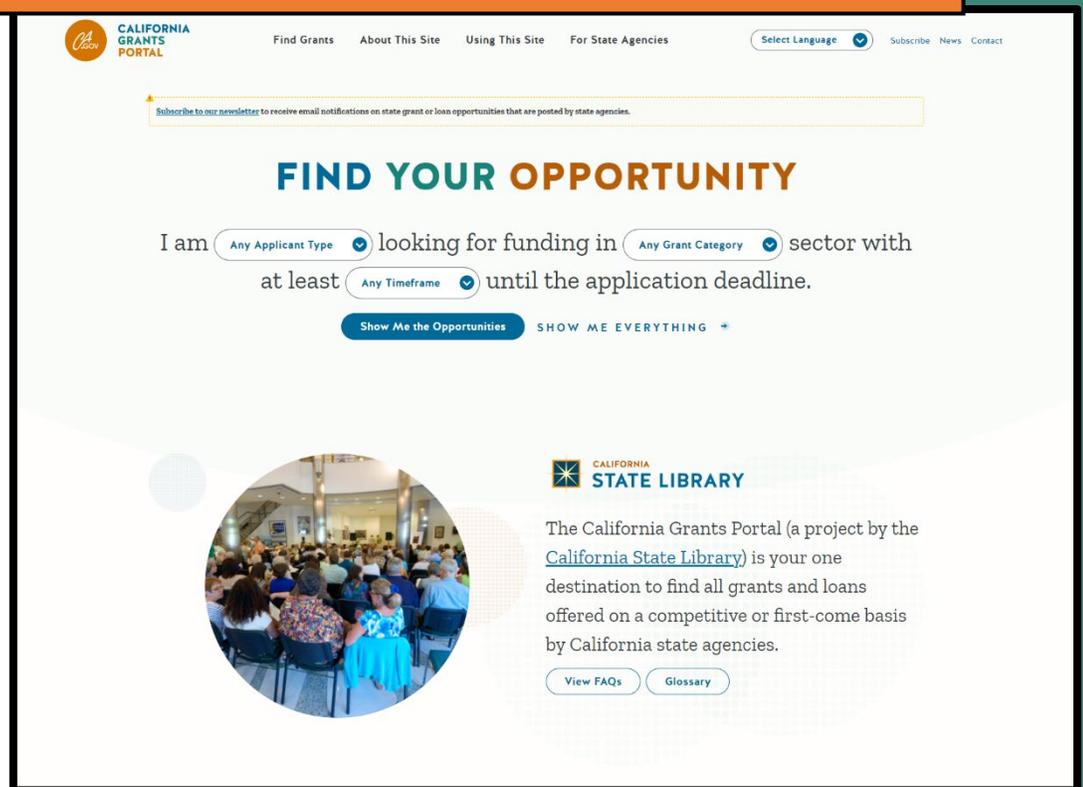


# 2021

## California Grants Portal



The screenshot shows the homepage of the California Grants Portal. At the top left is the logo for the California Grants Portal. Navigation links include "Find Grants", "About This Site", "Using This Site", and "For State Agencies". There are also links for "Select Language", "Subscribe", "News", and "Contact". A newsletter subscription box is present with the text: "Subscribe to our newsletter to receive email notifications on state grant or loan opportunities that are posted by state agencies." The main heading is "FIND YOUR OPPORTUNITY". Below this is a search form with the text: "I am [Any Applicant Type] looking for funding in [Any Grant Category] sector with at least [Any Timeframe] until the application deadline." There are two buttons: "Show Me the Opportunities" and "SHOW ME EVERYTHING". Below the search form is a circular image of a group of people sitting in a room. To the right of the image is the California State Library logo and the text: "The California Grants Portal (a project by the California State Library) is your one destination to find all grants and loans offered on a competitive or first-come basis by California state agencies." There are two buttons: "View FAQs" and "Glossary".



**CALIFORNIA  
GRANTS  
PORTAL**

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**Category:** Digital Government- Government to Business

**Project Initiation Date:** July 1, 2020 – Ongoing  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### IDEA

#### Grant Opportunities Were Listed on Each Department's Website

- No single unified access point to search for grants available from the State of California
- Rural, underserved, underfunded communities and regions miss out on funding and resources

#### Finding Grant Opportunities Is Time Consuming and Difficult

- Over 10,000 nonprofit organizations must wade through websites of departments, bureaus or commissions for grant opportunities
- The State of California could not ensure fair and equitable access to grant opportunities

#### A Helpful and Intuitive State Government Website

- Flexible, user-centered approach serves residents in a helpful and intuitive way
- Individuals and organizations searching for grants no longer need to hunt for opportunities

#### Uses Existing Tech to Ensure Success and Efficiency

- Leverages existing technical solutions
- Automates the process of data transfer

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### User Centered, Agile Roadmap

- Ongoing, iterative process keeps grantseekers and grantmakers at the center of the project
- Process leveraged unique roles: advocate, implementation, oversight, end-user or beneficiary

