

FOR EDS AND FINANCE LEADS WITH GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Government Agreement Playbook

How to read your funding agreement, work well with your project officer, and keep a written record that holds up when people change.

*Goodwill gets you answers.
A written record keeps them.*

INSIDE

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READ THIS FIRST

The agreement decides. The officer interprets.

Federal contribution agreements are written to give the department room. These are real phrases from public templates, and what they mean for you.

"to the Minister's satisfaction"

The department decides what counts as good enough. Day to day, that's usually your project officer.

"in the opinion of Canada, reasonable"

A cost can be eligible on paper and still be questioned later.

"Canada may, in its discretion, reduce"

Payments and amounts can change without your agreement.

"must be in writing and signed by both Parties"

A change agreed on a call isn't a change until it's signed.

"constitutes the entire agreement... supersedes all previous agreements"

Anything said before signing doesn't count unless it's in the document.

2,040

grantees studied

The individual program officer shaped their experience more than which funder they had.

Center for Effective Philanthropy, "Luck of the Draw", SSIR, 2007

44%

saw terms change mid-way

Share of US nonprofits with government funding whose contracts or grants changed partway through.

Urban Institute, national survey, 2013



The goal: a strong relationship with your officer, and a written file that would make sense to someone who has never met you. Officers change, and the next one starts with nothing but your file.

STEP 1 · READ IT WITH YOUR FINANCE LEAD

The 10 clauses to find in week one

Write the answer in your own words and note the clause number, so anyone on your team can find it again.

1

Eligible and ineligible costs

Lists, caps (admin is often capped, e.g. 15%), and any “reserves the right” wording

Ours: Clause

2

Moving money between budget lines

The exact threshold. It varies: 5% or \$50K (IRCC), 15% or 25% (Canadian Heritage)

Ours: Clause

3

Advances and holdback

Holdback % (IRCC: usually 5 to 15%) and what releases it

Ours: Clause

4

Reporting and claim dates

Every report, claim and forecast, and the final claim deadline

Ours: Clause

5

What needs prior written approval

Search for “in writing”, “prior approval”, “consent”

Ours: Clause

6

Amendments

Who must sign, and in what form

Ours: Clause

7

Default and cure period

What counts as default and how long you have to fix it (15 or 30 days are common)

Ours: Clause

8

Termination and notice

Can the department end it early, and with how much notice?

Ours: Clause

9

Records retention and audit

How long you keep records: 3, 5, 6 or 7 years by department

Ours: Clause

10

Acknowledgement and stacking

How to credit the funder, and limits on total government funding

Ours: Clause

Examples from public templates: Canadian Heritage contribution agreement, Canada Summer Jobs articles of agreement, IRCC Settlement Program recipient guide, NRCan and Justice Canada terms.

STEP 2 · KEEP IT AT THE FRONT OF THE AGREEMENT FOLDER

Your one-page agreement summary

Fill it in once. Give a copy to your board treasurer and a second staff member.

The agreement

Program and agreement

#

Total amount

Start and end dates

Purpose (their words)

Results we're measured
on

Next renewal or call date

The money

Reallocation threshold

Holdback % and release

Admin cap

Claim and report dates

In the shared calendar?

Last claim submitted

The rules

Needs prior written
approval

Who signs amendments

Cure period

Termination notice

Records kept until

The people

Project officer

Officer's manager

Our lead

Our backup

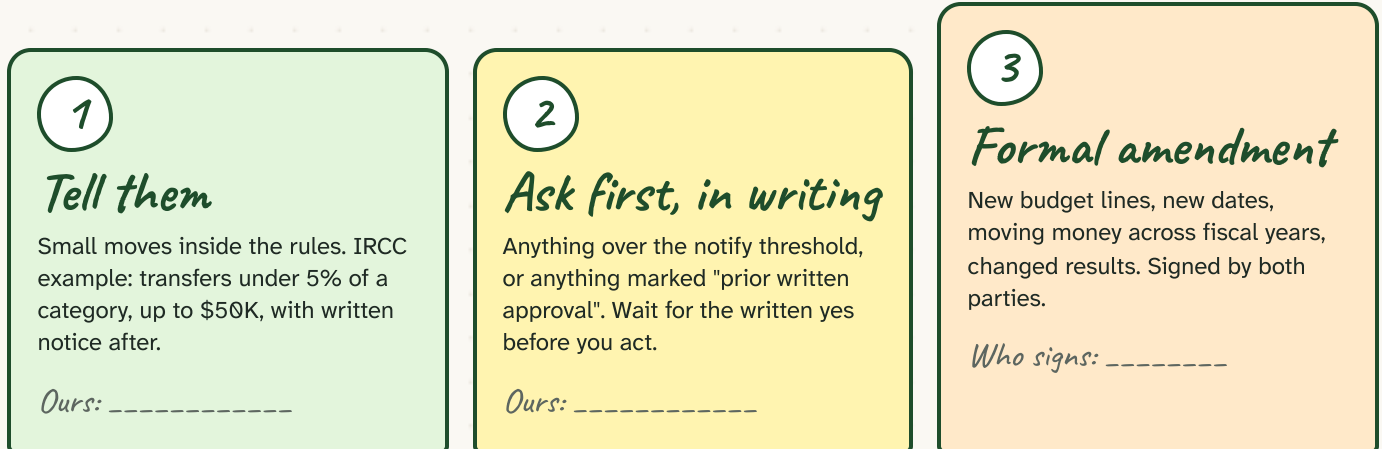
Agreement folder lives
at

If your lead left tomorrow, could your backup run this file from this page and the folder?

