

GRANT WRITING GUIDE

85 Strategic Reframes Across 20 Federal Agencies: 2025 Federal Grant Writing Guide



Principal at WPA | Grant Writing, Program Design, Funding Strategy & Messaging for Public Impact | \$1.6B+ Secured Across Government, Nonprofit & Private Sectors

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Language, Power, and Strategy in an Era of Retrenchment

The federal grant landscape in 2025 has not simply shifted—it has been restructured. What was once a technical process of aligning program design with agency priorities has become an ideological balancing act. After more than a decade of progress embedding racial equity, environmental justice, community voice, and labor protections into federal funding policy, the current administration is executing a deliberate rollback of those values from the bureaucratic architecture.

Let us be clear: this is not a neutral administrative reset. It is a coordinated ideological restructuring of the federal government, implemented through hiring policy changes (e.g., Schedule F), mass removal of civil service protections, and the strategic reengineering of

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language. In this environment, language is no longer merely a question of tone or clarity—it has become a compliance threshold. The terms we use to describe community needs, program outcomes, and historical harms are now subject to political scrutiny.

Grant writers are now on the front lines of this new reality. We are navigating competing imperatives: staying responsive to the stated requirements of federal Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), while also avoiding language that could be flagged internally as “ideological” or “noncompliant.” The result is a highly constrained and uneven playing field for mission-driven work.

Clarifying Our Position

We are offering this guide not as a retreat from values—but as a strategic tool to continue advancing them under hostile conditions.

- We do not advise abandoning equity-focused or community-rooted program work.
- We do not endorse symbolic gestures in place of structural change.
- We do recommend using precise, outcomes-based language to preserve access to public investment for those who need it most.

This guide is built on three core assumptions:

1. **Language is now being ideologically policed across multiple federal agencies.** Words like equity, justice, inclusion, trauma-informed, and community-led are being removed from guidance, training, and scoring frameworks—regardless of their evidentiary basis or programmatic value.
2. **The underlying goals of inclusion, fairness, and community investment are still permissible—but only when reframed.** In many cases, the same work can be described through the language of “access,” “infrastructure modernization,” “resilience,” “job creation,” and “regional competitiveness.”
3. **Funders are not monolithic.** Across agencies, there remain committed staff who understand the value of this work and want to see it funded. But they are operating under top-down constraints that affect what can be said—and how it can be scored. Our role is to support them, not put them in an untenable position.

What This Guide Does

This guide is intended to help organizations broadly navigate the evolving, increasingly ideological conditions shaping federal grantmaking. It provides general narrative and language guidance—organized by federal agency—to help applicants protect the integrity of their work while adapting to the politically sensitive terrain now shaping funding outcomes.

It does **not** provide program-specific writing instructions. Rather, it offers agency-level language strategy: identifying common narrative risk areas and suggesting reframing approaches based on what we are seeing in real time from NOFO language, peer review feedback, and shifts in agency tone.

A Note on Variation Across Agencies

You may notice discrepancies between publicly circulated “banned word” lists and the language still permitted—or even encouraged—within some federal grant programs. This is not a contradiction; it reflects the tension we are navigating. Grant seekers must still respond directly to the criteria outlined in each NOFO, even as agencies are being pressured to revise their public language, strip equity references, or avoid politically charged terminology.

As a result, some agencies (such as NSF, EPA, and parts of HHS) may still encourage inclusive, place-based, or community-rooted language—while others (including Treasury, Interior, and Commerce) now expect sanitized, universalist narratives. This is not about inconsistency. It reflects a fragmented bureaucracy under ideological pressure.

A Living Resource

This guide, and the examples that follow, are living documents. They will evolve as new executive orders are issued, agency language is reinterpreted, and political conditions change. Our goal is not just to help you write a competitive grant. It is to ensure that vital public investments—particularly in housing, workforce, health, climate, and infrastructure—continue to reach the communities that need them most.

