

Actions and Responses to 2024 Applicant Survey

Cummings Foundation invited all 313 nonprofits that submitted full applications during the 2024 cycle of the **Cummings \$30 Million Grant Program** to provide feedback via an anonymous online survey. We were delighted that 228 individuals shared enlightening insights and suggestions.

As a result of survey comments, we made several clarifying tweaks to language in the LOI and application, as well as on the website. In addition, please see below for Cummings Foundation's responses to comments that appeared multiple times in the survey, followed by the complete raw data from the survey. Note that slightly different surveys were given to applicants who completed the standard application (page 2) and those who completed the short-form application (page 27).

RESPONSES TO SURVEY COMMENTS

Consider moving the application submission window away from the busy holiday and 'annual appeal' season at the end of the year.

Several applicants commented on the timing of the application due date. Rest assured that we hear you. Although we cannot promise a change, we will be mapping out and considering potential alternative timelines for possible implementation in the future.

Having Cummings staff act as point of contact would be less confusing. Getting requests from volunteers who don't have Cummings emails has been awkward and confusing.

With just three staff members working on the grant program and more than 700 applicants (plus more than 650 current multi-year grantees), the Foundation is only able to give at the scale it does thanks to a sizeable, generous group of community volunteers. Nonprofits are always welcome to contact the Foundation to verify the identity of a volunteer, but our small staff does not have the bandwidth to serve as the point of contact between volunteers and nonprofits.

Would it be possible to further align the Cummings proposal with the Philanthropy MA common proposal or those of other local funders?

We appreciate how this would alleviate some of the grant-writing burden on nonprofits, and we will explore this possibility in the coming months.

(A) The most time-saving method for sharing a budget would be to allow organizations to submit their own budgets with the formatting of their choice. (B) It is more work to provide a budget that includes the organization budget alongside the project budget.

(A) Cummings invited applicants to send their own budgets during its first few years of grant-making. Given the large number of proposals that we now receive, however, a standard budget enables the volunteer grant reviewers to more effectively compare

applications assigned to them. (B) Although we recognize the time required to create a budget, the organizational budget provides helpful context to the project budget.

I would have liked the ability to include news articles about our work or to upload brochures or other supporting documents.

Applicants are welcome to include links in their proposals to websites, news stories, videos, or other supporting information. Please bear in mind, however, that the volunteer grant reviewers evaluate many proposals and may not have the bandwidth to review all supplementary materials.

The flow of questions was a little confusing, with some of the supplemental questions feeling like they should have come earlier in the application.

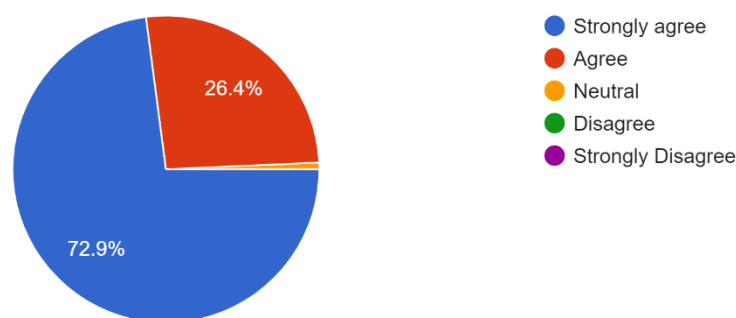
To accommodate both the short-form and standard proposals within one application process in our online portal, we had to ask all the questions included on *both* proposals first. Questions for only the standard-form applicants necessarily appear at the end. We agree that this ordering does not flow logically, but our grants management system software limits in our control over this aspect of the proposal's appearance.

SURVEY RESULTS: STANDARD APPLICATION

144 Volunteer Responses
January 30, 2024

1. The grant program information on the Foundation's website was clear and useful.

144 responses



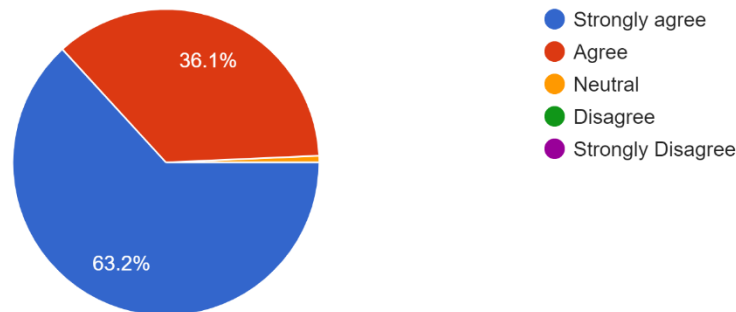
Comments, if any, including other information or guidance that would have been helpful via the website.

- Difficult to find the grant portal
- I attended the prep session that was very helpful and made the process easy.
- none

- The process and support provided was outstanding and very helpful.
- Information regarding the selection process (short-term grant recipients vs. long-term grant recipients) is confusing. It may be helpful to somehow further segment this information (background, eligibility, process, etc.).
- Overall I would say it is clear, I just wish there was a button that was more obvious and more near the top for logging into my account.
- Bit more initial clarification on the budget workbook process.
- We found it a little challenging to find the link to our login and keep working on our application without going back through earlier emails.
- The funding interest areas are a little vague.
- None
- NA
- I find your website much more helpful than most other foundation websites in explaining what you are looking for in an application and the process you use for evaluations
- Additional guidance for organizations that are volunteer based and have no tax documents would be helpful.
- New procedures required a lot of explanation. Not confusing per se, and I think it will become easier to understand with time.
- Great support through the entire application process
- The information and content included on the Foundation's website yielded the most helpful and informative experience I have had when researching potential partnership opportunities for my organization. Everything was clearly stated, and there was an answer to any question I might have had. I especially love that previous Q&A sessions were available on the Foundation's website along with dates/times for upcoming sessions.
- More explanation of the difference between the different budget sides/columns would be helpful for first time applicants.
- Why applications get rejected
- Perhaps you could give greater clarity regarding which grant program to apply for. It was a little confusing.
- Having access to the final proposal questions is very helpful from the start of the LOI round.
- clarifying the process for orgs that have previously received funding versus those that are newly requesting funding. I would even suggest having two separate "programs"
- Information presented was excellent, especially with in confirming important timelines.
- The site was easily navigable and helpful throughout the process of applying

2. The instructions and questions in the application itself were clear. (A preview of the application is available [here](#).)

144 responses



Comments, if any, including instances where the Foundation could be clearer in its request for information.

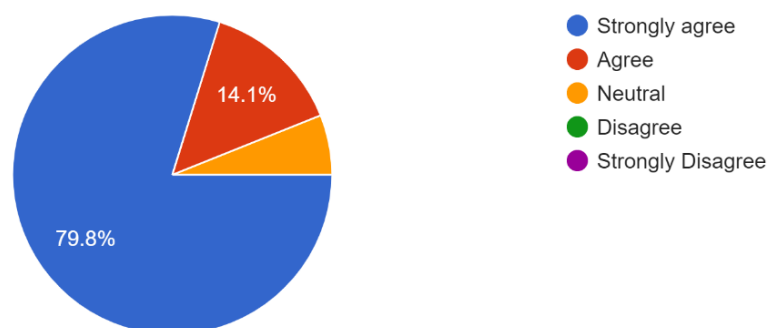
- Some of the questions seemed a bit duplicative
- Andrew was always available and super helpful in answering questions.
- Straightforward!
- Things were a little unclear on the distinction with applying for larger amounts. We did our best but not sure it was what the Foundation was looking for
- Definition and/or examples of "affiliated entities" would have been helpful.
- The "10-Year Grant (prior grantees requesting greater than \$25,000)" and "Supplemental Narrative Questions & Budget Form (requests greater than \$25,000)" sections were challenging to interpret, understand, and respond to accordingly.
- The budget instructions could have been included.
- The only suggestion is that the Requested Annual Installment should be mandatory (you cannot leave it blank and go back), as over \$25,000 populates additional questions.
- We REALLY appreciate you providing the application in Word format. We wish other funders would do that!
- Where not clear (e.g., under "Other Funding," I initially could not tell if the Foundation wanted a list of our project funders, organization funders, or both), I was immensely grateful for the Foundation staff's efforts to make themselves approachable and available to answer clarifying questions through info sessions and by email.
- None
- Even after participating in the webinar, I found the 10-year sustaining grant option a bit confusing. Could anyone apply for it, or only current grantees? I likely missed instructions for this.
- I found the question "How would the funds be applied to address the need stated above?" under "Plan for Grant Funds" a little confusing. At first I thought this was a question about the finances of the project (even with the additional information in the

question). Seeing that there was no where else to describe the project in depth though, I realized that this was the primary opportunity to describe it in full.

- I do think the question re: 3 year versus 10 year is still confusing. I do appreciate the continued efforts to clarify what exactly the Foundation wants in response to this question.
- The layout about who needs to complete various sections and those who don't could be a bit clearer (e.g. the 10-yr grant question should probably be moved to the very end of proposal). Having a question or field for the total amount requested would be helpful, in addition to annual installments.
- No feedback, other than it was a good experience
- Overall, I found the instructions and questions in the application extremely clear. However, the "Geographic Percentage" section's language was unclear to multiple members of my team. Given the importance of an organization's response for eligibility of a Cummings grant, perhaps it is worth reviewing this specific language to ensure a clear understanding of the question: "What percentage of people served by the entire organization's overall services – not just services provided by one office or division, and not just services to be funded by this grant..."
- For organizations that use a fiscal sponsor, the application could be a little more clear about which questions are for the fiscal sponsor and which ones are for the organization requesting the grant.
- Any templates or samples for reports? Or answering questions?
- Recommend the more broad and generic the questions, the better so that applicants can shape them for their particular projects or services
- Specify the criteria for a 10-year grant.
- The info zoom had quite a few questions regarding the budget but it seemed like the cause was that there was a change from last year's application to this year's.
- The flow of questions was a little confusing, with some of the supplemental questions feeling like they should have come earlier in the application.

3. When I contacted Foundation staff by phone or email with questions, they were responsive and helpful. (Please skip this question if you did not contact staff.)

