

TL&C FARMLAND

FROM FOSTER CARE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Grant Magnet™ Starter Kit

Stop Guessing. Start Building Your Funding System.

Your Complete Grant Readiness Toolkit

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Component 1 — Grant Readiness Checklist

50 Questions Across 5 Areas of Organizational Readiness

Before you pursue funding opportunities, you need to know where you stand. This checklist walks you through every area funders evaluate — so you can close gaps before they become dealbreakers.

Rate each area: Complete / In Progress / Not Started

AREA 1: ORGANIZATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

1. Does your organization have a registered legal entity (501(c)(3), LLC, etc.)?
2. Do you have a current EIN (Employer Identification Number)?
3. Is your organization in good standing with your state government?
4. Do you have at least 3 years of organizational history or a founding narrative?
5. Does your organization have an active board of directors with documented governance?
6. Do you have a current mission statement that is publicly available?
7. Does your organization have a strategic plan (1–3 years)?
8. Do you have documented organizational policies (HR, financial, program)?
9. Do you have liability insurance in place?
10. Does your organization have a dedicated business address?

AREA 2: PROGRAM READINESS

11. Does your organization have a clearly defined program or service offering?
12. Do you have documented program goals and measurable outcomes?
13. Have you documented your organization's theory of change or logic model?
14. Do you have evidence of community need (data, surveys, reports)?
15. Is your program model documented in writing?
16. Do you have a plan for serving participants or beneficiaries?
17. Do you have staff or volunteers trained to deliver the program?
18. Have you tracked and documented program outcomes from past work?
19. Do you have partnerships or collaborations that strengthen your program?
20. Is your program scalable or replicable if funding allows for growth?

AREA 3: FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

21. Does your organization have a dedicated business bank account?
22. Do you have financial controls and segregation of duties in place?

23. Is your organization currently using an accounting system or software?
24. Do you have an annual budget approved by your board?
25. Does your organization have documented revenue streams?
26. Have you completed and audited at least one year of financial statements?
27. Does your organization have a funding diversification plan?
28. Do you have financial policies in place (approval thresholds, reimbursement)?
29. Can you produce a detailed program budget aligned with funder priorities?
30. Do you have a grants management system or dedicated tracking process?

AREA 4: DATA & EVALUATION

31. Does your organization have a data collection plan?
32. Are you collecting participant demographics and outcomes data?
33. Do you have a system for tracking and storing data securely?
34. Have you produced outcome reports for past programs or funding cycles?
35. Do you have baselines and benchmarks to measure progress?
36. Are you able to demonstrate impact with qualitative and quantitative data?
37. Do you have an evaluation plan or framework for assessing program effectiveness?
38. Have you conducted surveys, interviews, or focus groups with participants?
39. Can you tell your impact story with real numbers and participant voices?
40. Are you prepared to report data to funders on a quarterly or annual basis?

AREA 5: DOCUMENTATION LIBRARY

41. Do you have your 501(c)(3) determination letter on file?
42. Do you have current board meeting minutes documented and stored?
43. Do you have organizational bylaws accessible?
44. Do you have a current list of board members with contact information?
45. Do you have your annual reports (1–3 years) compiled and accessible?
46. Do you have letters of support from partners or community stakeholders?
47. Do you have your most recent financial audit or review on file?
48. Are your 990 filings available (if applicable)?
49. Do you have a media kit or press coverage compiled?
50. Do you have current insurance certificates (liability, workers comp, etc.)?

SCORING GUIDE

Count your Complete / In Progress / Not Started responses.

40–50 Complete: You are highly grant-ready. Focus on matching opportunities to your strengths.

25–39 Complete: Good foundation. Close your critical gaps before applying.

10–24 Complete: Build your infrastructure first. A rejected application costs time and credibility.

Below 10 Complete: Use the 30-Day Funding Action Plan in this kit to close your gaps systematically.



Component 2 — Grant Pipeline Tracker

Know Exactly Where Every Grant Opportunity Stands

A grant is only as useful as your ability to track it. Use this pipeline to manage every opportunity — from first discovery to final decision.

5-STAGE PIPELINE

Stage 1 — RESEARCHING: New opportunity identified. Initial fit assessed.

Stage 2 — QUALIFIED: Eligibility confirmed. Fit with mission verified.

Stage 3 — IN PROGRESS: Application actively being drafted.

Stage 4 — SUBMITTED: Application submitted. Awaiting decision.

Stage 5 — DECISION: Awarded or Declined. Log result and notes.

PIPELINE DASHBOARD

Grant Name | Funder | Amount | Deadline | Stage | Next Action

Keep this updated weekly. A grant you forgot to submit is a grant you lost.

