

Funding and Budgets

For each Standard you are seeking certification in, you'll be given a questionnaire specific to that Standard to fill out. Most questionnaires will also request that you upload nonconfidential materials, such as examples of reports you have published or your standard operating procedures documents. This guide has tips to keep in mind when preparing for and filling out the Funding and Budgets questionnaire so that your office has a more seamless experience.

The Standard

Your election office understands your operational needs, communicates those needs to key decision-makers, and manages budgets responsibly. To achieve this standard:

- You seek the knowledge and resources to understand your jurisdiction's budgeting process.
- You develop an annual budget and a multiyear budget that reflect the baseline funding needs for your election office.
- You build a long-term aspirational budget that outlines your office's funding needs to reach stretch goals.
- You make the case for funding to key decision-makers, including local, state, and federal legislators.
- You seek additional appropriate sources of funding to support unmet expenses.
- You manage your office's budget and make informed spending decisions throughout the fiscal year.
- You advocate for competitive compensation with regular pay increases.
- You monitor and plan for legislative changes that might impact your budget projections.
- You educate the public about the stewardship of resources and budgeting needs.

Glossary

We've tried to keep jargon to a minimum, but some is unavoidable. Since many offices use different terminology, here are some terms used in the standard or questionnaire that may be unfamiliar or you may use in a different way:

- **Operational needs:** Anything an office needs to function in the short, medium, and long term. For example: office equipment, voting equipment, translation services, staff and poll worker salaries, and training expenses.

Who to include

You will get more out of the certification process and be able to complete the questionnaire more quickly if you involve the right staff in the process. Here are some suggestions for who to include for this standard:

- Staff who create and track your office's budgets
- Staff who communicate with budget decision-makers
- Staff who communicate with the public

Materials requested

The questionnaire will request the following materials:

- Your office's 1-year and 5-year budgets, as well as any long-term or aspirational budgets.
- An example of how your office has educated the public about your use of resources and budgeting needs.

You may not have documents with these titles or you may have reasons that you don't use some of these types of materials. In those cases, you can provide other documents that you use in these processes, or provide explanations for what you do instead.

Please provide only the versions or portions of these (or similar) documents that would be subject to public records requests in your jurisdiction. Do not provide any confidential documents or information. We encourage you to consult with your local counsel if you have questions about whether a document can be shared.

Example questions

Here are some examples of questions found in the certification questionnaire, to give you an idea of what you will be asked about:

Please describe how you determine your office's necessary budget, and include at least the following:

- How far in advance of the budget due date you begin drafting the budget
- Titles/roles of who you talk to to help draft the budget (internally, externally, staff, experts, government officials, etc.)
- Which previous years you use to set the budget

Please describe how your office communicates its operational needs to key decision-makers, and include at least the following:

- Who you advocate to (titles/roles)
- How often you advocate
- How you make an effective case
- What sources you use

Please provide an example of how your office planned for legislative changes that would impact your budget projections, and include at least the following:

- What was the legislative change
- How would the legislative change impact your budget projections
- What was your plan

Resources addressing this standard

If you are looking for ways to improve your processes in this area before applying for certification or to implement feedback you received about how to meet the standard, these publicly available, nonpartisan resources may help.

- [RFP how-to guide for election officials](#): This how-to guide is for those who haven't written an RFP before — or those who'd like a refresher. It includes guidelines, examples, a template, and a collection of resources to help prepare a successful RFP.
- [Educating and persuading public officials](#): One course in a larger series on communications, this training covers some ideas of how to best communicate and build relationships with policymakers of all sorts – including those who vote on budgets.
- [Setting goals in election operations](#): It's useful when thinking about building a budget, especially long term, aspirational budgets, to have goals for how to improve operations, then work backwards from those goals to what resources are needed to achieve them.

Using or reviewing these resources is not required for your office to be certified: certification is based on achieving the standard, not on using specific materials. These nonpartisan resources are provided for informational and educational purposes only.

Certification program information

For information on the certification program as a whole, as well as general advice on how to get the most out of the certification process, consult these resources:

- Our [guide](#) to the certification process
- [FAQs](#) about the Alliance certification program
- Go to [CertifyExcellence.org](https://certifyexcellence.org) to apply