



IMPROVING SOUTHERN  
NEVADA NONPROFITS'  
GRANT CAPACITY AND  
COMPETITIVENESS:

# A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

May 2017



# Acknowledgement

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## About Southern Nevada Strong

Southern Nevada Strong (SNS) is an ongoing, collaborative effort to create livable communities where residents have access to quality housing, education, employment, and transportation choices. Guided by the award-winning SNS Regional Plan, the region's first federally-recognized regional plan, the SNS Implementation Team, at the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC), educates, engages and empowers Southern Nevadans to help them achieve their vision for the region.

The Regional Plan is organized around four themes - Improve Economic Competitiveness and Education, Invest in Complete Communities, Increase Transportation Choice, and Building Capacity for Implementation - and includes a comprehensive implementation matrix that identifies goals, objectives and strategies for the region to pursue.

## Executive Summary

For decades Nevada has been among the lowest performing states in terms of receiving federal grant funding (except for recent growth in Medicaid). During the past six years, however, the State has taken several critical steps to improve its capacity and competitiveness for federal grants, which has created a valuable, timely opportunity for Southern Nevada. Through improved collaboration and regional prioritization, Southern Nevada stands to increase its share of federal pass-through and direct grant awards. Local governments, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community groups are poised to both lead and support this work, especially with the growing regional coordination and awareness created through the Southern Nevada Strong (SNS) Regional Plan process.

In late 2016, SNS initiated an effort with area nonprofits and the State of Nevada's Grant Office to develop a regionally-focused strategy for improving grant capacity and competitiveness. The effort culminated in a Strategic Framework that identifies strategies for (i) Southern Nevada nonprofits to consistently submit high-quality, competitive federal grant applications, and (ii) the region's leaders and organizations to work together to prioritize and secure federal grants.

The Strategic Framework, which is presented in this report, is intended to help stakeholders throughout the region identify, implement, and monitor the actions needed to support nonprofit organizations as they improve their grant capacity and competitiveness for the benefit of all.





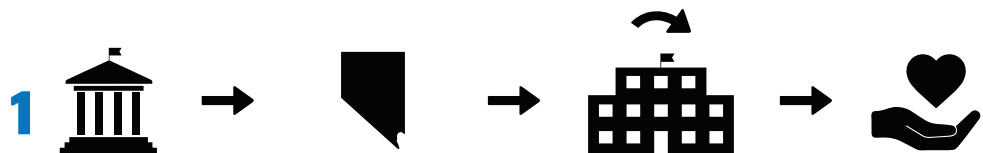


# A PLAN TO IMPROVE GRANT CAPACITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

## Federal Grants in Nevada

The federal government provides state and local governments with hundreds of billions of dollars in grants annually to fund a wide range of projects, programs, and services in areas such as community development, education, environmental protection, health care, job training, transportation, and social services.<sup>1</sup> In fiscal year, 2014 the federal government disbursed approximately \$589 billion in grants. Federal grants are so widespread that they account for approximately one-third of total state government funding and more than half of state government funding for health care and public assistance.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, nonprofit 501(c)3 organizations receive nearly 10 percent of their revenue from federal grants;<sup>3</sup> for nonprofits in health and human services, federal government funding (including contracts) soars to account for nearly two-thirds of total revenue.<sup>4</sup>

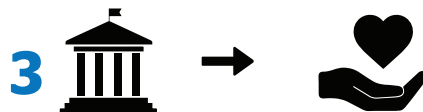
### HOW FEDERAL GRANTS MAKE THEIR WAY TO NONPROFITS



Federal grants awarded to state and passed through to nonprofits directly or through local governments and then to nonprofits.



Federal grants awarded to local governments and then passed through to nonprofits.



Federal grants awarded directly to nonprofits.

<sup>1</sup>Congressional Research Service. "Federal Grants to State and Local Governments: A Historical Perspective on Contemporary Issues". March 2015. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40638.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Congressional Research Service. "Federal Grants to State and Local Governments: A Historical Perspective on Contemporary Issues". March 2015. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40638.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Pettijohn, Sarah. "Federal Government Contracts and Grants for Nonprofits". Urban Institute. May 2013.

<sup>4</sup>Boris, Elizabeth, et. al. "Human Service Nonprofits and Government Collaboration". Urban Institute. Oct. 2010. <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/29221/412228-Human-Service-Nonprofits-and-Government-Collaboration-Findings-from-the-National-Survey-of-Nonprofit-Government-Contracting-and-Grants.PDF>



Despite their prevalence and significance, Nevada has long had some of the lowest per capita rates of competitive federal grant funding.<sup>5</sup> During the past six years, however, Nevada has made many improvements to its grant procurement and management systems, which better position state and local governments, and nonprofits to increase their federal grant funding.

