

## FY26 How To Apply Webinar

Ebonyque Taylor (00:08):

Good afternoon or good morning, depending on where you are. We're now going to get started with the webinar. My name is Ebonyque Taylor, and I'm a social science analyst here at the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, also known as the COPS Office. I'm joined today by my colleagues, Camisha Amaker, Latasha Austin, Bethany Wilson, Toni Morgan-Wheeler, excuse me, and Alicia Jones.

(00:35):

Thank you for joining our webinar. Today we'll be providing tips to apply for our programs for fiscal year '26. While some of you may already be aware of who we are, I would like to take a moment to tell you a little bit about the COPS Office.

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The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, also known as the COPS Office, is a component of the Department of Justice that is responsible for advancing the practice of community-oriented policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies. Since 1994, the COPS Office has appropriated over 21 billion to help advance community policing.

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This webinar provides guidance for applying to funding opportunities for community policing advancement at the COPS Office. We will discuss the steps to access and apply for funding, helpful tips to support the completion of a successful application. And resources and tools will be provided to assist with applications.

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So first, we're going to discuss the application process in three sections: What you should do before you apply, the application, and some important components and resources to support you through the application process. Before you apply, you will need to familiarize yourself with these three sites, as they are integral to the application process, and you will have steps that need to be completed on each platform for successful application submission. That's SAM.gov, Grants.gov, and the JustGrants system.

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Let's talk about SAM.gov. All entities seeking DOJ funding must have an active SAM.gov registration. You should make sure you renew or register at least 30 days prior to any application deadlines to complete the application in the allotted time. To complete an application, you will need to ensure you have an active SAM.gov registration. Additionally, a UEI number, or unique entity identifier, which is issued through the system for Award Management, or SAM, is necessary for applications.

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Grants.gov. If you don't already have one, you will need to acquire an authorized organization representative, or AOR, and a Grants.gov username and password and confirm your registration. The AOR or E-Biz point of contact is a person who is designated as the E-Biz point of contact in SAM.gov, and they must log into Grants.gov to confirm the applicant organization's AOR. The E-Biz point of contact will need the Marketing Partner Identification Number, which the password obtained when registering in SAM to complete this step. Please note that an organization can have more than one AOR.

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JustGrants. To complete an application, you will need to register with the JustGrants system. A new entity without a JustGrants account will need to do the following:

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1. Register the Entity Administrator. This is your E-Biz point of contact from SAM.gov and the application submitter in JustGrants and Grants.gov.

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2. Look for an email from JustGrants which requests the registration for the application submitter and the E-Biz point of contact to register for an account. Within 24 hours of JustGrants receiving an application from Grants.gov, the user submitting the application in Grants.gov and SAM E-Biz point of contact will receive an email to register for a JustGrants account. This email is from a DOJ secure user management system and will include instructions on how to create an account. It is important to note that to ensure that you receive these emails and that they are not flagged as spam, we recommend adding DIAMD-noreply@usdoj.gov to your trusted sender list in your email settings.

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In JustGrants, you'll need to assign authorized representatives. The E-Biz point of contact at the applicant organization serves as the Entity Administrator, and they must log into JustGrants to confirm the entity's profile, add users, and assign two required authorized representatives, which would be a law enforcement executive, program official, and government executive or financial official. The authorized representatives are officials who have alternate and final responsibility for all programmatic and financial decisions for your agency as the legal recipient.

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For law enforcement agencies, the COPS Office Awards require that both top law enforcement executives, for example, the chief of police, the sheriff, or their equivalent, and the top government executive, for example, the mayor, board chairman, or their equivalent sign the application and, if awarded funding, accept the award package. The top law enforcement executive must be assigned the role of authorized representative one, and the top government executive must be assigned the role of authorized representative two in JustGrants.

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For agencies that are not a law enforcement agency such as institutions of higher education, school districts, private organizations, COPS Office Awards require that both the programmatic official, for example, an executive director or a chief executive officer, and a financial official, for example, a chief financial officer, treasurer, or their equivalent, sign the application and, if awarded funding, accept the award package. You also need to ensure that these officials have the ultimate signatory authority to sign contracts on behalf of your organization and that they are properly assigned. The programmatic official must be assigned to the role of authorized representative one and the financial official must be assigned to the role of authorized representative two in JustGrants.

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Please note that non-executive positions, i.e. clerks or trustees, are not acceptable authorized representatives. Now that we've discussed some steps you need to take before you begin an application, let's discuss the application process, including where the application is submitted in this two-step process.