Agencies Covered (In Order of Appearance):

1. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
2. Department of Transportation (DOT)
3. Department of Education (ED)
4. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
5. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
6. Department of Labor (DOL)
7. Department of Commerce (EDA, NTIA, NIST)
8. Department of Energy (DOE)
9. Small Business Administration (SBA)
10. Department of Justice (DOJ)
11. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
12. Department of the Interior (DOI)
13. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
14. National Science Foundation (NSF)
15. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

16. Department of the Treasury (CDFI Fund, SSBCI)
17. National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
18. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
19. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)

Use this guide to:


- Reframe language to avoid politically flagged terms
- Align with both the letter of the NOFO and the subtext of current administrative tone
- Preserve equity- and justice-based impact in a system moving away from the language of harm


DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD)


Overview of Programs: HUD’s grantmaking continues to focus on affordable housing development, homelessness prevention, community development block grants (CDBG), lead hazard remediation, HOPWA (HIV/AIDS housing), and public housing modernization. Many of these programs are formula-based, but competitive opportunities—especially under Choice Neighborhoods and Continuum of Care—remain active.


Narrative Risk Zones: Language invoking racial justice, gentrification, anti-displacement, “Black and Brown communities,” DEI, or historical discrimination may now trigger negative reviews or require additional explanation. Terms like “environmental justice,” “marginalized,” “underserved,” or “systemic barriers” have been flagged in recent redlines.

Strategic Reframing Examples


 **Original Language** “Expanding affordable housing in historically excluded Black and Latinx neighborhoods”


 **Reframed Narrative** “Increasing access to safe, affordable housing in areas that have housing cost burdens”


 **Original Language** “Centering equity in development to prevent displacement”

 **Reframed Narrative** “Ensuring that housing investments increase choice, affordability, and long-term neighborhood stability for existing residents”


 **Original Language** “Culturally responsive case management”

 **Reframed Narrative** “Locally tailored support services that respond to the needs of families and individuals experiencing housing instability”

 **Original Language** “Housing justice for LGBTQ+ youth”

 **Reframed Narrative** “Addressing housing insecurity among youth who lack stable family or housing support networks”

 **Original Language** “Environmental justice concerns in siting decisions”

 **Reframed Narrative** “Addressing public health risks and infrastructure deterioration in older or industrial-adjacent neighborhoods”

Narrative Strategy: Focus on outcomes: housing access, cost stability, proximity to jobs, and support for families. Use quantifiable measures: cost burden rates, distance to employment, vacancy rates, overcrowding. Reference market conditions, not identity groups. Let the outcomes tell the equity story.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (DOT)


Overview of Programs: DOT continues to fund major infrastructure investments, including Safe Streets for All, the Reconnecting Communities Program, INFRA, RAISE, and Rural Surface Transportation grants. The department has been one of the most progressive in equity framing under past administrations, but language standards are tightening under current leadership.

Narrative Risk Zones: Avoid use of “frontline,” “BIPOC,” “justice,” “disparities,” or “environmental justice corridors.” Avoid implying infrastructure discrimination. Focus instead on connectivity, safety, reliability, and economic mobility.



Strategic Reframing Examples:

 **Original Language** “Reconnecting BIPOC communities divided by highways” 

Reframed Narrative “Improving connectivity and neighborhood access in areas impacted by historic infrastructure design”

 **Original Language** “Addressing environmental justice through transit equity” 

Reframed Narrative “Enhancing access to affordable, reliable transportation in regions with limited mobility options”

 **Original Language** “Supporting equitable transportation for marginalized groups” 



Reframed Narrative “Reducing travel time and improving safety for working families and residents in job-dense corridors”



Narrative Strategy: Frame projects around congestion relief, access to opportunity, mode choice, safety outcomes, and regional competitiveness. Avoid ideological terms; lean into universalist benefits.



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (ED)

Overview of Programs: The Department funds K–12, postsecondary, and adult education programs. This includes Title I, GEAR UP, TRIO, CTE (Career and Technical Education), and recent ARPA-funded innovation grants. Under political pressure, ED has begun restricting references to DEI, LGBTQ+ support, and racial equity.

Narrative Risk Zones: Avoid language that explicitly addresses structural racism, cultural inclusion, or identity-based disparities in student outcomes. Avoid references to “anti-racist education,” “gender-affirming support,” or “systemic inequity.”