Working to increase federal grant funding is particularly compelling for the region's nonprofit community, as Nevada's nonprofits rank 50th in the nation for assets and revenue per capita.<sup>6</sup> Increasing the flow of federal grants to the state will increase nonprofit funding and could fundamentally improve the nonprofit funding landscape with an influx of new dollars. Additional federal grant funding will also create opportunities for local governments and philanthropic donors to leverage their funding for greater impact and flexibility.




<sup>5</sup>The Pew Charitable Trusts. "Federal Spending in the States, 2005 to 2014." March 2016. [http://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2016/03/federal\\_spending\\_in\\_the\\_states\\_20052014.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2016/03/federal_spending_in_the_states_20052014.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>Word, J. K., Lim, J., Servino, C., Lange, K. (2014). Nonprofit Organizations and the Nevada Economy: An analysis of the employment, economic impact, and scope of the nonprofit sector in Nevada. 1-61. [http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lincy\\_publications/3](http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lincy_publications/3)



# Developing a Regional Strategic Framework

During the development of the Southern Nevada Strong (SNS) Regional Plan, stakeholders identified the need for dedicated and consistent funding for implementation tasks that are unfunded or underfunded. To meet these funding needs, stakeholders agreed that in addition to developing local funding options, the region should proactively seek external funding for implementation, particularly by enhancing efforts to pursue private and federal funding. The key strategies identified for these efforts focused on increasing communication, coordination, and collaboration among nonprofit organizations, local governments, the State of Nevada’s Grant Office, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations.

	 <b>RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION</b> Lead (L) Support (S)	<b>FISCAL IMPACT</b> 0, +, ++, +++	<b>TIMEFRAME</b> Short term (0-2 years) Mid term (3-6 years) Long term (7+ years)
<b>GOAL 5: PROACTIVELY SEEK EXTERNAL FUNDING FOR PLAN IMPLEMENTATION.</b>			
<b>Objective 5.1</b> Enhance efforts to pursue private and federal funding to increase competitiveness with other states and regions.			
5.1.1 - Pursue federal funding from the SCI partnership and reach out to other federal partners to determine how they can support implementation of the Regional Plan.	RTC = L Local Governments = S Brookings Mountain West = S	0	Short term
5.1.2 - Work with organizations such as the Brookings Institute and the Nevada Community Foundation to increase competitiveness for federal funding and prioritize grant seeking at all levels of government.	RTC = L Local Governments = S State Agencies = S Federal Agencies = S	0	Short term
5.1.3 - Increase coordination and data sharing with the State Grant’s Management Office, as well as designees at each local government.	RTC = L State Agencies = S Local Governments = S Education and Research Partners = S	0	Short term
5.1.4 - Tie eligibility criteria for state and federal dollars to the ability for the potential project to meet Regional Plan objectives.	RTC = L Local Governments = S State Agencies = S Federal Agencies = S	0	Mid term
5.1.5 - Enhance the accuracy, consistency, and timeliness of data reported to the federal government.	RTC = L Local Governments = S State Agencies = S Federal Agencies = S	0	Mid term
5.1.6 - Work with community leaders to increase their understanding and support of the Regional Plan.	RTC = L Local Governments = S	0	Short term
5.1.7 - Dedicate staff time to grant-seeking and grant-writing to look for additional funding sources for Regional Plan implementation.	RTC = L Local Governments = S	+	Short term

**Southern Nevada Strong Regional Plan - Implementation Matrix (p. 61)**

*Increasing federal funding as a means to implementing the Regional Plan is a focus of the “Building Capacity of Implementation” section of the plan.*

While Regional Plan implementation is currently underway, low or nonexistent funding continues to be a barrier to many implementation tasks. These barriers are especially problematic for the region’s nonprofit organizations, as they often struggle to maintain funding levels. Working with and supporting nonprofit organizations to develop sustainable funding strategies must be a priority for the region, as they play a vital role in creating opportunity and enhancing

quality of life for Southern Nevadans, especially those who have been historically underrepresented and under-resourced. Nonprofit organizations are so critical to our region's prosperity that they are named as responsible for leading or supporting roughly two-thirds of all implementation tasks identified in the Regional Plan.

