



From Burnout to Boundaries: Creating a Sustainable Grant Strategy



VANESSA BURNS
Grant Consulting

Who Am I?



The Grant Hustle



The numbers don't lie:

75% of grant professionals report experiencing burnout

50% of nonprofits report significant grant workload stress

Applying to every possible grant actually increases errors and reduces impact

Take a moment to jot down a particularly stressful grant experience you've had.

Boundaries = Sustainable Grant Work



Set realistic grant application goals

Focus on quality over quantity – 3 well-aligned grants can outperform 10 rushed applications.



Allocate adequate prep time

Build in internal review time and buffer days to reduce last-minute scrambles.



Protect team capacity

Enable your team to focus their energy on high-impact opportunities that truly align with your mission.

Discussion: How could establishing clear boundaries help your grant team?

Prioritize Grants That Fit

1

Mission Alignment

Does this grant directly support your organization's core mission and strategic priorities?

2

Capacity to Deliver

Do you have the staff, systems, and resources to successfully implement and report on this grant?

3

Impact vs. Effort

Is the potential funding and impact worth the time and resources required to apply and manage?

Quick Assessment: Looking at your next potential grant, how does it score on these criteria?



Spotting Red Flags in Grant Programs

- **Last-minute or unclear reporting requirements**
When expectations shift after you've already committed
- **Frequent priority changes**
Funders who constantly pivot their focus areas
- **Excessive administrative burden**
When reporting takes more time than program delivery
- **Reputation for poor communication**
Delayed responses and unclear guidance

Share with a partner: Have you encountered any of these red flags?

Prioritize Grants Strategically

Grant Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
Mission & Goals Alignment	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Community Impact	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Funding Sufficiency	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Resource Capacity	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Strategic Importance	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Score your potential grants on each criterion (1–5 points). Pursue grants scoring 20+ points; reconsider those below 15.

Activity: Take 2 minutes to score 2–3 grants you're considering. Which rose to the top?

Applying an Equity Lens to Grants

Critical questions to consider:

Who benefits most from this grant opportunity?

Who carries the administrative burden within your organization?

Are smaller or underrepresented organizations disadvantaged by the application process?

How might power dynamics influence your relationship with the funder?

Discussion: How could you adjust your grant strategy to better incorporate equity principles?



Plan Your Grant Year

A strategic calendar helps prevent the last-minute scramble:

-  **Map the full grant lifecycle**
Include preparation time, internal reviews, submission deadlines, and reporting periods for each grant
-  **Build in buffer time**
Add 25% more time than you think you'll need—unexpected challenges *always* arise
-  **Balance workload across the year**
Avoid scheduling multiple major applications or reports in the same period when possible

Activity: Plot your top grants on a calendar. Do you notice any potential conflicts or crunch periods?



Tools & Mindset for Sustainable Grant Programs

Practical Tools

- Grant Fit Checklist
- Boundaries Framework
- Annual Calendar Template
- Red Flag Assessment
- Team Capacity Tracker

Mindset Shifts

- Quality over quantity
- Strategic focus vs. reactive approach
- "No" is a complete sentence
- Protect team wellbeing as an asset
- Build funder relationships, not transactions

Identify one tool and one mindset shift you'll implement in the next 30 days.

Which do you think will have the biggest impact on your grant program?

Action Plan

This Week

Implement one boundary in your current grant process

This Month

Create your grant ranking system and evaluate upcoming opportunities

This Quarter

Develop a 12-month grant calendar with prep and buffer time built in

"The goal isn't to apply for more grants—it's to secure the **right grants** that advance your mission **without burning out** your team."





Thank You!

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LinkedIn



Calendly



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