 **Original Language** “Closing the racial achievement gap”  **Reframed Narrative** “Improving academic growth for students with significant learning loss or chronic absenteeism”

 **Original Language** “Hiring culturally responsive teachers”  **Reframed Narrative** “Recruiting educators with relevant experience in linguistically and economically diverse school districts”

 **Original Language** “Supporting LGBTQ+ student mental health”  **Reframed Narrative** “Expanding school-based behavioral health services for students experiencing bullying or family instability”

Narrative Strategy: Focus on measurable gaps in academic performance, chronic absenteeism, or access to high-quality educators. Reference school accountability frameworks, not identity politics. Let the data speak to inequities without naming them as such.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA)



Overview of Programs:



USDA administers a broad range of rural development and food security programs, including the Community Facilities Program, Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants, Value-Added Producer Grants, and Nutrition Assistance Programs. Grantmaking touches on agriculture, broadband, environmental conservation, food systems, and community infrastructure—particularly in rural and tribal areas.



Narrative Risk Zones:

Applicants must now navigate substantial shifts in acceptable language, especially in areas such as tribal sovereignty, food justice, climate resilience, and BIPOC farming support. Words like “marginalized,” “sovereignty,” “equity,” “underserved,” and “frontline food systems” may trigger red flags. References to “landback” movements, anti-monopoly language, or historical dispossession have also been flagged in peer reviews and technical assistance feedback.

 **Original Language** “Investing in food sovereignty for Native and BIPOC farmers”  **Reframed Narrative** “Supporting regionally based agriculture and local producer networks in historically under-capitalized areas”

 **Original Language** “Addressing systemic barriers for small Black farmers”  **Reframed Narrative** “Expanding access to technical assistance and markets for small-scale producers with limited prior access to USDA programs”

 **Original Language** “Climate justice in agriculture”  **Reframed Narrative** “Resilient agriculture practices that reduce future crop losses and improve land and water management in drought-prone zones”

 **Original Language** “Equitable food access for marginalized communities”  **Reframed Narrative** “Improving supply chain reliability and affordability in areas with limited access to fresh, healthy foods”

Narrative Strategy:

Emphasize geographic and economic conditions, not race or identity. Focus on production resilience, infrastructure gaps, or market failures. Use terms like “regionally based producers,” “first-time applicants,” “non-traditional suppliers,” and “areas with limited broadband or USDA participation.” Let place, not people, carry the equity story.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)


Overview of Programs:


HHS distributes a wide range of health-focused grants through agencies like HRSA, SAMHSA, CDC, and ACF. These include funding for community health centers, maternal and child health, mental and behavioral health, HIV prevention, early childhood education, elder care, and family services. Several health equity and harm reduction programs have been curtailed or are under increased scrutiny in 2025.


Narrative Risk Zones:


References to “health equity,” “LGBTQ+ affirming care,” “trauma-informed services,” “systemic disparities,” and “racial bias in healthcare” are increasingly difficult to use without pushback. References to reproductive rights, gender-affirming care, or intersectionality may be flagged or cause applications to be denied eligibility outright.


 **Original Language** “Expanding LGBTQ+ affirming behavioral health care”


 **Reframed Narrative** “Improving behavioral health access for individuals facing social isolation or family rejection”


 **Original Language** “Addressing maternal mortality among Black women”

 **Reframed Narrative** “Improving maternal health outcomes in regions with high incidence of pregnancy-related complications”

 **Original Language** “Trauma-informed services for communities impacted by systemic violence”

 **Reframed Narrative** “Integrated behavioral and primary care for individuals experiencing chronic stress, grief, or instability”

 **Original Language** “Health equity through culturally responsive care”

 **Reframed Narrative** “Enhancing trust, communication, and follow-up among patients who face barriers to care continuity”

Narrative Strategy: Prioritize health outcomes: reduced emergency department visits, increased screening, improved follow-up care, and long-term cost reduction. Frame work through public health logic—access, coverage gaps, early intervention, and system navigation. Use precise health indicators. Avoid politicized framing; root proposals in continuity of care, rural access, and care quality.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL)

Overview of Programs:



DOL administers grant programs through ETA (Employment and Training Administration), including Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds, Apprenticeship Building America, YouthBuild, Strengthening Community Colleges, and dislocated worker programs. With the repeal of recent executive orders, grant priorities have shifted away



from equity-focused workforce models and toward traditional employer-driven training strategies.