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After you acquire your UEI and done the appropriate registrations, you'll need to complete some steps as a part of the application process. Step one, in Grants.gov, you'll need to complete Application for Federal Assistance or the SF-424. Applicants must register via [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and complete an application for Federal Assistance Standard Form 424. The SF-424 is required, and it collects the applicant's name, address, and UEI, the funded opportunity number and the proposed project title

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among other information. It is used as a cover sheet for the submission of pre-applications, applications, and related information under discretionary programs. Applicants must complete and submit the SF-424 in Grants.gov using the information provided on that site. The SF-424 must be signed by the Grants.gov authorized organizational representative.

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So, some important parts of that form, Section 8F, you want to make sure that you complete the applicant point of contact and enter the name and contact information of the individual who will be completing the application materials and JustGrants. JustGrants will be using that information to assign the application to that user. Additionally, Section 19, Intergovernmental Review, this funding opportunity is subject to Executive Order 12372, which is intergovernmental review, and states that participate in intergovernmental review process have an opportunity to review the applicant's submission. Applicants are strongly encouraged to register immediately on Grants.gov to avoid any delays in registering or submitting the SF-424, because that will result in insufficient times to process your application. Refer to the Department of Justice Application Submission Checklist for additional details. For any technical assistance with submitting the SF-424, you can contact the gGants.gov customer service hotline, and their phone number is 800-518-4726, or you can submit questions via email to support@grants.gov. The Grants.gov support hotline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week except on federal holidays.

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Step two, remainder of the application will be completed through JustGrants. No other form of application will be accepted. Applications with errors or missing information may be disqualified or rated accordingly. Please note that the application system will not accept incomplete applications or applications with errors. Remember, to start your application in JustGrants, you have to complete the SF-424 and you have to have two confirmed authorized representatives. As previously stated, the authorized representatives are official have ultimate and final responsibility for all programmatic and financial decisions regarding this COPS Office application as representatives of the legal recipient, for example, your agency or organization.

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As we previously discussed, before applicants can complete this section, the two authorized representatives must have established accounts in JustGrants after the Grants.gov portion of the application was submitted. Please note, users assigned as authorized representatives must log into JustGrants to activate their account. Users will not be visible in JustGrants until they have successfully logged into that system.

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Where can you find COPS Office Funding Opportunities? You can locate open funding opportunities on the COPS Office webpage. Funding opportunities can be found using our Notice of Funding Opportunities Finder, which lets you identify programs that you may be eligible for by your agency or organization type. You can also view the grants section on our webpage, which gives you a complete list of open programs. Find the open COPS Notice of Funding Opportunities you are eligible for.

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To recap, for completing the necessary organization registrations at SAM.gov, Grants.gov, and JustGrants, you will need to go to the following sites: COPS.usdoj.gov/grants. Here, you will find the open COPS Office Notice of Funding Opportunities you are eligible to apply for. Grants.gov. This is where you will initiate the application by searching for the funding opportunity identifier found on our NOFO webpages. JustGrants. This is where the application will be completed. After taking the necessary steps

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in Grants.gov, you will receive an email to complete your NOFO application in JustGrants. Complete the application by entering data into the web-based forms, uploading attachments, and accepting assurances and certifications. Before you submit your application, each section must be completed and free of validation errors. The application submitter should closely monitor their email and JustGrants accounts for any notifications from Grants.gov or JustGrants about a possible failed submission.

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The user who is authorized to submit the applications on behalf of the organization is the one who will receive these notifications. The COPS Office does not send out these notifications, nor does the COPS Office receive a copy of these notifications. It is the applicant's responsibility to notify the COPS Office of any problems with the application submission process.

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Some important notes: Try to submit your application components at least 48 hours prior to the NOFO deadline. This will enable the applicant to receive notice of failed submission and provide an opportunity to correct the error before the applicable deadline. Also, please remember that the applicant will need to confirm the two authorized representatives so that they can submit their application. The Entity Administrator and the two authorized representatives will receive an email from JustGrants confirming application submission.

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Now we're going to talk about some tips for applying. Number one, prepare. You want to print out and refer to the Notice of Funding Opportunity or NOFO. The NOFO contains detailed information on how to complete your application. Pay special attention to the Grants.gov and the JustGrants deadlines when planning your timeframe for application submission. Read instructions and review thoroughly. Please return to each application section using the table of contents on the right side of the page. Before submitting your application, confirm that all required fields are completed and that you have attached all required supporting documents. Make sure to address the application elements the COPS Office has designated as critical and submit the required additional application attachments. Applications with errors or missing information may be disqualified or rated accordingly.

