



4 Ways to Adapt to the Shifting Grants Landscape

It's a challenging moment for state and local grant managers. Federal funding has been scaled back in some areas, while support in others remains uncertain. At the same time, communities are increasingly turning to state and local agencies to help fill the gap, often when those agencies are already operating with limited resources.

At a recent [GovLoop virtual event](#), thought leaders from government and industry discussed how agencies can navigate this shifting landscape and continue directing critical funds where they're needed most. Here are some insights from that session.

SPEAKERS

Kelly Bragg, Strategic Planning Manager, Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County, Ohio

Andrew Brooks, Director, Solutions Engineering, Euna Solutions

Lindsey Ewing, Grants Manager, Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County, Ohio

Dr. Shontia L. Lowe, Executive Director, Office of Out of School Time Grants and Youth Outcomes, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, Executive Office of Mayor Muriel Bowser, Washington, D.C.

1. GET CREATIVE IN THE SEARCH FOR FUNDING

With federal funding increasingly unreliable, state and local agencies need to look for alternatives. That means broadening the horizon when identifying potential funding sources. "You want to be proactive in how you're searching for grants," said Kelly Bragg of Franklin County. "You want to cast a wider net than you've had to in the past and look for nontraditional sources of funding."

Don't wait to get started. While grant writing can feel intimidating, Bragg said that at its core, it's about clearly demonstrating need and making a strong case for how the funds will be used. Don't overthink the process. Instead, be proactive: Seek out funding opportunities that address community needs, rather than waiting for a grant announcement to pop up in your inbox.



2. BE PREPARED TO MOVE FAST

Uncertainty and scarcity have made the grant landscape more competitive than ever. In this environment, speed matters. Agencies need to be ready to act as soon as a grant opportunity arises. “The difference between being awarded a grant and not being awarded one sometimes comes down to how quickly you can pull together all of the required information,” said Shontia Lowe of Washington, D.C.

As agencies work to improve grant readiness, artificial intelligence and automation can help minimize delays that often occur when data is scattered across multiple platforms. Ideally, grant managers should be able to rely on automated systems with built-in rules, she said. State and local agencies can gain a competitive edge by maintaining pre-populated grant application portfolios within these systems — centralizing key materials such as up-to-date IRS tax documents or pre-drafted statements of need supported by localized data.

3. MAKE IT A TEAM EFFORT

Grant writing today should be an all-hands effort. To be effective, agencies need a comprehensive view of the entire grant lifecycle, informed by insights from across functions such as finance, accounting, contracting and legal. Technology can help create that holistic view, and grant managers need to keep pace.

“A lot of my colleagues are now experimenting with AI,” said Lindsey Ewing of Franklin County. “It’s a new age, it’s a new workflow and you have to put the old mindset behind you, because things aren’t going that way anymore.” For grant management professionals who may have shied away from technology in the past, now is the time to shift gears, she said, and start networking, getting training and researching the most relevant and impactful solutions available.

4. BUILD A PROACTIVE GRANT INFRASTRUCTURE

With grant teams under growing pressure, technology can play a meaningful supporting role. Centralizing data into a shared framework gives agencies clearer, real-time visibility into their grant activity. Many are moving beyond spreadsheets toward more automated systems, and exploring how AI can assist with pre-award work.

The goal isn’t automation for its own sake, but freeing grant managers to spend less time tracking down information and more time identifying and pursuing the funding opportunities that best align with their mission.

“Having infrastructure that’s reactive doesn’t really make sense in 2026,” said Andrew Brooks of Euna Solutions. “Hurry up and build out infrastructure to be able to manage that and meet the deadlines of these funders.”

State and local leaders need to approach digital transformation deliberately. Change doesn’t happen by default; it requires clear direction and sustained commitment. As Brooks noted, agencies don’t need to modernize everything at once. Incremental steps can still deliver meaningful improvements, particularly when grant managers align on centralized data, shared workflows and timely, reliable insight across the enterprise.