99 responses



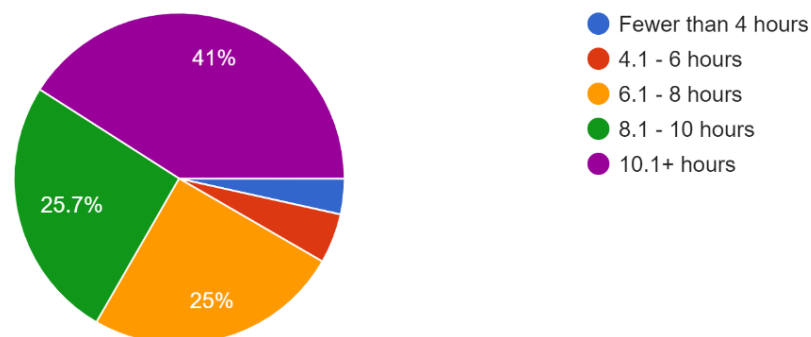
Comments, if any:

- Answered all the questions as I was a first time applicant.
- It was helpful to get feedback about our prior application that was not awarded.
- Andrew has been terrific. He provided detailed feedback from last year's application and encouraged me to access all the resources available online. Outstanding!
- See above
- I did not have to contact staff this round - but in previous rounds, they have been more than helpful!
- I was shocked at how fast Cummings Foundation staff were in getting back to me. It made us feel very supported in the application process.
- Thank you for being both responsive and collegial in all communications.
- So responsive, so fast!
- Almost instant replies! Amazing.
- For a Foundation that is handling so many proposals, your team is uniquely approachable, available, and transparent with applicants. I know this must take an immense amount of time and effort on your part, but this is so appreciated by the organizations that are working so hard to produce the best proposal possible. Thank you!
- I didn't have reason to contact them.
- While I did not contact anyone for this round, I have for a number of submissions in the past. I have always found Cummings Foundation staff to be helpful and kind!
- Cummings REALLY stands out in making space for equity and also for nonprofits to learn from missed opportunities in the past. You're my high standard benchmark, actually. So huge thank you's to you and your team for making yourselves available as you do.
- Foundation staff were very friendly and very helpful.
- Cummings Foundation staff are always very helpful, and far more open to dialogue than most other foundation staff. Much appreciated!
- The staff we contacted were so punctual and helpful with giving us feedback on our previous application and making suggestions on ways we can strengthen our proposal. I felt that we could contact them at any time with questions and receive a thoughtful response.
- I always find the Foundation staff to be responsive and professional. Even when they are giving us bad news.
- I did not reach out.
- I had to call twice and they were lovely.
- We have applied before and not been accepted, so this was a very helpful conversation to learn more about how to strengthen our application over previous years.
- Foundation staff always answered the phones ready and willing to help. Answers were always clear, and I felt comfortable that I could always call or email the Foundation again should I need further assistance or clarification

- I had questions about the application and Andrew Bishop was very helpful in answering my questions
- Wonderful responses and quick responses! A++
- N/A
- Andrew Bishop answered the phone when I called and he could not have been more helpful or kind. He made me feel totally at ease and assured me that my question was important and relevant. He was genuinely happy to help, and that was very much appreciated. My overall experience with the Foundation has also been exceptional. We are first-time applicants and I am honored to work with a Foundation that is so welcoming and without any pretense. There is just a wonderful desire to help improve the lives of others. The Cummings Foundation wants you to succeed and the joy of philanthropy is evident in all they do.
- Always responsive and helpful!
- I appreciated being able to speak directly with Foundation staff via phone and the quick response time.
- Always wonderful help. Took all the time needed.
- The staff was helpful and responsive. And the information session very helpful.
- Extremely helpful and responded very quickly. Thank you so much!
- Thank you for being one of the few foundations that allows phone calls AND provides feedback on previous proposals - that is most helpful.
- The Cummings Foundation staff made itself very available throughout the application process.
- We sent an email and received a return phone call -- an impressive level of personal attention. Cummings Foundation staff made a real effort to answer questions in a contextual way.
- remarkably timely, responsive, and helpful!
- While I did not personally, my boss did reach out and had very helpful interactions with Joyce. They were integral to how we were able to frame our proposal and focus on what was most salient to the grant reviewers

4. Approximately how many staff hours were spent completing the application?

144 responses



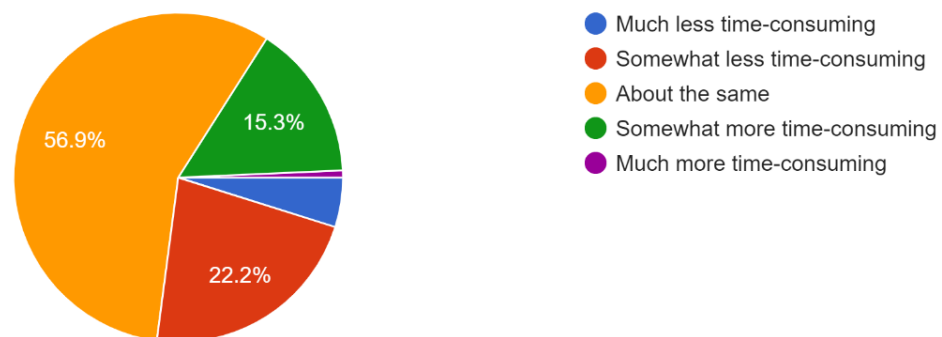
Comments, if any:

- It is hard to keep track when this isn't the only grant you are completing during the timeframe provided.
- There were multiple program staff involved in the project, so each of them had to spend time on the application. A simpler project or smaller staff might spend less time.
- we had a team of 3 people working on the application and it was a good opportunity to work together.
- The [ORGANIZATION] Foundation acts as fiscal agent for [ORGANIZATION]. This arrangement required consultation with other departments for content and budget. The budget was particularly challenging because [ORGANIZATION] does not include grant or investment income in its budget projections as those sources can vary.
- I spent time to research committee reviews and on the webinar
- Plus several hours of time spent by our grant consultant putting together drafts/materials for us
- This was the first major grant this team worked on together and we were focusing on creating boilerplate to be reused rather than JUST on completing the Cummings application.
- Cummings is not alone in this, I know you need to require a bunch of information, but a more accessible less lengthy application could just have a project proposal, budget, and/or video! a video, description, and budget is my dream application.
- Great process, staff were clear. The funding requirements are open and having the ability to applying for operational funding is essential.
- The application was super reasonable and straightforward. The staff hours for our application were about 10-15 because the stakes were high and we wanted to take the time to submit a high quality application. We had two team members review it prior to submitting as well.
- We greatly appreciated the ease in completing the application.
- While it did take a lot of time and collaboration across staff and our grant-writer, given the potential size of the award and the support we've had in the past from your Foundation, we were happy to allocate resources to this process.
- I think this may have taken our team a combined 20+ hours of work. The proposal is a long one, and we produced several drafts.
- None
- not exactly sure
- I included the LOI stage in my time estimate. I felt like the grant took a very reasonable amount of time to complete.
- I answered the above because we had a number of meetings with both Project Staff, Department Leadership, and Planning/Grant Writing staff to determine our path forward and the ask of the Cummings Foundation.
- Because we are a new organization, we took more time than we would ordinarily have needed.

- Including multiple people who helped work on it and proofread it....It was easier than past applications.
- It would be great if our LOI could be included as part of our application, to save time giving the same information in different formats.
- Not including time spent drafting the narrative responses on the application
- Total hours for review/edits and data accumulation. Don't feel this is a bad amount of time considering the amount of money being requested/proposed.
- N/A
- As a one-person development department, the application took a little longer than I anticipated. I needed the input of other departments and coordinating that was time consuming. However, that's not a reflection of the application process. I'm sure I could have completed it in less time if more development staff were available.
- The level of specificity required for the final proposal also required input from various colleagues - definitely a team effort!
- We had three people working on the various components of the application
- While the application is very doable, it does depend on gathering a lot of information from many sources within your organization. During
- I tend to do a lot of editing so this may reflect my habits more than anything else.
- Our team worked collaboratively across campus to partner on this application.
- The application takes 20-25 hours.
- This was one of our first major grants we've sought and the time invested in this proposal will benefit not just next year's Cummings grant proposal, but also subsequent grants from various other entities.

5. Compared with applications for similar-sized grants, how time-consuming did you find the Cummings application?

144 responses



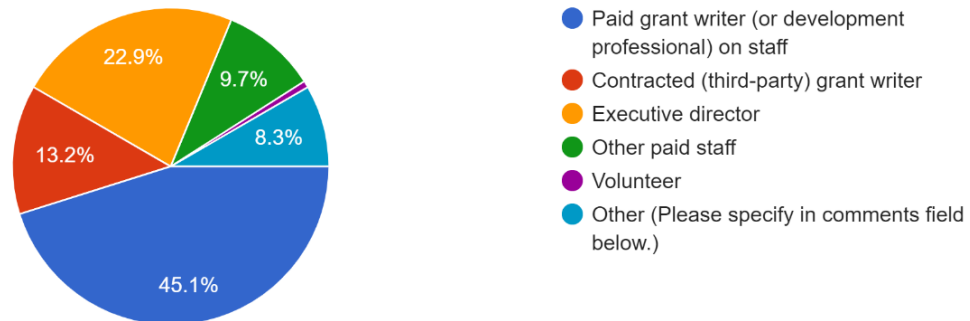
Comments, if any:

- The application was clear and concise.
- The time was well-spent and worthwhile. We do not work with grant writers so it was a lot of time from staff with many other responsibilities.

- Allowing us to build upon the LOI was useful. I know you say to just cut and paste from other grants, but most grant writers need a logical flow of ideas to run through the document and this is easier said than done.
- The mere size and importance of the Cummings grants makes you spent more time because you don't want to screw it up.
- It is incredibly helpful to hear outright that we do not need to rework/revise existing text from past application(s).
- Given the size of the potential grant award, I would consider this application less time consuming compared to others of a similar size
- We have since completed 2 similar grants and the time invested in the Cummings grant paid off in dividends (meaning, we were more efficient).
- Thank you!!
- I think this was much more time-consuming relative to other 3-year grants of a similar size. However, given the potential to receive a much more significant 10-year grant, this was really only somewhat more time-consuming and worthwhile to be considered for this opportunity.
- Pretty similar
- I appreciated the encouragement to cut and paste from other/old applications
- There were some issues with the portal, especially one area where supplementary questions didn't appear until a specific amount was input, which made us think the proposal was done before it really was, and necessitated some late-in-the-game section rewrites.
- The number of hours spent on the grant were higher than average due to attendance/viewing of the information session. It was time well spent, however.
- For a large grant proposal, we felt that Cummings has streamlined the process and made it a lot easier for our small team to craft thoughtful responses. Our organization felt that the questions made us think deeply about our plan going forward.
- It is very manageable for a Private Foundation Grant, and for the amount of funding we are looking for, it is a reasonable application process. It is significantly less than a federal grant, and also - my program, agency, and all of us appreciate Multi-year funding commitments.
- Some much smaller grants take more time!
- It was helpful that the Foundation encouraged applicants to reuse language from LOIs or previous proposals. This was a time-saving recommendation that I felt comfortable following given the clear recommendation from Foundation staff and a clear understanding of the grant application review process (community volunteers who wouldn't have read our LOI)
- N/A
- I think the application requests relevant information and provides an appropriate amount of space to provide it. I don't object to the time spent on this; we must describe our programs, objectives, and outcome goals with care. By definition, that's time-consuming!