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Pro-tip: Save frequently to prevent the loss of information. Save your information frequently, as the system does not auto-save. The system does time out and you will lose unsaved information. Applications cannot be edited after submission. Pay careful attention to the opportunity opening and closing dates. The DOJ Grant Application Checklist is designed to guide applicants through the two-part process of applying for Department of Justice Funding, and it provides a high level overview and step-by-step instructions to ensure all technical and administrative requirements are met across multiple federal systems. This checklist can help navigate the application process.

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We will now discuss the various application components related to our funding opportunities. And these are the proposal application questions, the budget, timeline, project scope, deliverables, basic minimum review, and selection criteria. A proposal abstract is a summary highlighting your main points. Talks about what you plan to do, what the problem is that you plan to solve, how you plan to do it, and what is the intended outcome. So a part of your proposal abstract is going to be background or context. This is just going to define the topic and its importance to the field, your problem statement, which is going to clearly identify the gap or specific issue that your project seeks to address. Aims and objectives. This is going to state the purpose of your project and what it will accomplish. Methods or approach. You're going to briefly describe how you will achieve your goals. For example, specific methodologies, tools, or

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data sets. Expected results or significance. And this is going to explain the anticipated outcomes, their impact, and why the project matters.

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Depending on the funding opportunity, you may be required to complete application questions or a proposal narrative. It will be clear in the application materials what is expected. In either circumstance, be sure to review what information is being asked and ensure that your responses or narrative provide the necessary information. It may be helpful to review the questions or the narrative requirements and create a checklist to ensure that you are providing all of the information required in your application.

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**Budget.** These are the categories of areas where you can request funds for your project. Base salary and fringe benefits. Review the NOFO Guide for the program that you're going to apply for to determine if sworn personnel is allowable under that particular program. Civilian personnel costs are allowable. This includes salary and fringe benefits. Overtime costs, although these will fall under the other category in your budget, are allowed. Please make sure that you review the specific Notice of Funding Opportunity Guide for each program to determine what costs are allowed to be included in the calculated overtime rate. **Travel.** This includes flights, lodging, and per diem for attendance at award-related meetings, conferences more than 50 miles away. When requesting travel costs, you want to make sure that you're utilizing the GSA Travel Policy and per diem rates located at [gsa.gov](http://gsa.gov). **Supplies** cover the cost of supplies that are solely used for the project identified in your proposal. Please note reimbursement for office supplies that are consumed by routine administrative purposes instead of project-related activities are prohibited.

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**Equipment.** This is cost towards the purchase of equipment or technology. Review the NOFO Guide for each specific program to know what can and cannot be considered an allowable equipment cost. **Sub-award.** As a party responsible for carrying out a portion of the project, procurement contracts, goods, or services for recipients' use, i.e., consultant rates capped at \$650 per day. **Other costs.** Any costs not covered by other budget categories. This will be an example of overtime, like stated before, you will put in the other costs. **Indirect costs:** That's facilities and administrative costs that are occurred for common or joint project purposes benefiting more than one cost objective and not readily assignable to a particular project. They're necessary to the operation of the agency and the performance of the project.

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When you're submitting an application, make sure that you're providing a current and direct cost rate agreement so that we can know what rates you are allowed to request. Please note that unallowable cost lists can be found on the program pages on the COPS Office website. The NOFO Guides also provide details about what costs are allowed under each opportunity.

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**The Budget worksheet.** The budget worksheet is an integral part of the application and is in JustGrants. It contains the numerical accounting for proposed expenditures. JustGrants provides screenshots of what that process looks like, and that's on the web-based job aid. Allowable and an unallowable cost list will also help you ensure that your budget contains costs that are acceptable for each respective program. These lists, as stated before, can be found on all of our program pages under Supporting Documents.

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The COPS Office Budget Narrative Template is an optional tool to support applicants when completing their budget. This is where you clearly identify the rationale, purpose, and calculation for funds being requested. I want to talk a little bit about rationale. The rationale is going to explain the necessity of the expense and connect your items that you're requesting directly to the specific problem or goal. A weak rationale would be, "We need 10 new laptops for the department," while a strong rationale would be, "To implement the proposed mobile data initiative, we need 10 laptops for field officers. Currently, officers must return to the station to file reports, which results in less time spent on proactive community patrolling. These laptops allow for real-time reporting from the field." So you really want to break down what the funding is going to be used for. The more information that you provide us, the better we're able to connect the item you're requesting to your actual project and the problem or goal that you're wishing to solve.