#### Cross-Sector Partnerships and Collaboration

- More than 60 departments across state governments and public agencies
- Many different types of grant seekers: nonprofits, individuals, businesses

#### Listening and Learning

- Serious time listening and learning from grantseekers and grantmakers
- Strong relationships ensure success despite COVID-19 Pandemic

### IMPACT

#### Faster, Improved Access to Funding, Resources

- Over two thousand grantseekers throughout the state have found opportunities in the portal

#### Visits Increase as Listening, Learning Continues

- More than 30 outreach presentations made to community members and organizations
- Over 50 state agencies are posting grant opportunities on the portal
- Over 150,000 grantseekers have visited the portal since July 2020

## IDEA

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### Grant Opportunities Were Listed on Each Department's Website

In California, government grants make up almost half of contributed income to nonprofits. Notable disparities exist in the geographic distribution of the revenue and assets that nonprofits receive, especially in rural and underserved communities.

Existing funding constraints mean that some nonprofits and other interested parties lack the time and expertise to identify potential grant opportunities and may miss out of vital funding resources, doubly and disproportionately affecting already underfunded entities and regions.

Without a single unified access point to search for grants available from the State, individuals, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders had to navigate through the individual websites of every state department, bureau or commission for grant opportunities that may support their work.

### Finding Grant Opportunities Is Time Consuming and Difficult

Because grant information was not readily accessible and transparently available, the State could not ensure that all interested parties and entities had a fair opportunity at state funding.

Over 10,000 nonprofit organizations expressed support for a web-based portal that consolidated grant availability information. The initial project budget was modest: \$419,000 in Fiscal Year 2019-20 and \$269,000 in Fiscal Year 2020-21. These funds provided for one, permanent, full-time position to:

- conduct significant and high-level coordination across the numerous departments, commissions and boards throughout state government;
- develop and maintain the resulting dataset of grant opportunities;
- provide ongoing website development, maintenance and hosting costs;
- procure one-time limited contracting support to provide early project management and user-centered design processes;
- provide ongoing for software and project management subscriptions to support the scale of the project.

### A Helpful, Intuitive State Government Website

The California Grants Portal ([grants.ca.gov](https://grants.ca.gov)) was born out of legislation, the Grant Information Act of 2018 (Stats. 2018, Ch. 318) and launched on July 1, 2020. It demonstrates how a flexible, user-centered, 21<sup>st</sup>-century government can serve its residents in a helpful and intuitive way. Individuals and organizations searching for grants no longer need to hunt through the websites of myriad state agencies to identify vital funding resources.

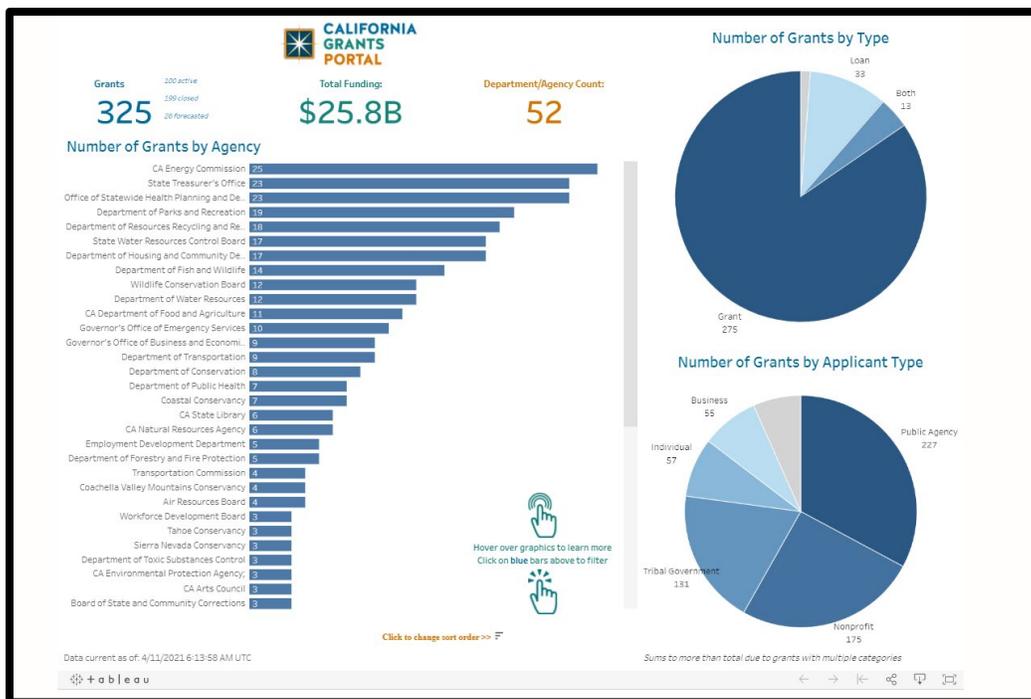
Prior to the creation of the portal, there had not been any current or previous efforts or funding anywhere in state government to consolidate grant availability information. This legislatively mandated website requires the State Library to collaborate with every state agency, department, commission and bureau that awards grants.