6. Recognizing that applications often involve cooperation among several people, who was the primary author or your application?

144 responses



Comments, if any:

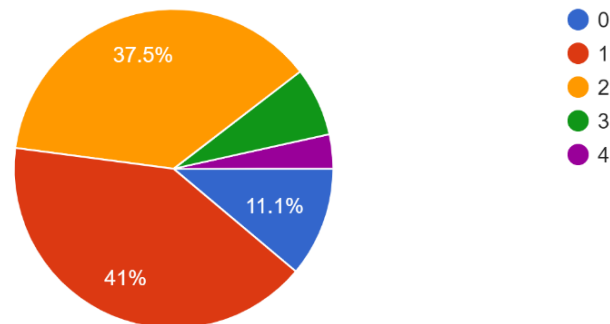
- Development Staff
- We are a small shop development department with one person writing all grants. It is difficult at times to get information from fiscal and other departments for whom the grant is being written.
- This was truly a collaborative effort between the grants office and the program staff.
- While our contracted grant writer does the initial draft, I would say our Director of Development spends just as much/equal amount of time as that writer on editing and adding to the application. Our Executive Director spends time putting together the budget and provides a final read through of the entire application before sending.
- Board member in charge of Development and Grants committees.
- There are a few local foundations to which most nonprofits of our size and type apply. You all ask mostly the same questions with slight differences of phrasing and of course a different application portal. I know you are trying but to be honest, you would do a tremendous amount for your nonprofit partners if you could simply align the common questions (e.g. mission, staffing, diversity) and all accept the same thing. This would be with Liberty, Boston Foundation, United Way. Please only you can do this...the time savings results- over your grantees would be huge, much more than your dollars can buy.
- The organization's president was also instrumental in contributing to, reviewing, editing, and approving this grant application.
- Combination of team. New grant writer who oversaw most of it, contracted for putting info into application before she started.
- Executive Director and several board members were equally involved.
- Combination of team. Contracted for putting info into application and data before Grant writer started.
- Myself — I am not a grant writer and balanced the grant preparation with my regular daily duties.

- Our Director of Foundation Relations led creating this proposal, with support from a paid grant consultant who produced the initial draft. Our VP of Advancement and a board member also spent time reviewing, commenting on, and helping to finalize the final draft.
- None
- [NAME] prepares with [NAME].
- Our grant application was written primarily by the director/head volunteer of our organization and a volunteer staff member.
- Budget and Development Director, a portion of whose job it is to write grants.
- Our lead grant writer / grant preparer is a contractor who focuses on Development and Strategy. While a third party contractor, they are heavily involved in all things related to our Development strategy + execution.
- Very close collaboration between part time paid grant writer, president/ED, and most experienced in house grant writer, several other readers
- Philanthropy Director, Executive Director & Education Director
- While the Planning and Grant Writing staff were the primary writers - it took a number of meetings with program staff, budget team, and leadership to craft the response and fully understand the intent of the program to be presented.
- The Executive Director and Director of Development worked together on the application.
- Founder
- Grant application was submit as a collaborative effort of the E.D., founders, and paid consultants.
- Contracted grant writer worked in absolute tangent with the Executive Director and other leadership team staff.
- Our Board Treasurer (which is a volunteer position) filled out the application
- N/A
- As the Director of Development, I was the primary author. The grant application also required input from other staff, including our Executive Director, CFO, Nursing and Rehabilitation.
- paid development staff member
- Chief Philanthropy Officer in conjunction with other development and program staff
- contractor previously worked for our org and wrote the initial 3 year funding application while working for us
- Director, Development & Outreach
- We do not have a staff person whose responsibilities include grantwriting so we utilize a contracted grant writer.
- President/CEO
- Employment & Post Secondary Specialist
- It was written jointly by the Founder & CEO and the Chief Program Officer.
- Our Director of Grants is technically contracted but is long-term and considered development staff.

- [NAME] and the team from [PROJECT] led the application writing process.
- Significant contribution from the Executive Director even if it was primarily written by grant writer.

7. Throughout the LOI and application process, Foundation staff held four Zoom Q&A sessions. How many sessions did someone from your organization attend live?

144 responses



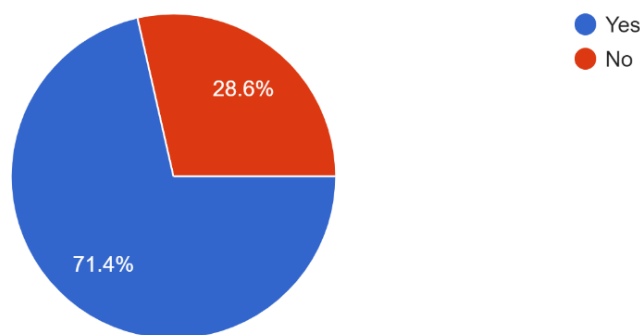
Comments, if any:

- We wanted to make sure that we were not missing any key information and would be helpful to indicate if need information is being presented.
- It was more like 1.5 as I missed some of the first session and sat through a second for additional information.
- Honestly, I found it most interesting to see the other applicants and some of their attitudes.
- These sessions were very helpful throughout the process; thank you.
- New grant writer was not on board yet, so none were attended.
- These sessions were appreciated and were helpful in helping us frame our proposal.
- The Zoom sessions were amazing and answered so many questions!
- If I knew how informative the two I did attend would be I would have been to all four.
- We were not able to get on the zoom as there were too many attendees. That said, we very much appreciate these sessions exist.
- These were extremely helpful. Thank you!
- None
- Were scheduled at times that conflicted but listen of recording where I needed to
- Again, appreciated the encouragement to draw from other/past applications
- These zoom sessions were the highlight. Very helpful! Especially since we do not know the staff there. It helped to put faces to names. Thanks.
- We have been a partner with the Foundation for a number of cycles and felt very confident in our ability to respond to this application.
- The ED and DD both attended one session
- We appreciate these being offered but for prior applicants, there was not much new information.

- I loved attending both as each session was helpful in different ways. Also, I appreciate the Foundation's willingness to hold the session for as much time as necessary to answer any and all questions.
- VERY helpful - thank you!
- N/A
- We found the information sessions very useful.
- Helpful with clarifications
- I believe I went to all of the sessions -- but I may have missed one.
- The Zoom Q&A sessions were very helpful. The Foundation staff were knowledgeable and patient and provided great insight. Often, others asked my questions, and I learned a great deal from listening to the other applicants on the call. (Hearing about the impactful work of the other organizations on the call was also inspiring!)
- Very helpful!
- These sessions were excellent in supporting [PROJECT] and [ORGANIZATION's] application process.
- Q&A sessions for very helpful and also necessary for us to understand how to fill out the application to the best of our abilities.
- 1.5 - attended 1 and watched a recorded FAQ session to get additional context

8. For those who did not attend a live Zoom Q&A session, did you watch any of the recordings afterward?

56 responses



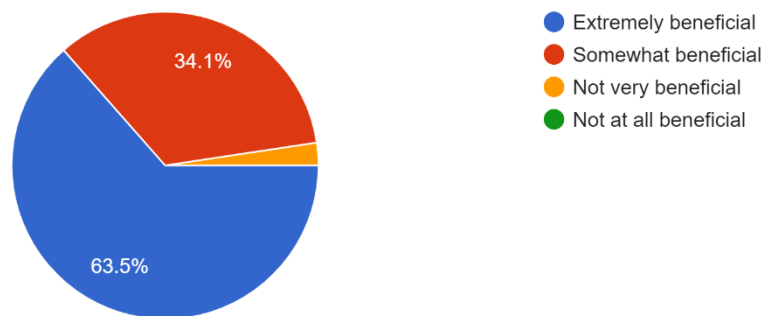
Comments, if any:

- None
- Attending live Q&As and watched recorded sessions for specific questions
- Attended, but also reviewed after the fact and shared with other colleagues,
- Thank you for providing the recordings, because the times they were live did not fit within my part-time work schedule.
- I was present at the live meeting so I did not watch the recording.

- Realizing that I missed the first Q&A session, I watched the recording that was on the Foundation's website and immediately marked my calendar for the next session. The recording helped greatly benefit my LOI outline, answering great questions and providing tips to strengthen my submission before I even started writing. This helped save time throughout the writing process
- I attended live sessions but also reviewed recordings to go back on information as I was completing the grant - helpful to have the resource at our finger tips
- N/A
- I followed up with the project team afterwards and forwarded zoom Q&A
- Thank you for making the recorded sessions available. They were very helpful.
- I had peers watch if there was something pertinent to their part of the application
- For the full application, we attended one of the Q+A sessions live and watched the recording of the other one.

9. If you attended or viewed a recording of one or more Zoom Q&A sessions, how beneficial did you find the sessions? (Please skip this question if you did not attend/view.)

126 responses



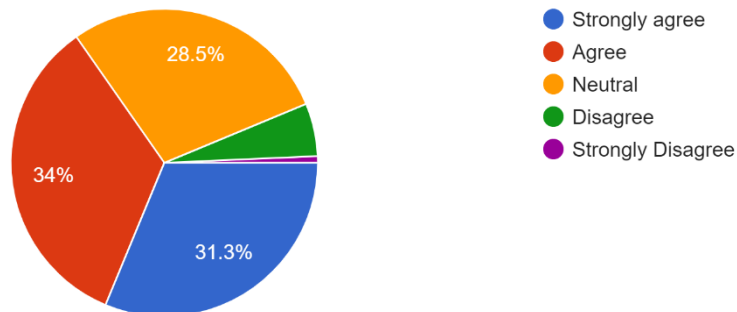
Comments, if any, or recommendations for future content you would like to see featured during these sessions:

- There was a lot of information that was rushed through and the speaker was very vague about answering questions or conveying ideas as they kept referring to making it our own interpretation.
- The Zoom sessions were so helpful and I greatly appreciated how both Joyce and Andrew were committed to responding thoughtfully to each question posed by applicants.
- If there are questions specific to one organization, or not relevant to the larger group, have those organizations reach out individually rather than answering them in the group session.
- potentially these could be grouped for under \$25,000 and over \$25,000/new or current applicants/since the focus of the questions would be very different and might be more efficient.