STEP 3 · FIND YOUR THRESHOLDS AND WRITE THEM IN

The change ladder

Most agreements have three levels of change. When in doubt, go one step up.



bigger change, more paper ↗

The confirmation email

Send it within a day of any call where something was decided. Friendly and factual: you're agreeing on the record together.

● ● ●

New message

Subject: [Agreement #] Confirming our call on [date] : [topic]
Cc: [our backup contact]

Hi [name] ,

Thanks for the call today. To make sure I've understood, here's what we discussed:

1. [our question] , related to clause [#] .
2. Your guidance: [what they said, in plain words] .
3. What we'll do next: [action] by [date] .

If I've got any of this wrong, please let me know. If it needs formal approval or an amendment, could you tell me what you need from us?

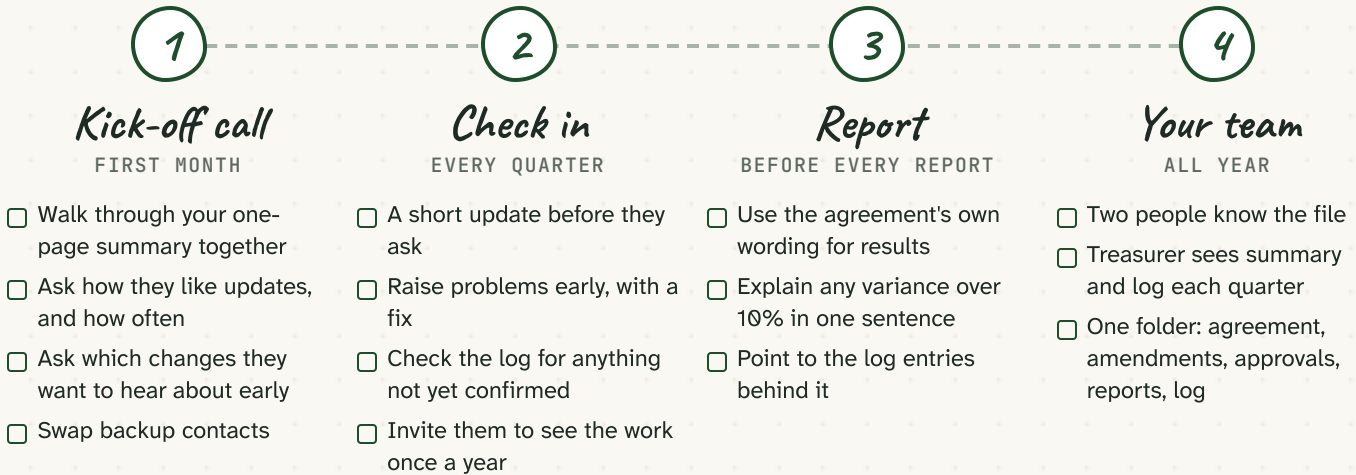
Thanks,
[name]

Save the email and their reply in the agreement folder, then add a line to the decision log.

STEP 4 · WORKING WELL WITH YOUR OFFICER

Stay in touch before you need something

Most project officers are fair and carrying a heavy file load. Clear, early, written questions make their job easier too.



What officers can do

Answer questions, give guidance, recommend approvals and set some terms, like the holdback in IRCC's program.

What a call can't do

Change the agreement. Amendments must be in writing and signed, and the agreement replaces everything said before it.

The decision log

One row per question, approval or interpretation: **date · clause · our question · their guidance · level · confirmed in writing? · link to the email · who · next step**. The Excel version comes with this guide, with an example row filled in.

STEP 5 · OFFICERS MOVE ON, AND RELATIONSHIPS COOL

When things change

A new officer is assigned

- 1 Within two weeks, send a short welcome email with your one-page summary, the decision log and copies of written approvals.
- 2 Ask for a 30-minute introduction call and walk through what's been agreed so far.
- 3 If they read something differently, confirm the new reading in writing. Where it conflicts with an earlier written approval, point to it politely and ask how they'd like to proceed.

The relationship gets tense

- 1 Move every open question to email, with clause numbers. Keep the tone warm and factual.
- 2 Ask for a call to reset, and bring your log, so the talk is about the file and not about people.
- 3 If it's still stuck, ask who else in the program can help. Use the dispute clause if there is one.
- 4 Tell your board chair or treasurer early. Funding risk is a board matter.

THE RESPECTFUL PATH WHEN SOMETHING'S STUCK



Want help setting this up?

Nimara sets up the agreement folder, shared reporting calendar and decision log, so the file doesn't depend on one person. Send Ben a message on LinkedIn or book a free assessment at nimara.ca.

Sources. Government of Canada: Canadian Heritage contribution agreement template (Annexes A to E); Canada Summer Jobs articles of agreement (s.6.1, 13.1, 20.1, 25.3, 35.1); IRCC Settlement Program recipient guide and funding guidelines; NRCan and Justice Canada funding terms; Treasury Board Directive on Transfer Payments (2008, Appendix G); Blue Ribbon Panel on Grant and Contribution Programs (2006); ESDC evaluation of the Social Development Partnerships Program. Research: Center for Effective Philanthropy, "Luck of the Draw" (2007) and "Relationships Matter" (2017); Urban Institute national survey (2013); Ontario Nonprofit Network funding briefs (2025 to 2026).