Narrative Risk Zones:



Terms such as “workplace discrimination,” “equity in apprenticeship,” “gender parity,” “inclusive hiring,” and “marginalized workers” may now reduce competitiveness. DEI-focused workforce language should be reframed into productivity, labor participation, and regional skill gap logic.

Strategic Reframing Examples:

 **Original Language** “Increasing workforce equity for BIPOC and immigrant workers” 
Reframed Narrative “Expanding industry-aligned training in regions with high unemployment and limited access to career pathways”

 **Original Language** “Supporting inclusive apprenticeships for underrepresented populations”  **Reframed Narrative** “Developing scalable apprenticeship models that connect nontraditional workers to high-demand occupations”

 **Original Language** “Workplace justice and protections for formerly incarcerated individuals”  **Reframed Narrative** “Improving job readiness and retention among individuals re-entering the labor force following periods of incarceration”

 **Original Language** “Dismantling structural barriers to employment”  **Reframed Narrative** “Addressing gaps in access to reliable transportation, childcare, and foundational skills in workforce training regions”

Narrative Strategy:

Anchor workforce programs in labor market demand, employer partnerships, cost-effectiveness, and return on investment. Focus on credentials of value, job retention, and economic mobility. Avoid advocacy framing. Use neutral terms: “emerging workers,” “first-time workforce participants,” “priority employment regions,” and “untapped talent pools.”

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE (Includes: Economic Development Administration (EDA), National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), National

Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA))



Overview of Programs:



Commerce has emerged as one of the most consequential federal agencies for regional innovation, economic competitiveness, broadband expansion, and technology infrastructure. Key programs include EDA's Build Back Better Regional Challenge, Recompete Pilot Program, Tech Hubs, and Public Works grants; NTIA's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program and Digital Equity Act grants; and NIST's CHIPS for America programs and Manufacturing USA initiatives.



Narrative Risk Zones:



The Department of Commerce has historically supported inclusive economic development and digital equity, but under the current administration, language around racial disparities, structural exclusion, or explicitly justice-oriented frameworks is being de-emphasized in favor of economic competitiveness, domestic manufacturing, and workforce alignment. References to "systemic exclusion," "BIPOC-led coalitions," or "equitable broadband access" are increasingly discouraged in external-facing materials, including applications and grant narratives.



Strategic Reframing Examples – Broadband, Economic Development, & Climate

 **Original Language** "Bridging the digital divide in historically excluded communities of color"  **Reframed Narrative** "Expanding high-speed internet infrastructure in regions with low broadband penetration and limited last-mile access"

 **Original Language** "Supporting BIPOC- and women-owned businesses through inclusive accelerator programs"  **Reframed Narrative** "Enhancing small business competitiveness through technical assistance and access to early-stage capital in economically distressed areas"

 **Original Language** "Addressing broadband access disparities in tribal communities"  **Reframed Narrative** "Improving high-speed internet deployment in geographically isolated rural regions and remote service areas"

 **Original Language** "Promoting equitable access to semiconductor workforce pathways"  **Reframed Narrative** "Scaling industry-aligned training programs to meet emerging workforce needs in critical manufacturing sectors"

 **Original Language** “Centering climate justice in regional development planning” 
Reframed Narrative “Integrating resilience and energy security into regional growth strategies to protect infrastructure and supply chains”

Narrative Strategy:

Emphasize regional productivity, resilience, and economic diversification. Position projects as enablers of national competitiveness, job growth, supply chain security, and infrastructure reliability. Avoid demographic framings that imply preferential treatment; instead, emphasize “regions with historically limited access to federal investment” or “populations not previously connected to high-growth industries.” Use data to highlight underinvestment without naming race or identity unless specifically required.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY (DOE)



Overview of Programs:



The Department of Energy plays a central role in the implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, administering billions in competitive funding through programs such as the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED), Grid Deployment Office, Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E), and Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE). DOE also leads workforce development, research commercialization, and energy justice initiatives—though the latter are increasingly reframed under energy reliability and domestic manufacturing priorities.

Narrative Risk Zones:



Terms such as “environmental justice,” “frontline communities,” “climate justice,” and “BIPOC-led climate coalitions” are increasingly scrutinized in grant language. References to legacy pollution, racialized energy burdens, or anti-fossil fuel advocacy may be perceived as ideological. However, many energy programs still require attention to “community benefit” criteria; reframing these benefits in neutral, outcomes-oriented language is essential.