- I watched 2, both were great, I probably should have watched all of them. The benefit to watching (as opposed to Live) is that if questions are relevant to the institution, you can skip through the recording. ALSO, if you miss something, you can rewind!
- It's good to have a session early in the process and one in the middle of the process so we can ask questions that come up while we're filling out the application.
- None
- Some ambiguous questions clarified in the Q&A session
- It's helpful for baseline questions + feedback, but overall its repetitive and there are many questions that are super specific.
- The Foundation has become much more transparent, thank you.
- N/A
- Webinars are a great way to get questions answered, and to learn from questions posed by others applying for the same grant funding. Perhaps consider a general focus for each info session e.g., a session devoted to Q&A specific to writing the application (technical); another session Q&A specific to goals/purpose/aims of the grant program and foundation ...
- Too many people attend the sessions not having read (or perhaps understood) any information at all, making the Q&As too lengthy and unproductive for those who did. It's no fault of the Foundation, though!
- Hearing the Cummings staff answer questions from a variety of organizations was very reassuring for me. It helped reduce the feeling of pressure I sometimes feel for the proposal to be "perfect" or aligned with some mysterious priorities that I might not understand. The staff were very helpful and reassuring, and gave straightforward information.
- Received clarification of some questions we had
- The Foundation staff were very welcoming of all questions which left a good impression on me.
- The sessions were excellent in answering questions which arose as we prepared the application.
- We appreciated the staff's availability, specific answers to questions, and that the general information about the process was not repeated during the full proposal webinar. It was a good use of our time.
- I think having smaller groups would've been helpful since the zoom I attended had a lot of people.
- I found a lot of value attending and watching other recordings. Each session is a snapshot in time where one attendee might ask a question that triggers similar questions in other attendees. However, if that question isn't asked in another session, others might not get the same depth of response. (One session might have focused more on the budget narrative where the other had questions in the vein of the new DEI question or how small vs big grant seekers would be reviewed).

10. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Using the Philanthropy Massachusetts Common Budget allowed my organiz...save time and better communicate our finances.

144 responses



Comments, if any:

- The budget form is okay but not that user-friendly.
- If you are requesting a general operating grant, the Philanthropy MA form is a good tool.
- I find it difficult to convey the project budget and the request budget adequately when you have to also include the full operational budget on the form. Also the locked in revenue line items do not pertain to everyone and it is difficult to translate funds at times. It would also be useful if it provided some expense line items, allowed for subtotals, and was more flexible to utilize.
- Since you're the first granter whose used it, it was the same as any other grant budget.
- I do not think the Common Budget was the source of the time-consuming issue. The College budget does not include grants or investment income as those sources are variable and the College budget has to balance, per state mandate. We added in the grant income but then had to determine where/how to account for expenses related to that income, which was time-consuming and involved several members of the CFO's staff. A philanthropic grant budget was anathema to them and a lot of time was spent in explanation and education! Using the budget of the fiscal agent was not appropriate as the [ORGANIZATION] will not be utilizing the grant but simply passing it on to the appropriate department at the College.
- I like that it's easy to re-purpose the org budget section from other funders who use this form. However, in general I don't love this form because it's somewhat clunky to work with.
- Thank you for using this budget document.
- For our specific project, the budget changed after year one. Meaning that in the first year, there are costs associated with infrastructure, which in year 2+ would go toward extending program opportunities.
- It was so helpful to have a budget template to work with!
- I have not done a grant process before this so I can have no comparison. But my initial experience is that it was not any more difficult than I would expect.

- Thank you so much for using this template and only requiring a Year 1 budget. We already had this budget ready to go, and our existing version only required minor tweaks for the purposes of the Cummings proposal. Thank you!
- We have our own budget forms. And we also sometimes use the Philanthropy MA Common Budget form. We are happy using either.
- Although the Philanthropy Massachusetts Common Budget standardizes responses, our Director of Finance finds the format limiting for all applications. Only needing to submit a budget for the first year of a multiyear proposal was appreciated.
- The more funders who adopt the common budget, the more this will be true.
- We hadn't used it before so took some figuring out. If many foundations started using it it would definitely save time. The project vs org budget distinction is always troublesome as there is often not a clean and neat 'project' that we are applying for so the 'project budget' has to be massaged to match the grant request, which was also ambiguous in this context.
- It isn't a drastic difference, as we create similar "multi-column" budgets for other foundations proposals, too.
- I'm sure it will be helpful for you and your team, and help speed up the review process. So we were happy to do it. Typically we just upload our standard budget spreadsheet, and that is easiest.
- If a funder is going to require a specific budget form, the Philanthropy MA budget form is one of the most user-friendly because organizations can fill in their own fields. The most time-saving method, however, would be to allow organizations to submit their own budgets, however they are formatted/broken down internally.
- I find our own budget format to be very helpful. We add explanation of all line items
- Our organization's budget categories are a little unusual compared to other nonprofits and easily editing/customizing the Philanthropy MA Common budget can be a bit cumbersome. But we understand this is a very useful tool for other nonprofits.
- We love the Philanthropy MA budget. I think it allows us to accurately reflect our financial picture. And, of course, it saves us so much time!
- We haven't used the Common Budget before so it was an adjustment.
- I prefer to submit our in-house annual organization and program budgets, which I create at the start of each FY. It is very similar to the budget used by Cummings Foundation. I spent a few hours transferring data from our budgets to the Philanthropy Massachusetts Common Budget.
- I believe this Common Budget Form is beneficial to our organization and saves time. I answered neutral. because I was not the one who utilized it for this grant application.
- There are several foundations that require this form. We prefer to use our existing budget form, but we are familiar with it.
- Very helpful to use common forms, questions, and budgets
- We already had a budget in our own format. But using the Phil. MA form is definitely a good idea
- The form had us stymied a bit as we requested only capital funding (no personnel). Foundation staff helped guide us to complete the PMCB appropriately.

- It was very helpful to use the common budget, as we use it for many of our grants.
- While using our own budget format is the easiest approach, I understand why that is challenging for the reviewers. To the extent that a funder requires a specific budget format, the Philanthropy MA budget is generally the easiest to use (as opposed to a format designed by the funder.)
- We're a big organization, so I'm used to creating customized budgets. Having a template of any kind always helps.
- Thank you for using the Philanthropy Mass budget template.
- It was tricky trying to translate how funding may change slightly from year to year (according to demand) on the budget form.
- It was our first time as an organization doing the Common Budget, but I had prior experience in following the template so had much more success in translating what I had done before to what this organization should put in
- I just wanted to say I liked the changes made for this year's application!

11. Please share your recommendations, if any, to make the application process or the application itself more accessible, equitable, or inclusive.

- It was difficult having to complete the proposal in the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when there are many competing demands on staff time (including holidays and personal time). Some organizations may also be trying to close their books for their calendar year.
- We had about 6-7 weeks to complete the application, but we were simultaneously working on another major deadline for organizational governance (not related to funding) and could not start work on the proposal for a few weeks.
- It would be nice to have about 12 weeks to complete the application, with a due date that falls outside the holiday period. I'm sure there are reasons for your timeline, including the scheduling of your fiscal year, but having a due date during the holidays was extremely stressful.
- I thought the process was as straight forward and could be - thank you.
- I would have liked the ability to include news articles about our work, to upload brochures or other supporting documents. I have some concerns that those organizations which had a site visit are more likely to get funded because reviewers have more information about those orgs.
- Cummings is unique in how sensitive and compassionate they are in designing a very thoughtful (from the applicant's perspective) and user-friendly grant application process. I am very impressed and grateful for the respect they demonstrate for the non-profit service providers and grant applicants. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
- Create your own budget template for the process. Too many questions regarding finances and financial situations - could be handled in one. More clarity for questions - less open to interpretation. Also in some cases trying to stay within word or character limits makes it difficult to provide a clear picture of the project or program

for which funds are being requested. I hate when question ask for a brief, but detailed explanation, and then proceed to limit you to 350 characters or 150 words.

- Cummings is incredibly supportive of the grant writing process, and as a regular grant writer, I am very grateful. Cummings makes it as clear and simple as possible, while allowing us to communicate our goals and strengths.
- A lot of thought went into the redesign of your application. I think it meets the mark for accessibility. The budget may still present challenges for those institutions, such as ours, that use a fiscal agent.
- I thought that this year's process was very clear and easy to work with. I appreciate how the data fields were set at a higher level to allow those submitting the ability to completely set forth and articulate the replies to the proposals.
- We agree with the need to provide limits for responses and feel that Cummings gave an appropriate amount. Many foundations are too restrictive. Giving 10000 to outline the need and the plan for the funds was enough.
- Nothing comes to mind- keep up the great work!
- Noted above
- Having an option of an oral or video component instead of writing, and just having it be shorter makes it more accessible!
- I think it was very accessible, equitable and inclusive.
- I thought the grant application and process was clear and straight forward.
- The salaries of the five highest paid employees was a question that some people were very sensitive about providing.
- None
- Overall, we thought the application process was easy and an appropriate length.
- Please revisit the question seeking information about the highest paid employees that seeks information beyond what is required in a 990 since it raises privacy issues.
- change to word count as opposed to character count
- A directory of Foundation Staff who can assist organizations who don't have as much time or resources as larger organizations might, so they can rely on the expertise of the staff instead of using limited resourced for a grant writer.
- Overall I think its a straightforward process, but it is a heavy lift.
- I think that the parameters for the application itself are very clear, but that the Foundation could supply more details / information / background on priorities for funding + overall strategy for approach.
- I know its almost impossible given the scope of total applicants, but its also hard that there is less feedback / relationship building available with foundation staff. IT makes it a lot harder to determine how to put forward the best / most specific approach for the Foundation.
- I think that the Cummings Foundation is a fantastic example of how trust-based philanthropy can work. For the sizable grants that are made, the application itself is a fair undertaking.
- It was an positive experience. We are not quite a typical applicant so some of the pieces did not apply, but when I called to ask I got good answers and guidance.