TIPS FOR USE

- Review your pipeline every Monday morning
- Move opportunities through stages as you progress
- Note specific next actions so nothing falls through
- Archive declined applications — you may revisit next cycle

Component 3 — Funding Opportunity Tracker

Prioritize the Grants That Actually Fit Your Mission

Not every grant is worth your time. This tracker helps you log every opportunity and rank them by strategic fit — so you stop chasing grants and start chasing wins.

OPPORTUNITY LOG FIELDS

- Grant Name
- Funder
- Website
- Deadline
- Amount
- Eligibility Requirements
- Fit Score (1–5)
- Status (Active / Closed / Not Eligible)

PRIORITIZATION MATRIX

Rank opportunities by these 3 factors:

1. Mission Fit — Does this grant align with what you actually do?
2. Amount — Is the funding meaningful to your operations?
3. Deadline Feasibility — Do you have enough time to write a strong application?

Formula: Mission Fit + Amount + Feasibility = Priority Score

High Priority: 12–15

Medium Priority: 8–11

Low Priority: Below 8 — deprioritize and focus elsewhere



Component 4 — 10 AI Grant Writing Prompts

Use AI as Your Writing Partner, Not Your Ghostwriter

AI can help you draft faster, think clearer, and push through writer's block — but only if you know how to ask. These prompts are built for grant writers who want to maintain their voice and produce fundable content.

PROMPT 1 — Organizational Background

“I am the [title] of [organization name], a [type of organization] serving [population] since [year]. Our mission is [mission statement]. Write a 250-word organizational background section that highlights our history, accomplishments, and capacity for this grant application. Tone: professional, confident, outcome-focused.”

PROMPT 2 — Community Need Statement

“I am applying for a grant from [funder name] to serve [population/area]. Our data shows [specific data point]. I need a compelling community need statement that connects local context to the problem we address. Include: demographic context, the specific gap we fill, and why now. Tone: urgent but hopeful.”

PROMPT 3 — Program Description

“Our program, [program name], does [what it does]. We serve [who], using [how]. Our expected outcomes are [outcomes]. Write a 400-word program description that a grant reviewer can visualize and understand within 60 seconds. Be specific about activities, participants, and methodology.”

PROMPT 4 — Budget Narrative

“Our total budget is \$[amount]. The largest line items are [list items]. We are requesting \$[request amount] from [funder]. Write a budget narrative that justifies each major line item and shows the funder that every dollar connects to program outcomes.”

PROMPT 5 — Evaluation Plan

“Our program goals are [goals]. We measure success using [metrics]. Write a 200-word evaluation plan section that shows the funder how we track outcomes, collect data, and report on program effectiveness.”

PROMPT 6 — Sustainability Plan

“We are requesting [amount] for [project]. Write a 200-word sustainability plan that outlines how we will continue this program after the grant period ends. Include: diversified funding strategy, earned revenue potential, and partnership commitments.”

PROMPT 7 — Collaboration Letter

“I need a draft letter to [partner organization name] requesting a partnership or letter of support for our grant application. Our collaboration would involve [what]. The letter should be professional, specific, and show mutual benefit.”

PROMPT 8 — Impact Story

“Our program participant [first name or alias], age [age], came to us [context]. Through our program, they [what happened]. Today, they [current outcome]. Write a 150-word impact story that connects one participant’s journey to your organizational mission. Real, human, specific.”

PROMPT 9 — Logic Model

“Our inputs are [resources]. Our activities are [what we do]. Our outputs are [deliverables]. Our outcomes are [short/medium/long-term changes]. Write a clear logic model narrative that a grant reviewer can follow — showing the cause-and-effect chain from investment to impact.”

PROMPT 10 — Letter of Intent / Letter of Inquiry

“I am preparing to submit a letter of intent to [funder name] by [deadline]. Our organization is [description]. We are seeking [amount] for [project]. Write a 300-word letter of intent that introduces our organization, states our funding request, and clearly articulates why this funder should invite a full application.”

Component 5 — Grant Planning Worksheet

Before You Apply — Answer These Questions First

Most grant rejections happen before the application is even written — because the wrong grants were pursued. Complete this worksheet before starting any application.

ELIGIBILITY CHECK

- Does the funder explicitly list your organization type as eligible? Yes / No
- Does the grant geographic focus include your service area? Yes / No
- Does the funding amount justify the time investment? Yes / No
- Does the grant period align with your organizational capacity? Yes / No
- Do you meet the minimum reporting or audit requirements? Yes / No

PROGRAM FIT

- What specific program or project does this grant fund?
- Is this the highest and best use of this funder's dollars for your organization?
- Does this grant align with your strategic plan goals?
- Is this an opportunity to expand into a new area or deepen existing work?

BUDGET ALIGNMENT

- Total project budget: \$ _____
- Amount requesting: \$ _____
- What % of the total project does this grant cover? _____%
- Can you cover the match or co-funding requirement? Yes / No / TBD
- Are there other funders covering the remaining budget? Yes / No

APPLICATION TIMELINE

- Grant deadline: _____
- Letters of support needed: _____
- Board approval needed: Yes / No
- Internal draft deadline: _____
- Internal review deadline: _____
- Final submission deadline: _____

RISK ASSESSMENT

- What is the biggest risk to completing this application on time?