Strategic Reframing Examples – Clean Energy & Environmental Justice



 **Original Language** “Prioritizing environmental justice communities in clean energy investments”  **Reframed Narrative** “Delivering energy cost savings and reliability improvements in areas with high energy burdens and aging infrastructure”

 **Original Language** “Workforce development for historically excluded communities of color”  **Reframed Narrative** “Expanding access to clean energy careers through

industry-recognized credentialing programs in regions with limited STEM employment pipelines”

 **Original Language** “Supporting community-led decarbonization in frontline neighborhoods”  **Reframed Narrative** “Deploying distributed energy systems and grid modernization solutions in neighborhoods vulnerable to power outages and climate-related disruptions”

 **Original Language** “Combatting energy injustice through equitable solar access”  **Reframed Narrative** “Increasing adoption of rooftop and community solar in areas with limited access to renewable energy financing and ownership models”

 **Original Language** “Anti-displacement guarantees for vulnerable populations near energy transition projects”  **Reframed Narrative** “Integrating community participation and cost-stabilization measures to ensure long-term local benefit and affordability”

Narrative Strategy:

Highlight cost savings, energy independence, domestic innovation, and system resilience. Avoid polarizing environmental rhetoric and instead focus on engineering solutions, workforce scaling, and regional manufacturing opportunities. Translate equity into infrastructure reliability, affordability, and community benefit agreements centered on outcomes, not identities.

U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (SBA)



Overview of Programs:



SBA’s mission remains centered on strengthening small business development, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and access to capital. Programs include Community Navigator Pilots, Growth Accelerators, Women’s Business Centers, Veterans Business Outreach Centers, and 7(a)/504 loan programs. SBA also manages federal contracting initiatives and pandemic-era program administration (e.g., COVID relief, shuttered venues).



Narrative Risk Zones:



While historically proactive in supporting disadvantaged business enterprises (DBEs) and minority- and women-owned businesses, SBA’s language tolerance has narrowed. Use of “structural racism,” “minority exclusion,” “gender disparity,” or “systemic barriers” in entrepreneurial ecosystems may be perceived as politically sensitive or ideologically framed. Programs must now be framed in terms of capacity building, regional innovation, or job creation rather than social justice.

Strategic Reframing Examples – Entrepreneurship & Inclusive Capital

 **Original Language** “Supporting Black and Brown entrepreneurs locked out of traditional capital markets”  **Reframed Narrative** “Improving small business access to early-stage financing in regions with historically low venture capital and loan deployment”

 **Original Language** “Equitable procurement access for BIPOC-owned firms”  **Reframed Narrative** “Enhancing participation of locally owned small businesses in federal contracting pipelines”

 **Original Language** “Promoting entrepreneurship for marginalized communities”  **Reframed Narrative** “Expanding small business development in economically distressed regions and under-capitalized markets”

 **Original Language** “Closing the gender gap in startup ecosystems”  **Reframed Narrative** “Scaling support for high-potential founders in sectors with low participation by first-time entrepreneurs”

Narrative Strategy:

Frame entrepreneurship as a tool for job creation, regional revitalization, and economic dynamism. Avoid demographic generalizations; emphasize business stage (early-stage, high-growth), geographic target areas (distressed zip codes, low capital flow), and strategic value (supply chain resilience, local job creation, export readiness). Center the economic benefit, not the identity, of the entrepreneur

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR (DOI)

Overview of Programs:



Interior administers a vast range of grants through agencies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management. Its programs focus on natural resource management, tribal governance, historic preservation, conservation, outdoor access, and ecosystem restoration. Many grants are place-based and historically have supported Tribal Nations, rural communities, and heritage groups. In 2025, DOI is under intense pressure to strip out sovereignty language, DEI frameworks, and climate-related funding priorities.



Narrative Risk Zones:



DOI is currently enforcing the rollback of Executive Order 14112 (Tribal Funding Reform), and grantees are advised to avoid using terms such as “self-determination,” “sovereignty,” “landback,” “decolonization,” “environmental justice,” or “Indigenous knowledge



systems” in their applications. Despite many programs being designed specifically for tribal or culturally significant purposes, the language used must now be reframed to emphasize administrative functionality and public benefit.

