DEENA STRATEGIC GROUP

Your Capital Pursuit Brief™

Get Me Ready to Pursue the Money™

Eastside Reading Circle (fictional)

November 9, 2026

EXECUTIVE READ

Funder or program: Riverbend Community Foundation (fictional)
Amount asked: $40,000. Date: August 2026.
What came back: Referred to training, a cohort or a readiness program
The funder's words: "We encourage you to join our nonprofit readiness cohort and reapply next year."
Top three fixes:
1. Line up every number in your narrative against your budget, line by line.
2. Lower the request, split it into phases, or apply with a fiscal sponsor or partner.
3. Rewrite your first paragraph so it says what you will do, for whom, and what will change.
Verdict: Fix first

WHAT MAY BE READING AS NOT-READY

Fit:
- Did your first paragraph say what you will do, for whom, and what will change? No.

Money:
- Did every number in your narrative match your budget? No.
- Did your budget include full staff time, including unpaid hours you rely on? No.

Size:
- Was your request at or under about 30% of your annual budget? No.

Proof:
- Did you show how often people came and how long they stayed? Not sure: check this.
- Did you report what changed for people, not only how many you served? No.

Credibility:
- Could a funder confirm your board, EIN and a real contact on your website in two minutes? Not sure: check this.

Language:
- Did you describe the people you serve by their strengths and situation, not by labels like "at-risk"? No.

THE FIXES, RANKED

Fix	Why it matters	Effort
[Critical] Line up every number in your narrative against your budget, line by line.	A mismatch tells a reviewer the money may not be tracked.	Quick: under 2 hours
[Critical] Lower the request, split it into phases, or apply with a fiscal sponsor or partner.	A large ask next to a small budget reads as risk, not ambition.	Medium: a day
Rewrite your first paragraph so it says what you will do, for whom, and what will change.	Reviewers decide early whether they understand the ask.	Quick: under 2 hours
Add full staff time to the budget, including the unpaid hours the work depends on.	A budget that leaves out real labor hides the true cost of the work.	Medium: a day
Report how often people came and how long they stayed. (check this)	Attendance and length of stay are how a reviewer judges depth.	Medium: a day
Add one result that shows what changed for people, and how you know.	Counts show activity. Change shows the work is working.	Medium: a day
Put your board list, EIN and a real contact on your website. (check this)	Funders look you up. What they cannot confirm reads as risk.	Quick: under 2 hours
Replace labels with the situation people are in and what they bring.	Labels flatten the people you serve and make the work sound smaller.	Quick: under 2 hours

CORRECTED LANGUAGE

Passage 1, before:

We are just a small volunteer group doing our best to help kids who are behind in reading.

Passage 1, your version:

Eastside Reading Circle runs four after-school reading sessions a week for 60 second to fifth graders. Last year 41 of them moved up at least one reading level on the school's own assessment.

BOARD, DOCUMENTS AND EVIDENCE CHECKLIST

Board, filings, budget and money documents:
[ ] Your narrative and budget side by side, with every number checked
[ ] Your current annual budget next to the amount you plan to ask for
[ ] A list of unpaid hours by role for the last year
[ ] A website page with your board list, EIN and a named contact (check this)

Evidence of the work and how you describe it:
[ ] A first paragraph that names the work, the people and the change
[ ] Attendance records showing how often people came and how long they stayed (check this)
[ ] One page showing a before/after change for participants, with how you measured it
[ ] Your need statement, rewritten around situation and strengths

WHAT THIS MONEY CHANGES, BY WHEN

These are your own numbers. They are estimates, not verified impact or a funding promise. Unknown values stay blank.
Period: School year 2025-26.
What changes: Child moved up at least one reading level on the school assessment
For whom: Not entered
By when: Not entered
How you will know: Not entered
Total cost: 38000. Participants: 60. Successful participants: 41.
Assumptions and sources: Cost includes rent, books and the stipend for two site leads. Volunteer hours are listed separately and not counted as cost.
Estimated cost per participant = total cost / participants: 633.33.
Estimated cost per successful outcome = total cost / successful participants: 926.83.
Use one currency and period. Count each participant once for one defined outcome.

WHAT TO SAY IF ASKED DIRECTLY

Why should we fund you now?
The library branch that hosted us closes in March. We have a signed offer of space from Grace Street Church, and $40,000 covers the first year there.

What will be different in a year?
Sixty children reading in a stable room four days a week, two paid site leads instead of volunteers alone, and attendance tracked every session.

How will you know it worked?
School reading-level results each fall and spring, and our own attendance log. We will report both, including the children who did not move up.

What happens if we say no?
We keep two sessions a week with volunteers and drop the other two. About 25 children lose their seat.

THIS WEEK

- Line up every number in your narrative against your budget, line by line.
- Lower the request, split it into phases, or apply with a fiscal sponsor or partner.
- Rewrite your first paragraph so it says what you will do, for whom, and what will change.
- Put your board list, EIN and a real contact on your website.
- Replace labels with the situation people are in and what they bring.

THIS MONTH

- Add full staff time to the budget, including the unpaid hours the work depends on.
- Report how often people came and how long they stayed.
- Add one result that shows what changed for people, and how you know.

LIMITS

This read comes from your materials and your answers. It cannot know what a reviewer was thinking. It does not promise funding.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Checking a specific grant? Run it through the free Grant Go / No-Go Decision Pack: deenastrategic.com/grants-hall/decision-pack.
Before you send anything, check what a funder finds when they look you up: deenastrategic.com/grants-hall/first-impression.