The State Library led and engaged this stakeholder group in developing a standardized set of information that each entity uses to publish each new grant opportunity on the portal, as well as identifying the information that they must report after they have awarded the grants.

One of the pieces that makes our project unique is that we have created a platform for California state government entities, of which over 60 make grants and loans, to submit their grant opportunity information in a standard and uniform way. For the first time, this allows grantseekers to find, view and compare over 300 grant opportunities, better positioning them to ultimately apply for those for which they are best suited. We created a dataset of over 300 grant opportunities from scratch and automated everything but initial ingestion. Currently, all departments are using an online form to input information into the site, and we are continuing to work on our automated alternatives such as WordPress plugin and JSON. All data is open source and available via a flat file and open API for public. We have a subscription functionality for the grantseekers to receive daily or weekly notification on newest grant opportunities added by the state agencies.

### Uses Existing Tech to Ensure Success and Efficiency

Several other states have implemented a program such as this. However, these programs appeared to rely on manually entering data from departments into a database.



In Maryland, for example, the state employs two full-time staff for this task because the staff manually enter the grant information into a database.

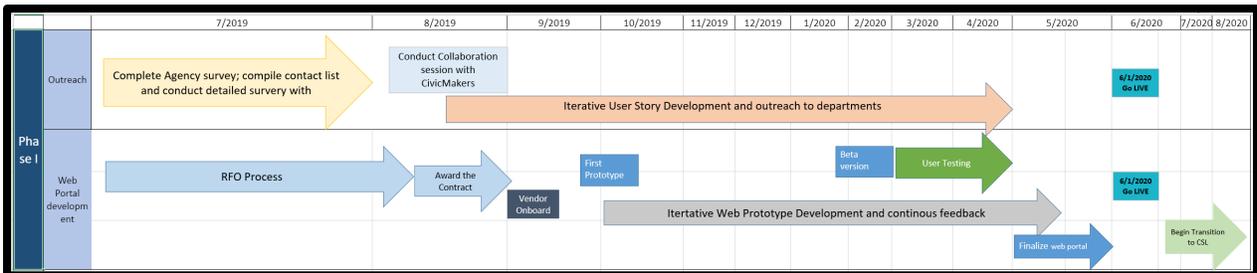
The California Grants Portal effectively uses 21<sup>st</sup> century methods to leverage existing technical solutions, automating the process of data transfer, ensuring success and efficiency with only one staff member, empowering grantmakers at the agency level to meet grantseekers in an accessible and convenient setting.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### User-Centered, Agile Roadmap

The project team had less than a year to build a new digital service, which required the partnership of more than 60 departments across state governments and the consistent, iterative input of many different types of grantseekers (nonprofits, businesses, public agencies, etc.) who had a variety of needs and priorities.

Despite a huge interruption in our work as the pandemic hit and we moved to a completely virtual environment, we were able to succeed because of the strong relationships we had already built with stakeholders by listening to and addressing their suggestions.



Like every organization with a new project, we had preconceived notions about priorities and needs. We knew that this tool could not work unless we spent serious time listening and learning from our stakeholders – grantseekers and grantmakers – so that the final product reflected their needs.

The terms “user-centered” and “agile” get lots of attention these days. We are proud to have lived by and continue to live by these terms throughout the life cycle of this project.

### Cross-Sector Partnerships and Collaboration

From concept to fruition, the project involved legislators, vendors, agency staff or citizens and leveraged their unique roles, such as advocate, implementation, oversight, end-user or beneficiary. CalNonprofits, a key partner in this effort, represents over 1,000 nonprofit organizations across the state. These are geographically diverse and include small, medium and large organizations.

### Listening and Learning

The State Library engaged grantmakers to develop an initial standardized set of information that each entity uses to publish each new grant opportunity on the portal and identify the information that they must report after they have awarded the grants.

Leveraging the human power of this network of stakeholders, the State Library gathered iterative feedback during the development of the standard data fields, design of the interface, testing and post-launch to ensure that the portal meets the needs of grantmakers and grantseekers.

## IMPACT

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### Faster, Improved Access to Funding, Resources

During the pandemic and our first year, the California Grants Portal has already helped over two thousand grantseekers throughout the state to find funding they need in a central location. We continue to thrive with the same momentum to understand our users' needs and make their experience better.



### Visits Increase, Listening Continues

We have had 156,666 users since launch. The average visitor spends close to 3 minutes on the site. Over 150 bugs have been found and fixed. We continue to work on the backlog to fix bugs and enhance the website.

To encourage engagement and continue to listen to the needs of California grantseekers, we have promoted and held four quarterly feedback sessions since launching the portal in July 2020. At the request of both grantseekers and grantmakers, we continue to hold quarterly feedback and listening sessions.

### Next Steps

Since its launch, we have heard from state agencies and grantseekers how instrumental this portal has been for their organizations. We continue to build strong working relationships with state grantmaking agencies to add more datasets and to do outreach to nonprofits, public agencies and businesses to bring awareness of this tool and gather feedback to keep improving it.