Increasing the flow of federal grants to Southern Nevada can significantly increase the funding available for Regional Plan implementation. In many cases, the funding will ultimately make its way to nonprofit organizations. However, to increase federal grant funding, the region must first improve its capacity and competitiveness for federal grants. To identify specific capacity and competitiveness improvements needed and develop strategies for success, SNS staff partnered with the Guinn Center for Policy Priorities, Nevada Community Foundation, United Way of Southern Nevada, and State of Nevada's Grant Office to form a working group of 15 nonprofit professionals and grant writers to provide expert input and direction.

Through six facilitated sessions, project participants conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, identified primary barriers and opportunities, organized their findings into two primary themes, and developed a Strategic Framework that includes goals, objectives, strategies, tactics and next steps for implementation. The working group's discussions focused on improvements needed at the organizational-level (i.e., what nonprofits can do) and at the community-level (i.e., what local and state governments, professional associations, community-based organizations and civic leaders can do), including:

## **Organization-level Improvements Needed**

- More frequently identifying grant opportunities, especially by enrolling in grant announcement publications and exchanging information with fellow nonprofits and grant administrators at the local, state, and federal levels
- Standardizing internal review and decision-making processes to effectively determine if a specific grant is a good fit for the nonprofit and worth pursuing
- Proactively developing relationships with other nonprofits that can mature into mutually beneficial grant partnerships
- Expanding professional development opportunities for staff and enhancing information technology (e.g., grant management and reporting systems) to support grant program design and evaluation, budget development and management, and reporting
- Maintaining quality grant-ready documents, including case statements, financials, program descriptions, and program budgets
- Internally prioritizing federal grant capacity and competitiveness, and viewing federal grants as a major revenue source
- Making more long-term commitments to programs to create reliability in grant administration





## Community-level Improvements Needed

- Ensuring that a diverse group of nonprofits, ranging in both size and service provision, are included and engaged in federal grant applications and awards
- Improving the quality and quantity of timely information about federal grant opportunities, awards, and impacts, especially through stakeholders more effectively sharing information with each other
- Engaging philanthropic donors to invest in professional development and additional grant staff positions for nonprofits as well as provide flexible funding for match requirements
- Increasing the regularity of nonprofit organizations partnering to apply for and administer federal grants
- Continuing to improve access to and consistent use of data
- Enhancing communication and coordination between the organization(s) involved at each level of the grant process (i.e., local government and public agencies, state government, federal government), especially in sub-award scenarios
- Maintaining a shared vision and set of priorities for the region and reporting on them so that organizations at every level of the grant process can more effectively coordinate actions

These two primary themes led participants to develop goal statements that described their desired outcomes, which anchor the Strategic Framework:

1. Southern Nevada nonprofits consistently submit high-quality, competitive federal grant applications.
2. Nonprofits, local governments, civic leaders, and policymakers work together to coordinate actions that prioritize and secure federal grants.

Input from the greater nonprofit community was captured before finalizing the Strategic Framework during an open house event held in early February 2017. Nearly 70 nonprofit professionals and stakeholders attended the open house to review and provide feedback on the findings and proposed recommendations.

## Strategic Framework

The “Strategic Framework to Improve Southern Nevada Nonprofits’ Grant Capacity and Competitiveness” is intended to guide nonprofits’ approach and work with federal grants, including collaborating with each other, investing in professional development, prioritizing federal grant work, and working with private donors to leverage their contributions. Additionally, the Framework should be used to align and guide stakeholders across the region for shared success, educate community leaders and policymakers on actions needed for progress, and engage partners in higher education and state government to share in the work.

The Strategic Framework is organized around two goals, and includes objectives, strategies, and tactics and next steps for stakeholders, who, for the purposes of this framework, include:

- **Community-based organizations** - Organizations that work at the local level to improve quality of life for residents, but are not direct service providers
- **Nonprofits** - Organizations that are direct service providers
- **Professional associations** - Associations of nonprofit professionals
- **Philanthropic donors** - Individuals, families, foundations and corporations that make charitable gifts and grants







## Goal 1

**Southern Nevada nonprofits consistently submit high-quality, competitive federal grant applications.**

### Objective 1.1

**Nonprofits identify grant funding opportunities they are eligible for and effectively evaluate whether the opportunity is a good fit for their organization and worth pursuing.**

- 1.1.1 Nonprofits utilize existing resources (e.g., Nevada Grant Office, Grants.gov, Foundation Center Online, etc.) to identify grant opportunities.
- 1.1.2 Nonprofits and community-based organizations establish communication tools to promote grant opportunities and establish networks for potential partnerships.
- 1.1.3 Nonprofits, local and state governments, and community-based organizations work together to identify shared community priorities that grant funding can be used for.
- 1.1.4 Nonprofits develop and adopt a standard grant evaluation criterion and decision-making process to determine if a grant is a good fit for them, and worth pursuing.
- 1.1.5 Nonprofits develop and regularly update important grant documents, such as a strategic plan, a multiyear program plan, and a case statement, along with a list of current funding priorities.