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You want to also make sure that you're clearly identifying your purpose. This is the specific function of the item or person within the project. It outlines the scope of work or the specific utility of the purchase. For example, for personnel, if you're requesting a community program coordinator, you'll say, "They'll be responsible for organizing monthly neighborhood watch meetings or managing the volunteer database or acting as the primary liaison between the police department and local leaders."

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For equipment, you may want to, if you're requesting a portable camera, you will identify how it's going to be utilized. You can say, "The portable camera towers will be deployed at high traffic community events and known hotspots identified in the project's data analysis phase to deter criminal activity and enhance public safety monitoring." Calculation. The calculation provides the mathematical breakdown of the cost. It must be transparent and logical so a reviewer can replicate your math. It is important to review the individual funding opportunities for allowable and unallowable costs to ensure that items and activities you are requesting funds for meet the requirements of the program. A COPS Office Budget Narrative Template can be found on our website at [cops.usdoj.gov/how-to-apply](https://cops.usdoj.gov/how-to-apply), and also under Notice of Funding Opportunity resources.

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So your timeline. This is where you're going to demonstrate how you plan to execute your project. Going to talk about some key timeline elements. First of all, feasibility. You want to show a realistic, well-considered path from project launch to completion. Strategic goals. You want to highlight the most critical tasks and the major outcomes they support. Progress tracking. This includes specific milestones to act as benchmarks for your progress. Think of these as the essential steps that keep your project moving forward towards its final destination. The timeline and the application demonstrates how feasible the proposal is by providing details about project goals, key tasks, milestones, deadlines, and staff.

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When creating a timeline, you should ensure that you do the following: Again, demonstrate feasibility. You want to make sure that everything is realistic. When identifying key task and goals, make sure that the most important tasks related to implementation and completion of your proposed project are clear. And it should be clear from the timeline what major goals your project is going to accomplish. You want to identify project milestones. The timeline should identify steps that support the execution of the project goals. Milestones are a great way to track progress and a way to stay on top of project completion. You want to make sure that your milestones are completely identified. We also have a

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timeline template that can be found on our website under our How to Apply page under Notice of Funding Opportunity Resources.

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When you're developing your timelines, SMART goals are very helpful. These are things you want your project to accomplish while the timeline is the roadmap you use to get there. So SMART goals, specific, they must be clear and unambiguous. You want to avoid vague terms like improve or enhance without actually describing what you're going to improve or enhance. For example, a vague response to improving community relations would just be, "We will improve community relations." Whereas a SMART goal will be, "We will establish a monthly Coffee with the Cop program to facilitate direct dialogue between patrol officers and local business owners." The SMART goal truly identifies what is going to be occurring and how it's going to support the program goals.

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You want to make sure that you have measurable metrics to track your progress. And to prove that the goal was achieved, you want to think about numbers and percentages. For example, instead of just saying, "We will hire more officers," you can say, "We will recruit and hire five additional full-time sworn officers to increase patrol coverage."

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You want to make sure that your goals are achievable. It should be very realistic given your current resources, budget, and timeframe. Unrealistic would be, "We will eliminate all violent crime within six months," whereas the SMART goal will be, "We will reduce response times for high priority calls by 10% by deploying additional data terminals."

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You want to make sure your goals are relevant. The goal must align with the specific priorities of the grant. For example, an irrelevant goal will be, "We're going to renovate the station's break room," whereas a SMART goal will be, "We will provide deescalation training to 100% of patrol staff."

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Lastly, you want to make sure that your goals are time bound. Every goal needs a finish line. Assigning a specific deadline prevents the project from drifting and creates accountability. So for example, something in your timeline that may have no deadline, you would just say, "We will update our policy manual." Whereas a SMART goal will say, "We will complete a full audit and update of the department's policy manual by the end of the second quarter of the award period."

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So this just is an example of the timeline that you'll be able to find under our How to Apply page and also on our Program pages. So if you do need a timeline to guide you in providing your goals and objectives and project activities, we do have a template that is usable and you can fill it in yourself.

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And so now we want to talk about deliverables. Deliverables are what will your project achieve? Deliverables are the specific outcomes, results, or goals that a project aims to achieve. They function as measurable benchmarks or milestones that demonstrate successful completion of the phases of a project. Deliverables helps to make sure that the project is on track and aligned with the overall project goal. They can be anything from a physical product to a report, a software program, or a completed service.

