



EJAH
BUSINESS CONSULTING & CO LLC

UNSEALED INTELLIGENCE

THE TIER 1 GRANTEE

The Five Gates Work Both Ways

A Free Fillable Workbook from EJAH Business Consulting & Co

UNSEALED INTELLIGENCE™ — Funding Clearance, Every Month, No Guesswork.

Introduction

Every piece of funder research in this library, and nearly everything taught in this sector, points outward. Screen the funder. Read their 990. Match their pattern. Ask the way they want to be asked. All of that is real and it works — but it quietly assumes the only variable worth studying is the funder.

It isn't. The organization asking for the money is a variable too, and most nonprofit leaders never turn the same rigor on themselves that they apply to a prospect. A Tier 1 prospect is a funder who's a good match on paper. A Tier 1 grantee is something different and, honestly, more valuable: an organization built well enough that it would be a strong match for almost any reasonably aligned funder, regardless of who happens to be looking.

This workbook is about becoming that. It uses the same five-gate structure this whole library is built on — turned inward, pointed at your own organization instead of a funder's tax filing.

A Different Way to Read Every Response

There's a habit worth building that most organizations never develop: treating every yes and every no as a source of information about your own fundability, not just a verdict on that one relationship. A rejection with a stated reason teaches something directly. A rejection with no reason at all — even a warm, generic one — can still be investigated: what does this funder's own real pattern say, and did your organization actually fit it, or did it just look like it fit on the surface? The more of these you study, deliberately, the sharper your own self-picture gets, independent of any single funder's decision.

Part 1: The Five Gates, Turned Inward

Capacity, Turned Inward: Can You Prove It?

The funder-facing question is whether a funder gives enough to matter. The grantee-facing question is harder: can you actually prove, with real and current numbers, that you can responsibly use and account for whatever you're asking for?

This is where organizations quietly damage their own credibility without realizing it — presenting a projected, hoped-for budget with the same confidence as a confirmed one. A funder can always verify an actual number. They can never catch a properly labeled projection in a lie, but a projection presented as fact, if it's ever discovered, costs more trust than the original ask was worth. Being a Tier 1 grantee means every number you hand a funder is real, current, and would survive a direct follow-up question.

Geography, Turned Inward: Is Your Reach Real or Claimed?

The funder-facing question is whether you serve their area. The grantee-facing question is whether that's actually true, or whether it's aspirational language dressed up as a track record. “We work across 12 counties” is a very different claim depending on whether you have real partnerships in most of them, or a handful of small in-kind touches everywhere and genuine depth in only two or three.

A Tier 1 grantee doesn't inflate its footprint to fit a funder's stated area. It builds real presence deliberately, and only claims what it can actually stand behind if asked.

Eligibility, Turned Inward: Is Your Own House in Order?

The funder-facing question is whether you meet their rules. The grantee-facing question is whether your own documentation is genuinely ready to produce instantly, not assembled under pressure each time a funder asks. A Tier 1 grantee's paperwork is always current and always the same, application to application.

Theme Fit, Turned Inward: Do You Actually Know Who You Are?

The funder-facing question is whether your mission matches theirs. The grantee-facing question is harder and more honest: do you have real clarity about your own identity, or are you still discovering it one application at a time?

Retiring a program that consumes far more effort than it returns, and doing it deliberately rather than letting it limp along out of habit, is a genuine act of identity clarity — not a loss. A Tier 1 grantee can describe exactly what it does and doesn't do, in the same words, regardless of which funder is reading it.

Ask Type, Turned Inward: Can You Justify Any Number You're Given?

The funder-facing question is whether they prefer general operating or program-restricted support. The grantee-facing question is whether you could take literally any dollar figure a funder offered and immediately describe, specifically, what it would fund.

This is the difference between a vague, flexible-sounding ask and a Tier 1 grantee's ask: the second one is ready for any number, because the underlying program has always been broken down into real, itemizable costs.

Part 2: Prospect vs. Grantee

A Tier 1 prospect is a property of a specific funder relationship — good geography, good theme, good timing, for this one funder, right now. A Tier 1 grantee is a property of the organization itself. It travels with you into every application, regardless of who's reading it.

Why a Real Rejection Can Be a Grantee-Readiness Signal

When a genuinely aligned funder still says no, it's worth asking a second, harder question: is there anything about how the ask was built that a Tier 1 grantee would have handled differently, independent of this funder's preferences? Not every no has this kind of lesson inside it. But more of them do than most organizations ever stop to check.

Worksheet: Are You a Tier 1 Grantee?

Answer honestly. This isn't a pass/fail test — a “not yet” answer is exactly as useful as a “yes.”

Gate	Honest Answer	What Would Need to Change
Capacity		
Geography		
Eligibility		
Theme Fit		
Ask Type		

Reflect

Think of a recent “no” — even a warm, well-explained one. Setting the funder's own reasoning aside, is there anything in how the ask was built that a Tier 1 grantee would have done differently?

Closing Thoughts

This sector trains people to study funders closely and rarely trains anyone to study themselves with the same rigor. That's backwards, and it's fixable. The organizations that get funded consistently, across many different funders and many different years, usually aren't the ones with the cleverest applications — they're the ones that became genuinely, structurally fundable first, and then let that show up in every application they wrote.

Every yes and every no you've ever received is still sitting there, available to be studied for what it can teach you about your own readiness — not just about that one funder's preferences. The more of them you actually look at this way, the fewer surprises the next one holds.

Want This Discipline Applied to Your Own Organization?

EJAH Business Consulting & Co screens both sides of every funding relationship — the funder's real pattern, and how ready your organization is to meet it. If you'd rather have this judgment applied professionally, see our Monthly Prospect Brief, Funding Clearance Report, and Complete Intelligence tiers.

Email ejah@unsealedintelligence.com to get started, or request our Client Readiness Assessment first.

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