Strategic Reframing Examples – Tribal Sovereignty & Land Stewardship

 **Original Language** “Investing in Tribal sovereignty and self-determined governance” 
Reframed Narrative “Expanding locally administered services for rural Native communities under existing federal trust obligations”

 **Original Language** “Centering Indigenous ecological knowledge in land management”
 **Reframed Narrative** “Integrating generational land stewardship practices into habitat restoration and conservation efforts”

 **Original Language** “Restoring cultural land access for Native communities” 
Reframed Narrative “Enhancing recreational, educational, and ecological access to traditional-use areas through coordinated land management”

 **Original Language** “Reparative conservation through decolonial models”  **Reframed Narrative** “Supporting regionally led natural resource conservation that includes historically under-resourced stakeholders”

Narrative Strategy:

Frame projects around local control, stewardship continuity, and land-based public benefits. Emphasize DOI’s legal responsibilities (e.g., trust and treaty obligations) without framing the work as corrective justice. Use terms such as “culturally significant,” “place-based conservation,” and “regional heritage protection” instead of justice-oriented frames.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS) (Includes: Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and immigration-related grant programs)

Overview of Programs:



DHS supports grants related to emergency preparedness, disaster recovery, cybersecurity, homeland security technology, anti-terrorism, and community resilience. Major programs include the Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP), Nonprofit Security Grant Program



(NSGP), Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG), and Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC). Previously, equity and community trust were emerging priorities. These have been deprioritized in 2025 guidance.



Narrative Risk Zones:



Terms like “community trust,” “vulnerable populations,” “racialized policing,” “asylum support,” “inclusive disaster planning,” or “equity in recovery” are now considered politically sensitive. Security framing has overtaken community resilience language, particularly in immigration and disaster relief contexts. Humanitarian language must now be reframed under continuity of operations and public safety.

Strategic Reframing Examples – Emergency Management & Climate Resilience

 **Original Language** “Building trust between immigrant communities and emergency responders”  **Reframed Narrative** “Improving communication and emergency coordination in linguistically diverse regions”

 **Original Language** “Protecting marginalized communities from climate disasters”  **Reframed Narrative** “Enhancing infrastructure and early-warning systems in flood- and fire-prone areas”

 **Original Language** “Ensuring equitable access to shelter and recovery aid”  **Reframed Narrative** “Streamlining service delivery to maximize reach and reduce post-disaster displacement”

 **Original Language** “Addressing racism in emergency response”  **Reframed Narrative** “Improving consistency in emergency response deployment and community outreach”

Narrative Strategy:

Emphasize operational efficiency, public safety, response timelines, and infrastructure protection. Use terms like “risk mitigation,” “continuity of care,” “emergency access,” and “service reliability.” Avoid political framing, and link resilience directly to national and local safety standards.

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (NSF)

Overview of Programs:


NSF funds academic research, regional innovation, STEM education, and economic development through major programs like the NSF Engines, Research Experiences for

Undergraduates (REU), STEM Workforce Development, and Technology Innovation Partnerships. The CHIPS and Science Act significantly expanded NSF’s mandate to engage regional ecosystems and diversify participation in science and technology—goals now under quiet revision.



Narrative Risk Zones:



References to “equity in STEM,” “systemic exclusion of women and BIPOC researchers,” or “intersectional underrepresentation” are under pressure. NSF’s DEI commitments are still technically active, but many regional reviewers have begun penalizing overt language in favor of “broadening participation” framed through geographic, institutional, or economic access.

Strategic Reframing Examples – STEM Equity & Research Access

 **Original Language** “Improving equity in STEM education for BIPOC students” 

Reframed Narrative “Expanding STEM learning opportunities in under-resourced school districts and rural areas”

 **Original Language** “Advancing women and LGBTQ+ researchers through intersectional fellowship support”  **Reframed Narrative** “Providing research opportunities to individuals from institutions and regions historically underrepresented in federal funding”

 **Original Language** “Embedding anti-racist frameworks in STEM mentoring” 

Reframed Narrative “Creating mentorship models that increase retention and career pathways for students with limited exposure to research”

Narrative Strategy:

Prioritize regionalism, economic development, and STEM pipeline metrics. Use terms like “broadening participation,” “expanding access,” and “enhancing representation from emerging research institutions.” When referencing demographics, center them around educational geography or institution type, not identity politics.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)

Overview of Programs:

VA supports housing, healthcare, mental health, homelessness prevention, and transition services for veterans. Key grant programs include Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), Veterans Housing Rehabilitation and Modification Pilot Program, and Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program. Many programs interface with HUD and HHS, and several incorporate behavioral health or housing-first approaches.