- Reducing the three-year budget requirement if most years were similar was very helpful in streamlining the application process.
- No recommendations at this time
- I felt it was very accessible and staff were quick to offer support when needed; felt the language used in the grant was accessible and inclusive and the over/under \$25K aiding in providing some relief to the potentially smaller grant requests
- N/A
- Thank you. Regardless of size or level of inhouse expertise, any NFP should be able to navigate a project grant application. That extra layer of assistance may help "level the playing field" when it comes to an equitable process for application development, while helping NFPs build expertise/sustainability to address challenges during an application process.
- I found the application very straight forward. That combined with the info sessions, I found the process accessible, equitable and inclusive. What helped the most was knowing that I could reach out to the Cummings Foundation Team if I needed to. I did not need to, but knowing they were there made the process less daunting.
- The community reviewer aspect of the process presents a lot of unknowns for the applicant - not knowing how much interest or knowledge a particular review team will have in the subject matter of the applicants' work, not knowing what misconceptions they may hold about our clients or the specific issues we address, and not knowing how much the review team will understand the nonprofit sector as a whole. This can be a challenge for applicants. I think you have accounted for that as much as possible by 1) educating your review teams about the Cummings Foundation's philosophy of giving to ensure as much fidelity as possible to a common approach and 2) sharing with the applicants the instructions you've given the reviewers. This helps to create a transparency that is critical to equitable and inclusive practices.
- For me, the due date of the application on Dec. 20 was difficult to work with. While I try to plan ahead to allot plenty of time and start early, having the additional factors of the holiday season, the needs of the people we serve during that time, the winter illnesses going around which affect staffing in a small organization, made for some twists and turns in my schedule that made it more challenging. I typically spend time organizing the budget, program statistics and other attachments for the grant first (with information needed from other staff and outside accountants) and then develop my written proposal components.
- I don't have any.
- Preparing this application was an excellent, collaborative process which was greatly supported by information shared by the Cummings Foundation throughout.
- It would be helpful if you explained the reason for requesting salary information for the top five earners. That information is not typically requested on grant applications.
- I don't think this is necessary to completely pull the curtain back, but it was comforting to hear just how many people would have eyes on the proposal. Knowing that review process made me more conscious about clarity and where to reiterate or

be able to assume prior knowledge. Additionally, hearing that groupings are now done by size rather than topic is an excellent change.

12. Bearing in mind that some level of due diligence is required to be good stewards of Cummings Foundation's funds, please share your recommendations, if any, to make the application process or the application itself easier or less time-consuming for nonprofits.

- The application process was VERY easy and clear throughout, thank you!
- The Season of Giving is a particularly, busy and stressful time for advancement professionals, and adding a grant deadline to this time of year, was a lot.
- I felt the cummings application process to be streamlined compared to many other foundations. I like how they encourage applicants to reuse content. I felt the word limit was too short on the question pertaining to the 10 year question.
- Given the value and multi-year commitment of this grant, the time and length of the application seems reasonable.
- Your process is THE best in the field. My only recommendation is to be careful with redundancy in terms of questions to be answered. You do a great job with that, but as or if you add other questions, please just keep that in mind. Otherwise, you earn an A+ with me.
- Thank you! We appreciate your professionalism and support.
- Less emphasis on fiscal data - more emphasis on project or program being presented.
- this was overall a very positive experience for us
- I have no recommendations to share. The process was clear and appropriate for the level of grant funds being sought. Many thanks!
- The only thing I would add is to make the LOI a little shorter. Much of the information was the same, so it seemed a little redundant. Maybe a 2-3 page submission outlined by prompting questions and a budget would make the process streamlined and less work intensive.
- I liked the fact that you emphasized we could and should use information provided in the Lol. I felt freer to "cut and paste," which reduced time required for content development. Asking for a budget for the project alone, rather than as part of the institutional budget, would have been the least time-consuming option for us but I understand the purpose of requiring the project budget to be shown in context.
- See above.
- This is a big grant and the amount of time spent was appropriate for the ask. Thank you
- I think the time involved in your application process is perfectly appropriate as is, given the significant scale of the possible grant award.
- Noted above -- Your application process is not difficult still it was a chunk of my time as a busy ED of a small nonprofit. The common budget form is great. How can you take that even farther? There are multiple common questions you could align with

your peer local funders. Think of how much mission impact that can have from freed up time from your grantees! Thanks!

- Other than the constructive feedback offered above, there are no additional recommendations to share at this time. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this survey.
- There is so much riding on the application that I feel being super conscientious is worth the time.
- The whole process was wonderful and the Foundation was so helpful. Thank you!
- Your questions were thorough and thoughtful and while it took our team many hours to complete the application, it did not seem at all unreasonable for a large, multi-year grant. That said, we really appreciate your thoughtfulness about our time!
- I think that given the size of the potential grant, the amount of information requested was both reasonable and expected. We found the instructions and Zooms really helpful and the character count in each of the fields helped to frame expectations around how much content you were looking for. All in all, while it was a time consuming process, we found the process clear, reasonable and accessible.
- Unless there is something I am missing, my greatest difficulty is the inability to print grant as I go along that requires "I start over with every question reading again everything" however if I had the ability to print out what I have written it would take much less time and make the process more facile. Thank you.
- I wonder if in the future it might be possible to further align the Cummings proposal with the with the Philanthropy MA common proposal language. That might save grantees even more time.
- Thank you for requesting feedback from applicants. I find that your team is uniquely concerned about the organizations who apply for your funding program, and I am very grateful for this open and more equitable approach. Thank you!
- It was pretty standard and navigable.
- One suggestion is on the portal - to include all fields instead of some being hidden.
- There was some duplication in the budget questions/documentation. Please consider requesting a budget narrative only if the applicant wants to explain any potential concerns, red flags or questions a reviewer may have.
- I think you do a great job
- I think Cummings Foundation has taken a thoughtful approach to supporting Nonprofits. It is always wonderful to meet with the volunteers who do site visits; they are thoughtful and encouraging of our work.
- You're rocking. If there was one ask, it might be to use your brand and relationships to bring more and more funders on board with your approach including adopting the common budget.
- I really appreciate the foundation's commitment to listening to and incorporating feedback from applicants. Having applied to this opportunity multiple times, I can say this year's application was one of the easiest to accomplish.

- It might be helpful to include information about how each section of the application might be reviewed, or there is criteria that Foundation staff look for when reviewing applications.
- I had a positive experience moving through the application process. The instructions and questions were clear, and the Foundation staff was very responsive. We are grateful for the opportunity!
- Overall, I have had nothing but the best experience with Cummings Foundation staff and processes. Given the status quo in the field, I think Cummings is a far more accessible and well-run process than most.
- Given the depth of the funding opportunity, everything felt like a very reasonable application process and the questions made sense and were clear and accessible. Thank you for your thoughtfulness in trying to make this equitable and not overwhelming for us as nonprofits, and respecting the time we put into it. We appreciate your consideration and responsiveness and care greatly!
- I thought it was a good application process. Everything was clear and reasonable.
- I appreciate the foundation's efforts, including seeking feedback via this form.
- Just a thank you to the Foundation staff, who do an excellent job of being responsive and informative.
- Appreciate the efforts that go into making it as streamlined as possible and pulling from common apps / commonly used questions. It's still very long and therefore a heavy lift.
- I think some additional clarity about how the Foundation considers "project based" applications vs. "general operating funds" or even moving to make it only general operating funds, but allow areas to discuss key metrics and initiatives might help to simplify / help organizations to pull from existing resources.
- I really appreciated the Cummings Foundation's diligence and responsiveness throughout the process, and think that the foundation is very much on the right track with making the application process as smooth and accessible as possible.
- We actually find the Cummings Foundation process very manageable. We have, however, the experience of applying a number of times, and with the same staff responsible for both the program and the grant writing for this process.
- For planning and scheduling purposes, it would be helpful to have the entire application process (from LOI through to the final decision) condensed by at least a few months (9 months to 6 months, for example).
- Overall, I felt the process was fine. I understand the Foundation needs to compile a good amount of information to make informed decisions.
- This is a [TYPE OF ORGANIZATION] so some of the parts did not apply to us, such as the Form 990. There wasn't an option to say N/A or add a note of explanation so I did have to write something and upload. If there wasn't an option to add a note rather than an upload that would have saved a phone call and a little bit of time. But a quick call answered my question and it compared to some other applications it was easy.
- I think you do a phenomenal job, and even that you're taking the time to reflect on this issue indicates a level of insight that is not often present in philanthropy.

- Adopting the new Philanthropy MA suggested language to the greatest extent possible for the application would be easier/less time-consuming. Thank you for soliciting feedback.
- I'm not sure how to tackle this, but it can be tricky navigating the reality that the LOI committee is not involved in reviewing full applications, because we don't know if the review committee will see the same strengths in our proposal as the LOI committee did. And, since committees change every year, it can be difficult to improve our application over time, without knowing what the committee next year will be looking for. I'm sure there is some standardization in scoring (a rubric?), but some transparency around how we score and what we've scored in the past may be helpful. Otherwise we greatly appreciate your diligent work to make this a more inclusive and equitable process!
- Thank you for taking the time to get applicants' feedback -- that means a lot to me.
- I believe your process is one of the easier ones to navigate. I thank you for thinking of the organizations who are working hard to do good work and for making applying an authentic and transparent process.
- I think the application has just the right amount of complexity.
- The application process was smooth and the timeline was extremely helpful.
- Perhaps a Calendly in scheduling site visits?
- The Cummings Foundation application process was extremely well-organized, clear and concise. The streamlined process, access to information, helpful staff, and information sessions were all beneficial. The application was also very easy to follow. Whether you were a first-time applicant from a small organization, or a seasoned professional in a large institution, in creating such a positive experience, the Cummings Foundation truly evened the playing field for all applicants. It was a great experience.
- It is extremely gratifying to learn that the Foundation has accepted a LOI, and we all put our very best efforts into crafting a compelling and thorough funding request. That said, the application is lengthy and requires a concerted team effort. One approach to make the overall application process less time-consuming might be to limit the number of accepted LOIs that are invited to submit a full proposal. That way, you reduce work effort on applications that are not as likely to be funded. Just a thought!
- Suggest adding an "other" category for organizations that have broad missions and service populations.
- Honestly, I think you need to put in the work for a grant this size. I do not think it needs to be less time-consuming, I believe it meets the perfect balance for funding awards.
- There is a bit of repetition between the LOI stage and the Application stage (and in some cases the reporting on prior grant funds) due to the fact that each of these documents is reviewed by a different group. I do appreciate that you made it clear in the info session that it would be totally permissible, and not viewed as a negative, to reuse content from a report or LOI in the application itself if it was important and relevant to the application, and that we did not need to spend time creatively restating the same information in new or different ways.