**The following tactics and next steps can be used to implement this objective and these strategies:**

- Nonprofits subscribe to electronic databases and forums that promote grant opportunities, such as the one offered by the Nevada Grant Office.
- United Way of Southern Nevada and nonprofit professional associations highlight current and upcoming grant opportunities in their newsletters, meetings, etc., and provide opportunities for members to learn about grant opportunities and best practices.
- Southern Nevada Strong will convene nonprofits, governments, and civic leaders around shared grant opportunities and community priorities.
- The Nevada Grant Office will continue to share information on grant opportunities and potential collaborations through its email list and website.
- Nonprofits update their grant toolkit (e.g., case statement, financial information, program descriptions, etc.).



## Objective 1.2

**Nonprofits submit grant applications that are well-constructed, well-written, and meet the requirements set by the specific grant opportunity.**

- 1.2.1 Nonprofits utilize existing resources and partners to review grant applications before submission.
- 1.2.2 Nonprofits and independent grant writers invest in professional development and training in areas like narrative writing, budget development, and program design.
- 1.2.3 Nonprofits utilize professional grant writers, when possible, including through cost-sharing contracts with fellow nonprofits.
- 1.2.4 Nonprofits identify and use quality data to the greatest extent possible.
- 1.2.5 Nonprofits, community-based organizations, and philanthropic donors work together to expand availability of cash and in-kind match funding that can be used to secure grants.

**The following tactics and next steps can be used to implement this objective and these strategies:**

- United Way of Southern Nevada and community-based organizations provide trainings and toolkits for budget development and program design.
- Community-based organizations provide philanthropic donors with information and insights on the need for capacity building and match funding.
- The Nevada Grant Office, community-based organizations, and professional associations publish grant writing resources and best practices.
- Professional associations create opportunities for peers to review each other's grants.
- Nonprofits conduct internal reviews to determine their need for professional grant writing assistance.



## Objective 1.3

### Nonprofits effectively implement, manage, evaluate, report on, and close out grant awards.

- 1.3.1 Nonprofits strengthen program evaluation skills and develop evaluation tools by working with partners in the region's colleges, universities and think tanks, and consulting existing online resources.
- 1.3.2 Nonprofits integrate program and finance staff into the grant development and reporting process to create shared expectations and responsibility across their organizations.
- 1.3.3 Community-based organizations provide trainings and toolkits for program and project management.
- 1.3.4 Nonprofits adopt, to the extent possible, best practices for communication and reporting with funders to ensure mutually successful grant awards and increase the likelihood of future funding.

#### **The following tactics and next steps can be used to implement this objective and these strategies:**

- The Nevada Grant Office, United Way of Southern Nevada, Guinn Center, community-based organizations and professional associations provide and promote program evaluation tools and best practices for tracking performance metrics.
- Nonprofit organizations establish relationships with partners in higher education who can assist in researching, reviewing and evaluating program design and reporting.
- Nonprofits establish internal cross-departmental teams responsible for successful grant implementation and reporting.
- Nonprofits adopt and implement procedures for communicating and reporting to funding organizations.



## Goal 2

**Nonprofits, local governments, civic leaders, and policymakers work together to coordinate actions that prioritize and secure federal grants.**