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Deliverables can be tangible, which is a physical report or document, intangible, knowledge improvements, or the creation of a process. A process can be intangible, however, if a document is created, memorialize the process. It can be tangible. Deliverables can be internal, so things that are specific to the project team or organization, or they can be something external, which is something that's provided to stakeholders or outside an organization. Some examples of deliverables or milestones can be hiring of staff, review of literature, scheduling events, drafting or finalizing reports, development of an MOU, completing training or curriculum, developing a toolkit. How do you identify your deliverables? Deliverables are identified by organizing the task that need to be completed in order to achieve project goals and identifying the major outputs or accomplishments after completing a series of activities or tasks.

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Next, we're going to talk about basic minimum review, or BMR. It's very important that you review each NOFO Guide and see what the BMR requirements are. BMR is the minimum threshold that applications must pass to move onto official review. As I stated, it is very important to make sure that you follow the guidelines of the NOFO to ensure your application passes BMR.

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Here are some things you should do to ensure that you pass BMR: Ensure that the project is not out of scope. This means reading through the goals of the program you are applying for, looking specifically at the project's out of scope information in the Funding Opportunity Guide. You want to make sure that the proposed project idea you have does not fall under any of those out of scope projects. You want to ensure that all applicable questions in JustGrants that demonstrate eligibility are correctly answered. You also want to ensure that the provided budget contains costs that are allowable. If your budget consists primarily of costs that are not allowed under the funding opportunity, your application can fail basic minimum review, and you will not be moving forward in the process.

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In the Notice of Funding Opportunity for each of our programs, it is important that you review the scope to ensure that your application aligns with program goals. There's also a section within the NOFO that will identify projects out of scope, as I discussed in BMR. Reviewing this can prevent you from making errors. Making errors can potentially disqualify your proposal, so make sure that you review the Notice of Funding Opportunity to make sure that your proposal is fully aligned with the program goals.

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And now we're going to talk a little bit about selection criteria. So during the review process, the entirety of the application is considered. To support your application for funding, when completing the application, you want to consider the following. Organizational readiness and problem identification. Did you clearly explain what problem the proposed project would address? You want to look at your proposal. If you were someone who didn't know anything about the project you were planning, would you be able to read your own proposal and understand exactly what problem you were intending to solve?

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The Management and Implementation plan. You want to make sure you clearly identify any key personnel. You provide detailed timeline that's supported by milestones. It's feasible. You want to remember to use those SMART goals. You want to make sure that you can demonstrate implementation of partnerships where necessary.

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Reach and Impact. You want to make sure that you're providing detail on how successful project implementation can help the field of law enforcement. Take into consideration data that will be used to report and evaluate project success.

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Experience and Capacity. You want to make sure you demonstrate the ability of project staff to implement the project. What are their qualifications? Have they worked on projects like this before? What makes them a good fit to manage or participate in the proposed activities? Resumes can also be used here to demonstrate experience and capacity.

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So now we're going to talk a little bit about resources that'll assist you with your application. For application materials, reference materials, deadlines, guides, and fact sheets, you want to visit [cops.usdoj.gov/grants](https://cops.usdoj.gov/grants). Again, that's [cops.usdoj.gov/grants](https://cops.usdoj.gov/grants).

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For templates, registration for JustGrants, training sessions, frequently asked questions and application templates such as our budget, timeline or project narrative, you want to visit our website on our How to Apply section. You can also find materials such as information about sole source justification, program income, training, and webinar fact sheets as well as helpful hints for the SF-425.

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For information about community policing, you can visit our resource information center. You can also learn more about FOIA requests at [cops.usdoj.gov/FOIA](https://cops.usdoj.gov/FOIA) and locate training resources at [cops.usdoj.gov/training](https://cops.usdoj.gov/training). For JustGrants training support and resources, you can visit [justiceGrants.usdoj.gov](https://justiceGrants.usdoj.gov). And for access to the applicant user guide or the SF-424, you would visit [Grants.gov](https://Grants.gov).

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For information about uniform guidance, the DOJ Financial Grants Guide, and automated standard application for payments, also known as ASAP, you can utilize the sites noted here. You can stay connected with the COPS Office. We produce hundreds of guides and publications. Additionally, we can be found on X, Facebook, or YouTube in the app store for Apple devices and Android devices.

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And finally, the COPS Training Portal. The COPS Training Portal is a convenient, no-cost learning platform for law enforcement and community partners providing access to interactive online training and resources, emerging public safety topics. It was created by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The portal hosts a variety of on demand training courses and resources and emerging public safety topics. For access, visit [copstrainingportal.org](https://copstrainingportal.org). And the COPS training portal is completely free.

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Now that we've went through the entirety of the How to Apply Webinar, thanks to all the participants for joining, and have a great day.

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