- The application process is perfectly run and I appreciate how you've made it as easy as possible, and especially how it was broken into separate categories for different asks. While I was applying from a large organization myself, I know how hard it can be without a dedicated staff person to manage grants so it must have been a huge help to smaller organizations and it helps to not feel like you're taking anything away from them if you do have the resources! Thank you!
- I really appreciate the effort to make this process more efficient. Thank you.
- Application process is fair and seems typical of other large grants that I write. My only recommendation is to lengthen the time between being invited to apply (after LOI), to actual deadline. I for one would be happier if the deadline was not so close to December holidays and end of year!
- If there was any way to pre-populate info/data from previous applications it may save some time
- I would like to suggest that the foundation consider access to funding and need for investment when it sets its geographic priorities.
- I thought the process and application were fair and straightforward. The information sessions were great -- they not only informed the logistics of the application but enhanced my understanding of the Cummings Foundations philosophy and goals.
- I like the process because I was able to save my progress and print the final application for my records.
- I think the transparency of the Cummings Foundation application process is wonderful as it is. I think the outreach - like the Zoom Q & A - is appropriately conducted as well. Thank you for this opportunity.
- Thank you for asking! Thank you for providing a Word document for bidders to prepare responses - that is very helpful and time-saving. Providing suggested, but not strictly enforced character limits would also save time by eliminating the need to move information around to fit it all into the application.
- Overall this process was excellent and provided significant resources for our team throughout.
- A table in the installment section breaking down how the installments work from \$25k or less to the maximum \$100K ten-year installments. It took several read through's + the Q&A to fully understand our options.
- Some other foundations that use the Common Application have an option to share submitted proposals with others and I wonder if Cummings is open to receiving those from alternative foundations. Similarly, is Cummings sharing our submissions with foundations that might be more aligned?
- I think you've struck a good balance between your due diligence requirements and striving to make the application doable for nonprofits.

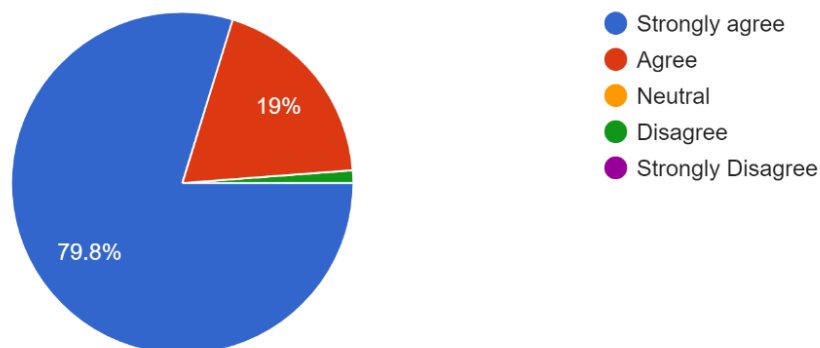
SURVEY RESULTS: SHORT-FORM APPLICATION

84 Volunteer Responses

January 30, 2024

1. The grant program information on the Foundation's website was clear and useful.

84 responses



Comments, if any, including other information or guidance that would have been helpful via the website.

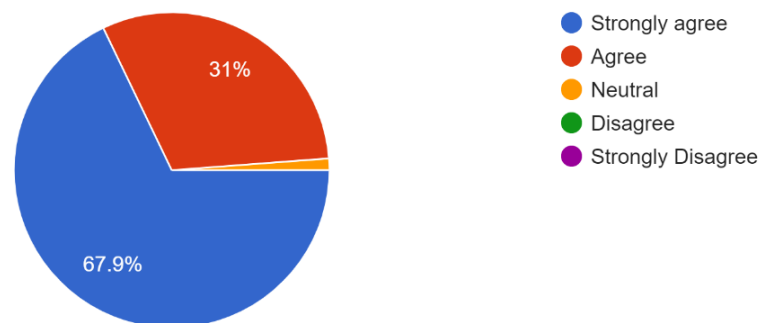
- Very clear application
- None
- I had questions about the grant amount, but my coach helped me
- n/s
- Although we did not get a coach I thought the instructions were very clear.
- None - it was very clear
- n/a (not sure if you mention on website that Final application readers DO NOT see the LOI application).
- I found it all very clear and informative.
- none. This is done very well. It includes a lot of very helpful information
- I can tell an effort was made to make the site as useful as possible.
- I especially appreciate the timeline information, thank you!
- In general I found the information very helpful. One thing I would suggest adding more information about is the criteria panelists use to evaluate proposals. I learned more about this from one of the webinars, but thought it would be helpful to have on the website too.
- Being able to submit as a smaller organization for a smaller amount, using an easier application was very helpful. Thank you!
- [ORGANIZATION NAME] received mentoring through the Letter of Intent submission and it was greatly appreciated.
- The website has a lot of information. It is hard to find grant information in a separate and distinct area especially if you are a newcomer to the grant world. There are lots

of pictures which is great. Suggest having a central area for grants alone. The information is spread out everywhere.

- I found the site easy to navigate and instructions were clear.
- Some information I may not have found on my own - some very helpful info was shared via links during the webinars.

2. The instructions and questions in the application itself were clear. (A preview of the application is available [here](#).)

84 responses



Comments, if any, including instances where the Foundation could be clearer in its request for information.

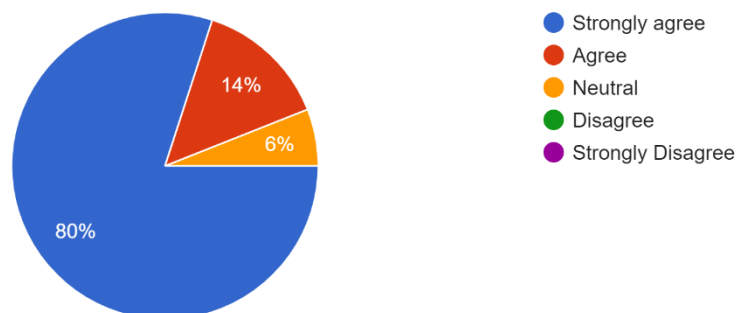
- For organizations that are multipurpose and fit multiple categories, it wasn't clear how best to indicate that.
- None
- Please list all active board members and, if applicable, the organizations with which they are employed. *This wording was a little unclear, what makes listing employment applicable? Also, understanding how much to request was a little confusing. We did not want to ask for more than you allowed, but didn't want to ask for a lower amount if we would have qualified for more.
- I had a question about the "budget" The title was budget, but the expansion asked for more information.
- n/a
- I think more specificity of interests or focus of the Foundation would cut down on the number of applications.
- Clear and non-intimidating. It seemed like you actually wanted organizations to apply!
- For smaller grant awards the optional budget and auditing sections could be edited. In addition it should be recognized that smaller non-profits may work solely through volunteers or contractors this should be included in the employee section.
- I appreciated that the application was fairly straightforward.
- The application was clear and easy to understand for the most part. My comment is geared toward the "Need Description" question. While the Letter of Interest included

a question to explain what we intended to do with the funds, the larger grant application did not. Our coach suggested we use the need description section to answer this part of our explanation. I believe I remember a staff member saying we should expand on that as well during the info session. I think it would be helpful to explicitly state whether or not the foundation wants us to elaborate on that. If we did not have a coach or did not attend the info session, I'm not sure we would've gone in depth about how we would use the funds because the need description is not asking that.

- We found the process very clear and direct.
- I think that the Need Description was less clear than the request for information in the Letter of Intent. I felt like I was guessing what information would be most useful and relevant for reviewers - did you want information about our need as an organization? Would information on our current fundraising practices be useful or unnecessary? Did you want to know the need of the community we serve and why we are best suited to address it? I really hope my application had everything you wanted to see, but I wasn't confident that I had addressed everything.
- It would be good if one of the questions asked for a description of how the funds will be used. A description of the programs that the organization does. I worked my description into the "Needs description", because I didn't know where else to describe our programs.
- The one section that was not super clear to us was the section on Financials. There seemed to be inconsistent use of the words Budget and Expenditure so it wasn't clear what was requested as it seemed that the words were sometimes used interchangeably. As a result, we spent a fair amount of time articulating our Actual Expenditures vs. our Budget vs. our Requested Grant Amount.
- This is our first application

3. When I contacted Foundation staff by phone or email with questions, they were responsive and helpful. (Please skip this question if you did not contact staff.)

50 responses

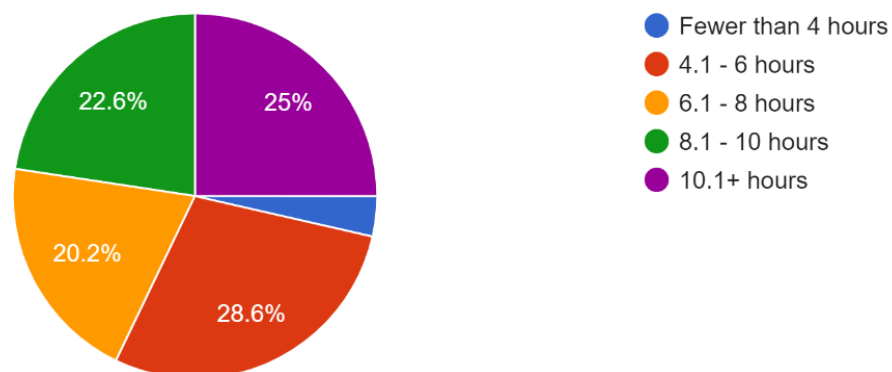


Comments, if any:

- My limited interactions with staff were so warm and open that I felt I *could* reach out if I needed to, which is often not the case. So greatly appreciated!
- Did not contact anyone
- Seemed immediate responses to my questions by Andrew Bishop. Friendly/nonintimidating
- Did not contact staff; also did not know this was an option.
- I was contacted regarding an error I made and it was very quickly corrected
- Andrew is very responsive. Webinars were very helpful.
- Not applicable
- Andrew got back to me quickly several times over email, even late at night. I hope he sleeps, but he's very reassuring and helpful :)
- The staff was always ready to answer questions, and responded very promptly.
- The staff was extremely helpful when responding to my questions. They were timely and gave clear instructions/feedback.
- Absolutely helpful! I asked questions on at least 3 different occasions and heard back promptly with the information I needed.
- Interacting with the Cummings Foundation staff has been a positive experience for me, particularly my correspondence via email with Andrew Bishop who is always responsive, helpful, and delightful to talk to.
- I didn't do this, so I don't have an opinion. I'm sure you are very helpful though! :)
- After reaching out to Cummings, we quickly received responses each time.
- The information sessions were very helpful in answering any questions, so we did not need to reach out directly!
- The support through webinars and the willingness to respond to questions is outstanding. The best of any organization I have worked with.