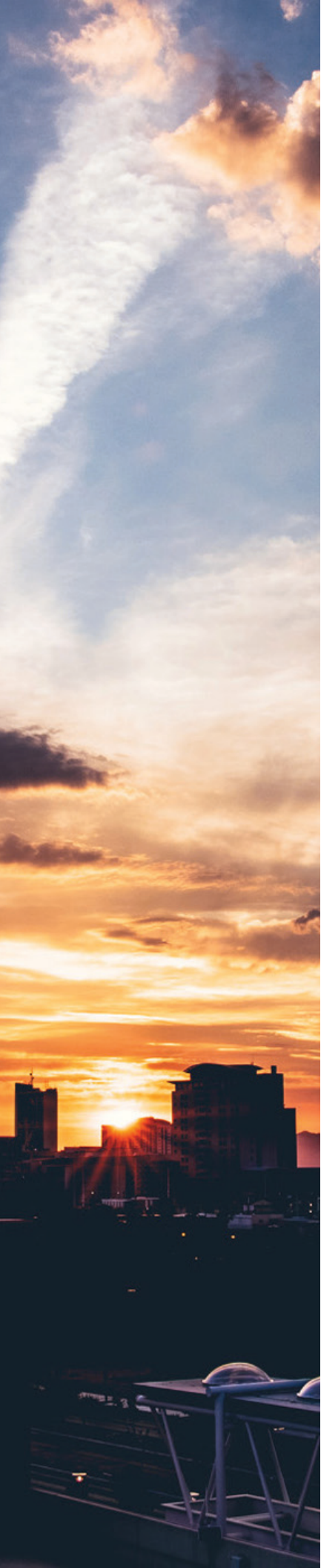
### Objective 2.1

**Nonprofits and government partners at the local, state and federal levels work collaboratively to increase federal grant investment in Southern Nevada.**

- 2.1.1 Community-based organizations develop and facilitate forums for nonprofits to meet and develop relationships with elected officials and staff in local, state, and federal government.
- 2.1.2 Nonprofits work with local and state government staff to identify grant opportunities, recruit partners, secure match funding, and craft competitive grant applications.
- 2.1.3 Nonprofits and elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels collaborate to identify grant opportunities and support competitive grant applications.
- 2.1.4 Nonprofits cultivate relationships with federal grant administrators.
- 2.1.5 Local and state government staff, working closely with nonprofits, regularly review and update the criteria and processes used to approve or endorse applications and/or partners for federal grants that require local or state government approval.
- 2.1.6 Grant awards and sub-awards within Nevada are tracked and reported so that stakeholders can understand the flow of federal grants, and stakeholders can communicate regarding specific awards.
- 2.1.7 Nonprofits and community-based organizations encourage clients, residents, and staff to apply for and otherwise participate in public boards and commissions as a way to be engaged in decision making.







**The following tactics and next steps can be used to implement this objective and these strategies:**

- Nonprofits identify the policymakers who represent them at the local, state and federal levels to establish relationships and communication.
- Nonprofits participate in policy discussions, including legislative sessions, when relevant to their mission and priorities.
- Southern Nevada Strong, United Way of Southern Nevada, and community-based organizations host forums to provide timely, accurate updates on federal grant budgets, future programs, and collaborations.
- The Nevada Grant Office implements a statewide grants management system that allows stakeholders at all levels to track grant awards.

## **Objective 2.2**

**Nonprofits, including those that are traditionally underrepresented, work together to build capacity and promote the importance of federal grants.**

- 2.2.1 Community-based organizations develop and maintain a database of the region's nonprofits that is searchable by services, programs, populations served, etc.
- 2.2.2 Nonprofits share best practices and resources with each other to improve grant competitiveness.
- 2.2.3 Community-based organizations and nonprofits host issue-specific grant forums to communicate with relevant local, state, and federal government stakeholders about grant opportunities, community priorities, best practices, etc.
- 2.2.4 Community-based organizations and local and state governments proactively engage nonprofits that are often underrepresented in community efforts.

**The following tactics and next steps can be used to implement this objective and these strategies:**

- United Way of Southern Nevada, community-based organizations and nonprofits organize forums and electronic portals to receive and disseminate information.
- The Nevada Grant Office and community-based organizations develop and publicize a database of the region's nonprofits.
- Southern Nevada Strong and United Way of Southern Nevada convene funding partners and implementing organizations within issue areas to support the development of partnerships.

## Objective 2.3

### Nonprofit board members and donors support and prioritize efforts that build capacity and competitiveness in securing federal grants.

- 2.3.1 Nonprofits and community-based organizations collaborate with board members and philanthropic donors to develop a shared vision and commitment to increasing federal grant funding and the actions it will take to do so.
- 2.3.2 Nonprofit board members, philanthropic donors, and professional organizations promote the positive impacts of increasing federal grant awards and utilization.

#### **The following tactics and next steps can be used to implement this objective and these strategies:**

- Community-based organizations develop and provide informational forums, fact sheets, and data to engage and educate stakeholders about federal grants.

## Next Steps

Through improved collaboration and regional prioritization, there exists a real opportunity to build on the progress the State of Nevada has made to improve capacity and competitiveness for federal grants. Southern Nevada's nonprofit organizations, working alongside community partners, stand to increase their share of federal pass-through and direct grant awards, better equipping them to meet the needs of the community, both today and as the region continues to grow.

A coordinated regional effort among local governments, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, foundations, higher education institutions, and community groups is critical to ensuring progress continues. During the coming year, project organizers and community partners will share resources, provide technical assistance, organize professional development trainings, and host educational workshops to further educate the community about the Strategic Framework and how it can successfully be implemented.





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