



TO: Frank Reeder/Nick Rathod  
FROM: Eric Brenner  
DATE: December 5, 2008  
RE: December 8 meeting on Federal grants issues

The **National Grants Partnership** <http://www.thengp.org/> is an organization consisting of state, local, non-profit, and some Federal grants officials. In my role as Director of the MD Governor's Grants Office [www.gov.state.md.us/grants](http://www.gov.state.md.us/grants) I helped prepare the NGP transition report that contains a few core recommendations related to improving coordination and transparency. What follows are the key points from this document, organized in a slightly different way, along with a few other items that did not make it into the NGP document but I think might be relevant for our discussion.

1. **Grants.gov** <http://www.grants.gov/> The grantee community (those of us who apply for Federal grants) see Grants.gov as the web portal that is meant to be a one-stop-shop for all Federal grant support. Currently, Grants.gov publishes grant notices and accepts on-line grant applications but that is where everything stops as grant notifications, awards, management reports, and tracking of dollars all take place somewhere else. Only discretionary grants are posted on Grants.gov, not the larger (in dollar amount but not actual number) formula grants. Grants.gov is housed at the Department of Health and Human Services.

2. **OMB/Grants Policy Committee.**

[http://www.cfoc.gov/index.cfm?function=grant\\_governance](http://www.cfoc.gov/index.cfm?function=grant_governance)

Unlike the grantee community, the Federal government sees the Grants Policy Committee as the focal point for most Federal grant activity. Historically, the Grants Policy Committee has been a closed organization, with no official or unofficial role for the larger grantee community. Grants.gov does not appear to be managed by or connected to OMB or the Grants Policy Committee.

3. **Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act.** This law took effect in 2006, with then Senator Obama as a lead sponsor. FFATA requires all Federal grant and procurement data to be posted on a searchable website within 30 days of the award. FFATA also requires that sub-grantee award data (when Maryland state government receives a large block grant, we pass on money to other entities who become sub-grantees) be posted on this same website within 30 days of the award. This sub-grantee requirement takes effect on January 1, 2009, but the law allows OMB to request an extension from Congress. Everyone expects (hopes?) that an extension will be provided as compliance with this provision is a logistical impossibility.

4. **www.USASpending.gov** This website was created to implement FFATA and while it has information on Federal grants (not sub-grants, yet) the numbers do not line up with information included in Census data, which in the past has been the method used to track the flow of Federal spending dollars <http://www.census.gov/govs/www/cffr.html>. Neither of these two systems link back in any way to the information that starts out as a Federal grant notice and application on Grants.gov.

5. **Training.** Currently training on various aspects of finding, winning, and managing grants is scattered throughout the Federal government. In many cases Federal government employees conduct training either for their own agency constituents, or at the request of other organizations. This information is not consolidated in a single location or website. The Maryland Governor's Grants office (with just 3 full-time staff and no



training budget) has conducted multiple trainings on topics ranging from the basics of researching grant opportunities to the most technical aspects of grants management, often using Federal employees as instructors. All information is posted on our website and heavily used, even by people who didn't attend the original training.

**6. Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives/Office of Civic Engagement.**

While seemingly (?) having limited contact with OMB or Grants.gov, many of the Federal agency FBCI offices provide training on grants and grants management.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/contact-agency.html>

Even though the primary audiences for these trainings are faith and community groups, local governments and state agencies could also benefit but are rarely included. Regardless of what happens to these offices in the new Administration (a new Office of Civic Engagement has been mentioned that could include service/volunteerism) this could be another resource waiting to be better used. In Maryland, many of the people who have participated in our trainings are in fact Vista and Americorps members who then go on to assist faith-based and community organizations. Past FBCI trainings seem to focus on Federal grants that go directly to non-profits, but the vast majority of Federal grant dollars that end up in the hands of non-profits, first go through state governments (via formula grants) and leads to item #7.

**7. Single Points of Contact.** A Reagan era executive order, EO 12372 set up a Single Point of Contact in each state for review of grant applications prior to their submission. Many states have dropped this function but reissuing this EO to ask each state to designate a single grants contact so local governments and non-profits have a place to seek information on available state funding could fit in nicely with some of these other ideas, and also take advantage of the increasing number of states that are establishing grants offices. Only a couple of the states (Texas and DC) with grants offices have them listed as the official SPOC on the website maintained by OMB. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html> Plus, having a method of sharing Federal grant information with an official state contact on both grant seeking and grants management issues, could build on what is taking place through the National Grants Partnership as well as the FBCI state contacts. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/contact-states.html>

**8. State Grants (and Federal dollars that go into state grants).** Some states already help local governments and non-profits identify where state agencies receive Federal funds that may be of interest to them. Maryland does this and the model for our Annual report actually comes from the Illinois Legislative Research Unit [http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lru/lru\\_home.html](http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lru/lru_home.html). Then Illinois State Senator Obama was familiar with this document which contributed, to some small degree, to his interest in FFATA.

**9. Foundation Grants.** This is a bit beyond the scope of this memo, but non-profits and local governments are interested in funding wherever they can get it. Once engaged with a state grants office on finding, winning, and managing grants, making sure they know about available foundation resources is a logical next step beyond learning about publicly funded grant opportunities (state, local, or federal). The Urban Institute has provided Maryland a free link to all foundations headquartered in our state by county <http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/PubApps/geoCounties.php?q=MD> and they presumably could do this for the Federal government, covering all states.