4. Approximately how many staff hours were spent completing the application?

84 responses

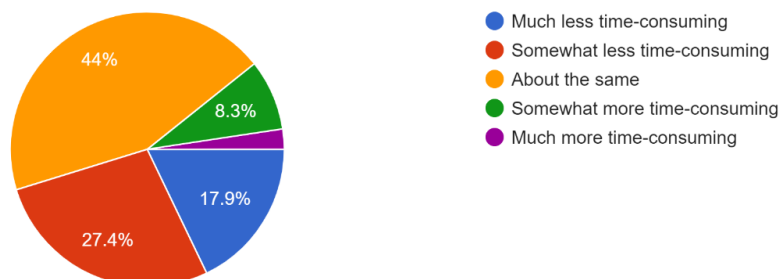


Comments, if any:

- I really worked hard on portraying our non profit clearly in the application
- This was by choice, we prioritized the Cummings application over others and by doing so spent more time focusing on this application.
- n/a
- It was much easier to write after assembling the LOI which took more time.
- I wanted to give you a clear picture of the program and the complex organizational structure we have as a non-profit working with and fundraising for a COA.
- We don't have staff, only volunteers. We spent approximately 30 hours on it.
- We really appreciated the shorter form, though it would have been good if we could have been more specific about the intended use of the funds; our organization utilizes all funding for programming, with all overhead expenses paid by the founders. So requesting funds for general operating expenses rather than program expenses was not a great fit for us.
- I'm not sure about the hours, but it stands out as less burdensome than many grant applications. The questions are straight forward and readily answered. I really appreciate the opportunity to have a short form application for our request. I appreciated being able to use the LOI answers again.
- What was asked for seemed reasonable
- Our need is clear and hopefully that came through on the application. We felt we were able to express our need in the application, no problem.
- Because of the support during the LOI process, we were able to spend less time completing the application as we felt we had received the guidance that was needed.
- Process took longer because this was our first time applying to this type of grant. Most likely would take much less time (less than 10 hours) next time.
- Because of the clarity of the instructions, it was easy to fill out the necessary information.
- This includes the time of the grant writer and the two additional team members who reviewed and edited the application.
- Application was prepared by an unpaid volunteer

5. Compared with applications for similar-sized grants, how time-consuming did you find the Cummings application?

84 responses

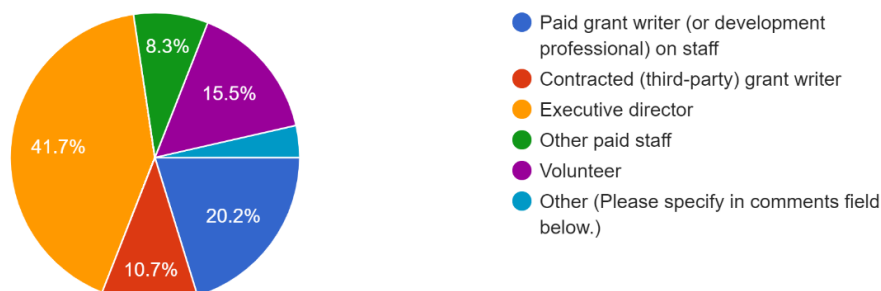


Comments, if any:

- Really appreciated how streamlined the application was!
- I work hard at each application- I do not cut and paste for fear of appearing that way
- n/a
- I do appreciate that you encourage applicants to use narratives and data from previous applications. With the clarity of knowing who reads the information at different phases was also very helpful.
- As first time applicants, we found we wanted to give more information and more budget details to ensure we were painting the full picture of who we are and what we do.
- The application was priceless as it gave me the opportunity to craft narratives that will make coming applications easier.
- We were very mindful of what was being asked in the Cummings Foundation grant application. It was not as formulaic as some of the other organization's.
- It was the first major grant I've applied for so it was all new to me, which meant it took more time than subsequent grants. But that's to be expected for one's first rodeo.
- We have only applied to the Ogden Codman Trust for large grants. Their grants are only available to Lincoln organizations and therefore not as competitive as the Cummings Grant program.
- This is our first grant application, so I am not able to answer this question
- This application is about the same amount of work as the other applications I submit, however it is for a much larger grant. So comparatively, it is less work when I consider the potential yield. Thank you!!
- In comparison to other grant applications, Cummings Foundation has done an excellent job streamlining the process as much as possible, while still collecting all necessary information. Thank you!
- Only because of the added Cummings coach interaction which was an added benefit - time well spent.
- I struggled with making sure that my narrative need description met all the application's needs. I spent a lot of time editing and adding to this section, a lot more time than other similar grants where the application has more questions with shorter character limits.
- Thank goodness there was no Logic Model required. They are a huge waste of time and are never useful when actually implementing your goals.

6. Recognizing that applications often involve cooperation among several people, who was the primary author or your application?

84 responses

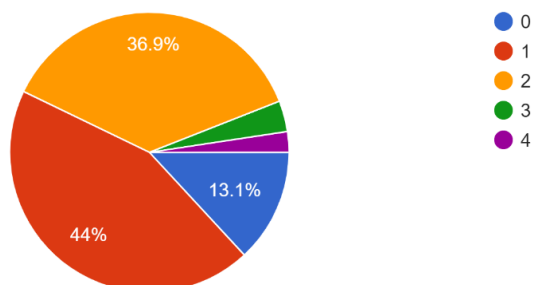


Comments, if any:

- I am the grant writer/free care doctor writing these grants- appreciating the efforts to create user friendly application.
- Our executive director is a volunteer
- [ORGANIZATION] was fortunate and was chosen to have a mentor which was a great asset.
- We share the application with a grant writer for review and also incorporate comments from our Development Committee and Program Manager.
- Coordinator of project
- All operational staff volunteer their services at the present time
- Two people worked on it: our development coordinator did the majority of the writing and the director helped edit.
- We have a professional grant writer who helps us at a highly discounted rate, as we are still trying to launch the organization toward sustainability.
- Co-Directors
- With a great deal of input from the treasurer and office manager.
- Our volunteer board members comprise the Grant Committee and write the grant proposals. Our small staff don't have the time.
- Despite having a paid grant professional, this was a very collaborative process.
- Our primary author is a board member; all board positions are volunteers.

7. Throughout the LOI and application process, Foundation staff held four Zoom Q&A sessions. How many sessions did someone from your organization attend live?

84 responses

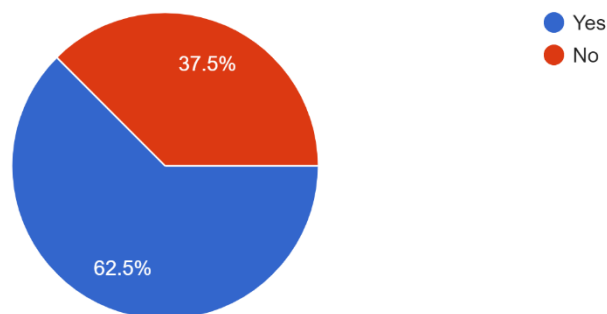


Comments, if any:

- these sessions were extremely helpful
- They were very informative and helpful to the application process
- Since questions were different each time, both sessions were helpful. I didn't have any questions the first time, but did during the second. The sessions also reinforced the accessibility of the grant staff. I would have felt more comfortable seeking assistance after having this "face to face".
- These were well done and very informative.
- Helpful! Reassuring.
- Grant writer had previous experience applying for a Cumming Foundation
- Very very helpful! Thanks for having them.
- The zoom calls were so helpful and appreciated.
- One of my previous organizations was a grant recipient so I felt like I came into this application familiar with the Foundation and process.
- This was very helpful, especially the Q&A. Thank you!
- I found the session very helpful.
- Again, very helpful!
- These sessions were very helpful
- Watched the recording of an LOI session and participated in one live application session. Both were very helpful, although many questions asked by participants were easily answered on the website and introduction of the LOI and final applications, so these were longer than necessary and somewhat annoying to those who reviewed the information prior to attending. Though it should be noted that Cummings Foundation answered these questions patiently and professionally.
- Sessions were very help to hear not only from Foundation staff but all from fellow grant applicants

8. For those who did not attend a live Zoom Q&A session, did you watch any of the recordings afterward?

40 responses



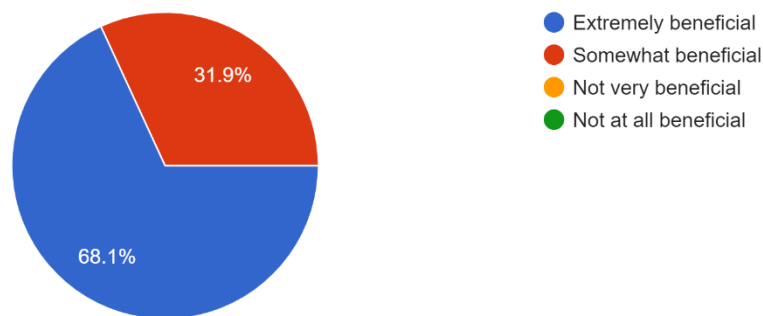
Comments, if any:

- N/A

- The recording was super helpful, especially as I was able to fast forward through a question/response if not applicable to us.
- Because I have applied for this grant previously, I did not feel like I needed the Q&A content
- I was grateful for the recording as I wasn't able to join the zoom meeting.
- I'm already familiar with the process.
- It was good to be able to check programs that I was not able to attend live.
- Thank you for making these available.

9. If you attended or viewed a recording of one or more Zoom Q&A sessions, how beneficial did you find the sessions? (Please skip this question if you did not attend/view.)

