



The Binky Foundation
“Helping People Help Animals”

Frequently Asked Questions About Our “Action/Business Plan” Requirement for a First Steps Grant

Our First Steps grants are unique in that they are not aimed at any specific need or request of the grant applicant. They are specifically intended to provide an incentive to new organizations to establish themselves on a sound, well thought-out basis to give them the best possible chance to achieve long-term sustainability. This approach is based on our belief that it takes more than a passion for animals to create and run a successful animal welfare organization of any type. It also takes planning, organization, and the right people with the right background, experience, and commitment.

The centerpiece of our First Steps criteria is our requirement for a well-conceived and meaningful action/business plan designed to encourage new organizations to develop forward thinking steps for long term success. We receive more questions from potential applicants about our action/business plan requirement than any other aspect of our program. Because of its importance to our review, we want to make sure that these questions are answered and provide some guidance to applicants about our expectations and considerations in our review. So here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions and tips for potential applicants about what we look for in reviewing an action/business plan:

- There is no “one-size-fits-all” plan format. There are many sources on the internet and elsewhere providing formats and outlines for action/business plans. But please remember that these materials are guides and that what counts is what is important for your organization.
- Every organization and its needs are different. Clearly a farm or horse sanctuary has far different needs and requirements than an all-volunteer rescue or TNR group. And even among similarly focused groups, needs and considerations could differ by geography, population, location, economic diversity, or many other factors.
- We do not dictate the topics to include in your plan, nor do we care what you call it. It is, after all, your plan. However, we suggest that at a minimum a thoughtful and successful plan should clearly explain its mission and objectives, and provide details about, among other things, the organization, its people and their training, the need it fills within its community, its community connections, and the plans to pursue and achieve the stated objectives both operationally and financially, including current and projected budget data. What a plan should **not** be is a brief outline or statement of aspirations and objectives without any depth of discussion or financial consideration.

- Seriously considered financials and budget projections are an important element of a purposeful plan to help explain or understand how the organization intends to become a financially sustainable, viable and functioning organization for the long-term. We appreciate that this can be a hard exercise for a new organization, and we know that the numbers will quickly change as a group progresses and matures. However, the importance of having a well-considered financial starting point cannot be underestimated.
 - A formal opening balance sheet and income statement, however sparse, provide a proper template for future growth and development, and for developing a meaningful budget and for projecting future income and expenses.
 - Describing and listing expected revenue sources and expenses in narrative form may seem sufficient for initial planning purposes, but experience shows that formalizing your budget and projections in financial statement format from the outset greatly enhances your focus and flexibility in financial planning.
- Please remember that the plan is **not** for us. It is for you. The target audience for your plan should be the organization’s directors, management, staff, principal supporters, and the community it serves, and should be a not be prepared solely to meet our requirements.
- The action/business plan should be a living document subject to change as your organization develops. It should be a guide for you, your management, and your principal supporters to understand your mission and the steps it plans to take to achieve its goals and to develop a sustainable model for the future. It should be viewed as a management tool to be reviewed and modified as circumstances change and as the organization matures.

Finally, please understand that your plan should be in your organization’s own voice. It should reflect the passion that led you and your supporters to want to establish the organization in the first place, while also showing the thought and expertise that has gone into developing the plans to achieve a sustainable future.

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We trust that these explanations and tips will help First Steps Grant applicants to not only understand the importance of an action/business plan to us, but more importantly to understand its value to you and your organization.