- What is the biggest risk if you receive this grant?
- What happens to this program if you do not receive funding?

SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

- & Eligibility confirmed
- & Program fit verified
- & Budget aligned
- & Timeline mapped
- & Internal approvers notified
- & Letters of support requested
- & Application draft complete
- & Internal review complete
- & Final submission submitted



Component 6 — Annual Funding Calendar

Stay Ahead of Deadlines All Year Long

Grant writing is a year-round activity. Use this calendar to plan your funding strategy so you're never scrambling at the last minute.

Q1 (January–March): FOUNDATION & PLANNING

- Audit prior year's grants — what worked, what didn't
- Set annual funding goals and revenue targets
- Refresh and update core application documents
- Research new funders for the year ahead
- Identify grants with Q2/Q3 deadlines to target

Q2 (April–June): ACTIVE PURSUIT

- Submit at least 2–3 major grant applications
- Follow up on Q1 submissions
- Begin relationship-building with funders
- Update your pipeline tracker weekly
- Review first-quarter outcome data for reporting

Q3 (July–September): PIPELINE & RELATIONSHIPS

- Mid-year grant reporting to existing funders
- Scout new opportunities for Q4 and next year
- Connect with funders at conferences or virtual events
- Update pipeline tracker — archive decisions, log new opportunities
- Draft and revise fall applications

Q4 (October–December): CLOSE & PLAN

- Submit fall grant applications before holiday slowdowns
- Complete year-end reporting for active grants
- Conduct annual funding review — what did you win vs. pursue?
- Begin planning next year's grant calendar
- Update organizational documents for January submissions

MONTHLY ACTIONS

1st of each month: Review pipeline tracker

2nd week: Follow up on pending funder communications

3rd week: Draft or revise at least one grant application

4th week: Log decisions, archive results, update annual calendar

Component 7 — 30-Day Funding Action Plan

Close Your Gaps and Submit Smarter

If you need to move fast on grant readiness — this sprint is for you. Four weeks, one mission: close your critical gaps before your next application deadline.

WEEK 1: FOUNDATIONS

Days 1–2: Confirm your legal status. Pull your 501(c)(3) letter, EIN confirmation, and board governance documents. If anything is missing, start the replacement process today.

Days 3–4: Audit your financial infrastructure. Pull your last two years of financial records. Can you produce a balance sheet? An income statement? If not, get an accountant or bookkeeper on board.

Days 5–7: Review and update your mission statement and organizational description. This is the foundation of every application. It must be clear, specific, and ready to share.

WEEK 2: DOCUMENTATION

Days 8–9: Pull your documentation library together — 990s, audit reports, board minutes, letters of support. If any are missing, note what needs to be replaced.

Days 10–11: Draft your theory of change or logic model. Funders want to see that you understand the link between what you do and the outcomes you produce.

Days 12–14: Review your program goals and measurable outcomes. If you don't have outcomes data, start collecting baseline data now — even one participant's story is better than nothing.

WEEK 3: DISCOVERY

Days 15–16: Identify 5–10 grants that fit your mission and capacity. Use the Funding Opportunity Tracker to log and rank them.

Days 17–18: Narrow to your top 2–3 priorities. Complete the Grant Planning Worksheet for each.

Days 19–21: Research each funder. Read their last 3 years of funded grants if publicly available. Know what they fund — not just what they say they fund.

WEEK 4: DRAFT AND SUBMIT

Days 22–24: Begin your first application draft. Use the AI Grant Writing Prompts to speed up section drafts. Do not aim for perfection — aim for a complete first draft.

Days 25–27: Conduct internal review. Have a colleague or board member read your draft.

Check for clarity, accuracy, and completeness.

Days 28–30: Finalize, submit, and log. Submit your application before deadline. Update your Pipeline Tracker. Document what you submitted — you'll need it for follow-up reporting.

WEEKLY CHECKLIST

- & Completed all actions for this week
- & Pipeline tracker updated
- & Next week's priorities identified
- & Time blocked for Week 2 actions



About Grant Magnet™

Grant Magnet™ is a product of TL&C Farmland, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to serving youth ages 16–24 aging out of foster care in North Carolina.

Through a greenhouse agriculture and aquaponics-based workforce development program, TL&C Farmland creates paid job experience, financial literacy, and a genuine pathway to independence for the young people our community cannot afford to forget.

Every purchase of the Grant Magnet™ Starter Kit directly supports the development of TL&C Farmland — a residential agricultural community that turns lived experience into sustainable futures.

Learn more: tlcfarmlandinc.org

Contact: info@tlcfarmlandinc.org