69 responses



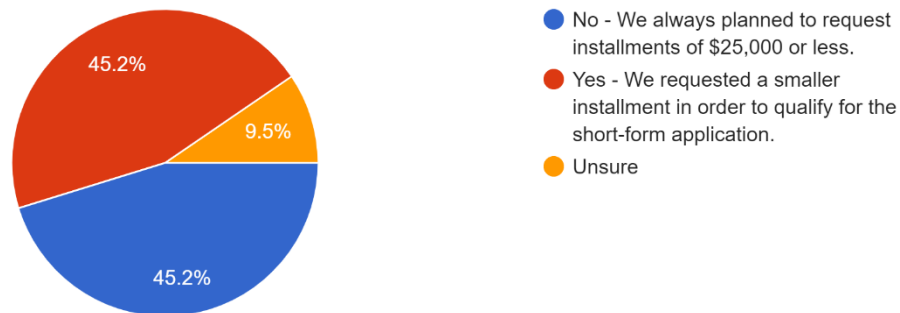
Comments, if any, or recommendations for future content you would like to see featured during these sessions:

- Just understanding other applicant's thought processes and explanations from Cummings Foundation helped give a lot of context to this grant.
- Finding a corporate sponsor/ tiered ramp to requesting increased financial support- you must qualify for lower amounts first then in future years request larger amounts. Is this the metric
- I found the Zoom sessions extremely beneficial; even going back and watching the recordings. I wish more funders offered this type of help.
- The entire session was great and the organizations even had the opportunity learn some thing about each other.
- N/A
- It was a helpful format - direct and functional - no wasted time
- Many questions were not generally applicable and a lot of the information was on the website anyway. I am still glad I watched them. Perhaps they could be a bit shorter.
- The process is very straightforward, so didn't really need the Q&A session
- I appreciate how much the foundation staff made themselves available for questions and consultation. It's clear that a lot of work went into trying to make organizations as successful as possible.
- Much of the conversation was for those submitting applications for over \$25,000.

- I joined with few questions, but it was helpful to hear from other applicants as well.
- Always helpful to hear the updates for this cycle and the questions from other applicants.
- I think these sessions gave me a sense of what wouldn't be funded - which is very useful information! Would Cummings ever share a redacted successful grant application? Or walk through the application process with examples of answers? I'm not asking for a step by step guide, but I know you receive a large amount of requests and I want to respect your time by providing the best application that I can.

10. Did the new short-form application for organizations seeking \$25,000 or less annually affect your requested installment amount?

84 responses



Comments, if any:

- This made the process more achievable and felt like a better fit so that we aren't in constant competition with the bigger, more established organizations that always seem to prevail. This is our 4th attempt at the full process, as we typically do make it past the LOI round but have not yet crossed over the finish line. This new structure may position us better among a different pool of applicants. I appreciate your leadership and guidance in this new structure.
- n/a
- We had planned to apply for the larger grants, but were advised to go for the smaller amounts because of the size of our budget.
- It felt more achievable and worth our time to apply since we are a smaller institution, and with the short-form application, we are not competing with larger organizations requesting \$100,000. The short-form made the Cummings Foundation grant seem more realistic and attainable for us.
- We were given advice that as a new organization we probably wanted to be compared to other small, new organizations, so this pointed us towards the short-form application, and this meant we could only apply for \$25K.
- We did not discuss that before we saw the new application format.
- Yes, and no. We felt like the requested amount was also reasonable considering our budget size and current inflection point.
- See answer to #11

- We chose to apply for the smaller amount because we are a smaller organization and while we could use the full amount, we understand the competition is very high and preferred to be judged against similar size organizations.
- While we planned to request installments of less than \$25k, the new short form was really helpful. Thank you!
- Based on our current income level, the \$25,000 was a good start for the size of our organization. We plan to apply for a greater installment in the future.
- We appreciate the shorter form!

11. Please share your recommendations, if any, to make the application process or the application itself more accessible, equitable, or inclusive.

- Cummings has made this a satisfying application process- whether we get funded or not
- The Cummings Coaches program along with the \$25,000 or less category felt like it made the process much more approachable and realistic for small nonprofits such as ourselves.
- Thank you for including coaches. This has helped build equity and inclusivity.
- n/a
- I think you do a good job trying to make the grant writing process easier, and I appreciate that. Having access to a mentor was immeasurably helpful. It was supportive in terms of receiving helpful feedback, and it made me feel more connected to Cummings.
- Many organizations are small and have a limited number of FT staff. A BIPOC-led organization should also include employees of color who work full time or part time.
- Express your goals for inclusivity.
- The question about DEI was interesting, especially with all the recent research about how DEI excludes specific demographics of people. I might recommend revisiting this question.
- I think you've made the process very welcoming and clear.
- It was very helpful to be able to do the short form without the budget stage, and to be encouraged to use material we've already developed.
- I think you're doing a good job with it
- The Cummings Coaches program was extremely helpful for our organization, I would recommend keeping this for future applicants.
- We are grateful we are selected to be in the application coach program. It will make the application process or the application itself more accessible, equitable, or inclusive if the program can be available to more organizations that can't afford paid writer and lack experience of writing grant application.
- Consider moving the application submission date to late January. Late December is already a crunch time for nonprofits.

- My recommendation is that, if possible, you consider moving the application deadline to mid-January. I work at a small organization and I am a development team of 1 (some small organizations do not even have a dedicated development person). November through the end of the year is a very busy time for development staff, and especially development staff at smaller organizations, because it is 'annual appeal' season. It is very challenging for me to run our annual campaign and find time to work on grant proposals at the same time. If the application were January 15th, I know I could do a better job because I would have time to really focus. Thank you for listening and thank you in general for everything you do to support applicants! I wish all funders could be more like Cummings.
- Thank you!
- I found the process to be accessible and straight forward to follow.
- It was pretty straightforward, I do not have any suggestions for you.
- I find that the Cummings staff are always so helpful in a gracious way. You never feel like you are asking an irrelevant or stupid question.
- I heard in a webinar the mention of a 'Common App' concept. It would be amazing if something like this could be developed, and other Foundations participated. This would ease the burden of requesting funding allowing us to spend more time and resources on our mission.
- Our organization's focus is on access, equity, and inclusion and were pleased to see the effort Cummings Foundation makes to focus on these issues both from the grant award decision-making process to the coaching opportunities for organizations without the experience and resources. The only recommendation (even though this increases our competition!) is to find ways to reach more organizations who meet the grant objectives - we were fortunate to stumble upon this opportunity; we had no idea this was available.
- Fewer restrictions on assistance option

12. Bearing in mind that some level of due diligence is required to be good stewards of Cummings Foundation's funds, please share your recommendations, if any, to make the application process or the application itself easier or less time-consuming for nonprofits.

- This year's process felt fair and balanced, with a reasonable amount of questions asked. Thank you.
- We benefitted from a Cummings Coach" which really helped dissolve the mystery of who gets funded. We just presented our project and hope for a good outcome with the support of our coach- avoids second guessing our written data presentation.
- One of the most clear, user-friendly and helpful experiences I've had with grant submissions. Cummings staff is fantastic at being available and offering help.
- We have applied 3 times and this time we felt more heard as an organization that is small but growing. Thank you for considering this option to listen to smaller agencies separately.

- while it was time consuming, the time matches with the amount of funds we are requesting and the impact it could have on our organization
- The mentoring was a key factor because I was able to start the application and email my mentor what I wrote and he was able to write down key notes of improvements if needed , then we'd schedule time together and go over sections and discuss why/why not something worked for the proposal. It truly was a great learning asset to the process, and he was also grateful that I took the initiative to begin and send submissions instead of starting from scratch.
- It would have been great if the LOI information and any other redundant info. automatically flowed into the actual application. That would have saved us time cutting and pasting. TY for asking.
- I thought the questions were reasonable given Cummings potential investment
- I truly feel that the Cummings Foundation does an exemplary job. Everything is well laid out, clearly communicated, the process is clear, and you make it as straight forward as possible. We also greatly appreciate the multi-year grants, and general operating. Many thanks and kudos to you all!
- Having Cummings staff act as point of contact would be less confusing. Getting requests from various people who say they are with Cummings Fdn but don't have Cummings Fdn emails has been awkward and confusing.
- Excellent set-up, easier than many applications we have written for much smaller grants.
- Our Cummings Coach was instrumental in helping us to get through the LOI process, and it would have been great to continue with the coach throughout the application.
- The questions were good and gave us the opportunity to describe who we are and what we do. It was a lot of work but it is perhaps necessary in such a competitive grant program. Please move the deadline. We are overloaded with work from November till Christmas. It was very stressful to spend time on a grant proposal when so much else needed to get done. In a small all volunteer organization all of us wear many hats. If one of us works on a grant, the others have to do more than their usual share.
- I wish all the foundations followed this format! Multi year, general operations grants are a dream come true for grant seekers. Thank you!
- The availability of coaches throughout the process was extremely helpful especially for a new organization like ours. The abbreviated grant request was also helpful although between the LOI and Grant Request the amount of time spent preparing both was about the same for just a grant request at other foundations. However, the increased time spent with our coach was invaluable.
- I am deeply appreciative to the Cummings Foundation for making this process streamlined and easier. It was easier than some grant applications I've done for under \$10,000. Thank you!!
- We appreciate the care you take to make sure everyone has a good experience. Thank you!
- Present the complete application to applicants. If they request \$25,000 or less, then remove the supplemental sections.

- None. Thanks again for all you do!
- We hope that the Cummings Foundation has peer reviewers who understand what the organizations do, whom they review. Thank you!
- I'm grateful for the team's focus on seeking feedback and continuous improvement. You set the standard for others to follow. Thank you!
- I found the process to be accessible and straight forward to follow.
- Maybe during the info sessions, going through the questions one by one might alleviate some of the instances of the same questions being asked over and over. Likewise, maybe to register to participate in the info sessions have potential applicants confirm at least geographic eligibility. That may help to reduce the volume of "am I eligible" questions that seemed to take up a good portion of the time. - That being said, I think you are doing a great job making the process simple and achievable to small non profits.
- I thought the application process was short and easy, asking good relevant questions.
- There are pluses and minuses to having lay volunteers read your application. Perhaps there can be more of a balance where not all reviewers are lay people.
- The time and attention that the Cummings Foundation is devoting to the ease and comprehension of its application process was so deeply felt and appreciated. Thank you from this small non-profit!
- This was one of the easiest, most straightforward applications I've ever completed. It would be hard to find a way to make it easier!
- We felt that all questions were reasonable and necessary for Cummings Foundation to make their decisions. We did not have an issue with the amount of time it took to complete the applications (LOI and final application) and in fact, it helped us focus and do a mini self-evaluation of our short and long-term goals and how we could accomplish these goals. The only suggestion might be that an LOI isn't necessary for grant requests under \$25,000.
- Have the ability to download a Word version (current option a PDF for viewing?) of the application questions so they can be drafted/edited offline and then copy/pasted into online form.