Narrative Risk Zones:

References to “gender identity,” “LGBTQ+ veteran mental health,” “trauma from systemic military discrimination,” and “inclusive housing” may now trigger review scrutiny. However, VA remains committed to evidence-based care and outreach to historically underserved veterans, if framed through non-ideological language.



Strategic Reframing Examples – Veteran Services & Equity

 **Original Language** “Supporting LGBTQ+ veterans who face housing discrimination” 

Reframed Narrative “Providing safe, stable housing for veterans who have experienced difficulty accessing services or shelter”

 **Original Language** “Addressing racial inequities in VA care access”  **Reframed**

Narrative “Improving continuity of care and health outcomes for veterans in underserved rural and urban areas”

 **Original Language** “Culturally affirming mental health for women veterans of color” 

Reframed Narrative “Delivering veteran-centered behavioral health services designed for diverse military experiences and health needs”

Narrative Strategy:

Focus on clinical outcomes, service delivery gaps, and rural-urban differentials in access. Emphasize “veteran-centered care,” “chronic condition management,” and “housing retention.” Let military service status lead, not identity category.

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY (Focus: CDFI Fund, SSBCI, financial inclusion programs)

Overview of Programs:



Treasury's most impactful grantmaking channels are the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund and the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI). These programs support small business lending, affordable housing finance, and community reinvestment—often targeting low-income, rural, and minority communities. In 2025, the language around racial wealth gaps, redlining, and inclusive capital access is being heavily depoliticized.

Narrative Risk Zones:

Avoid phrases like “racial wealth gap,” “structural undercapitalization of BIPOC businesses,” “redlining reparations,” or “community reparative lending.” Instead, use

access-to-capital framing tied to geography, size of business, or historic disinvestment metrics.

Strategic Reframing Examples – Equitable Lending & Wealth Building

 **Original Language** “Closing the racial wealth gap through equitable lending” 

Reframed Narrative “Expanding access to responsible capital in regions with low rates of small business financing”

 **Original Language** “Supporting historically excluded entrepreneurs of color” 

Reframed Narrative “Providing credit enhancement and technical assistance to first-time small business owners in underserved markets”

 **Original Language** “Reparative financing for formerly redlined neighborhoods” 

Reframed Narrative “Catalyzing small business growth

Narrative Strategy:

Keep the focus on financing gaps, market access, and outcomes. Use economic development and capital deployment framing, not justice terminology. Position your work as supporting local economic resilience, job creation, and credit availability.

NEA / NEH / IMLS (National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, Institute of Museum and Library Services)



Overview of Programs:



These agencies fund cultural institutions, public libraries, artists, humanities scholars, and heritage preservation. Grants often prioritize community storytelling, cultural infrastructure, digital access, and place-based arts. In 2025, many DEI and access-oriented terms have been cut or downplayed—especially at IMLS, which faces direct defunding threats.



Narrative Risk Zones:

Avoid language such as “decolonizing arts institutions,” “culturally responsive exhibits,” “justice-oriented library programming,” or “equity in archives.” Even “inclusive programming” should be reframed.

Strategic Reframing Examples – Arts, Culture & Public Spaces

 **Original Language** “Creating inclusive, anti-racist library spaces”  **Reframed Narrative** “Expanding access to collections, literacy programming, and public space for a wide range of community members”

 **Original Language** “Funding BIPOC artists telling stories of cultural resilience”  **Reframed Narrative** “Supporting local artists and cultural producers who reflect the region’s diverse histories and experiences”

 **Original Language** “Decolonizing museum curation”  **Reframed Narrative** “Increasing community involvement in exhibit design to enhance public engagement and education”

Narrative Strategy:

Frame projects around education, civic participation, and accessibility. Use terms like “regional storytelling,” “historical representation,” and “multigenerational public engagement.” Emphasize local history, youth engagement, and digitization—not ideological alignment.