

The Church Grant Checklist

Twelve programs your congregation may already be running that a funder would support — and the six things to have in place before you ask.

CHURCH OR ORGANIZATION

COMPLETED BY

ROLE

DATE

Somewhere along the way, most churches were told they cannot receive grants. It is one of the most expensive pieces of misinformation in the nonprofit world.

Here is the accurate version. No funder will pay for worship, religious instruction, or evangelism. But the food pantry, the after-school program, the recovery group, the senior lunch, the summer camp, the job readiness class — those are community services, and community services are exactly what a great deal of public and philanthropic money exists to fund.

START HERE

Check every one below that your church already does — even informally, even seasonally, even if it is three volunteers and a folding table. You are taking inventory of what you already have.

PART ONE

Twelve fundable programs

Tick what you run, and note roughly how many people it reaches.

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After-school programs, homework help, or tutoring

Look at: 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) · state education agency · local foundations

approx. served

☐

Summer camps or summer learning programs

Look at: 21st CCLC · USDA Summer Food Service Program · state summer learning grants

approx. served

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Meals or snacks served to children in your programs

Look at: Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), through your state agency

approx. served

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Food pantry, food bank, or meal ministry

Look at: USDA commodity programs · regional food bank network · FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter

approx. served

☐

Senior services, congregate meals, or wellness checks

Look at: Older Americans Act funding, through your Area Agency on Aging

approx. served

☐	Childcare, preschool, or early learning Look at: Child Care and Development Fund subsidies · state pre-K · Head Start collaboration	 approx. served
☐	Youth mentoring or violence prevention Look at: juvenile justice and delinquency prevention funding · state and local youth initiatives	 approx. served
☐	Recovery, substance use, or mental health support Look at: SAMHSA programs · state opioid response funds · hospital community benefit dollars	 approx. served
☐	Housing assistance, shelter, or homelessness outreach Look at: HUD Continuum of Care · Emergency Solutions Grants · local continuum of care board	 approx. served
☐	Job readiness, workforce training, or career support Look at: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, through your local workforce board	 approx. served
☐	Adult literacy, GED preparation, or English classes Look at: Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, through your state adult education office	 approx. served
☐	Emergency assistance — rent, utilities, or disaster relief Look at: LIHEAP subgrants · FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter · community action agencies	 approx. served

HOW MANY DID YOU CHECK?

Three or more means you are not a church wondering whether it might qualify. You are a community-service organization that has been operating unfunded — and that is a stronger position than you think.

PART TWO

What funders will not pay for

- Worship services, religious instruction, or evangelism.
- Requiring participation in religious activity to receive a service.
- Choosing whom you serve on the basis of faith.
- Construction or renovation of space used for worship.
- Blurred accounting — the funded program is tracked separately.

What this does not mean

You do not have to stop being a church, change your mission, or hide what you believe. The rules govern the funded program and how it treats the people it serves — not your identity, your staff, or your convictions.

PART THREE

Six things to have in place

Most of this is paperwork you can complete before any application window opens — which is exactly when you should do it.

1 ☐ **An EIN**

Your federal employer identification number. Most churches already have one for payroll.

status / notes

2 ☐ **A 501(c)(3) determination letter — even though you don't legally need one**

The most useful item on this list. Churches are automatically tax-exempt without filing anything, which is why most have no letter. But foundations routinely require one as proof and will not process an application without it. Requesting it voluntarily removes that obstacle permanently.

status / notes

3 ☐ **SAM.gov registration and a Unique Entity ID**

Required for any federal grant, with no religious exemption. Free, renewed annually, and roughly seven to ten business days to process. Start it now.

status / notes

4 ☐ **Basic financial records and a governing body**

A budget, bank statements, and a board or trustees who can approve an application. You do not need an audit to start.

status / notes

5 ☐ **Numbers on who you serve**

How many people, how often, from which neighborhoods or schools. If you are not counting yet, start this week.

status / notes

6 ☐ **Background checks and insurance, if you serve children**

Non-negotiable for youth programming, and reviewers look for it.

status / notes

PART FOUR

Your plan

The one program we run best (not the one we wish we ran)

Our state agency contact or web page for that program

Target application window or deadline

Who owns this on our side, and by when

Questions we still need answered

IF YOU WANT HELP

I write and win grants for churches, schools, HBCUs, and after-school programs — and I founded and run an after-school and summer program of my own, so I answer to the same requirements I write about. Most first conversations take twenty minutes and end with a straight answer about whether a grant is the right tool, including when it isn't. There is no cost to asking.

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This worksheet is general guidance, not legal or tax advice. Program rules, eligibility, and deadlines vary by state and change over time — verify current requirements with the administering agency before applying.