



The National Grants Partnership

Presidential Transition Report

November 2008

Today, more than 900 programs in over 26 federal grant-making agencies provide over \$500 billion annually in federal financial assistance. Budgets across the nation are becoming more constrained and demand for accountability is at an all time high. Better, more streamlined grant application, award, and management processes have never been more important.

The National Grants Partnership, a coalition of government and non-government parties with an interest in improving the grants process (www.thengp.org), has been working for some time to streamline, simplify, and improve grant-making and management processes. We believe that improving the coordination and transparency of all aspects of grant application, award, and management will benefit everyone. The following recommendations are related to recent legislative activity (Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act (P.L.106-107) and the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act ((P.L.109-282), and all strategies are the result of numerous discussions with a broad range of participants across the nation.

1. Expand the use and functionality of Grants.gov.

Grants.gov, a web portal developed and designed to be a one-stop shop for federal grant support, definitely advanced centralizing grants services. However, the current functionality of Grants.gov includes only “find and apply” components. We believe that Grants.gov can be improved by ensuring that all federal grants, including formula grants, be posted on the site and by expanding the functionality of the system beyond “find and apply” to include management, reporting, closeout, award tracking, and training.

- **Require all grants (formula and discretionary) from all grant-making agencies to be posted on Grants.gov.** Many formula grants (including the ones with the largest amount of funds) are not included in Grants.gov. In addition, some discretionary grants are not being posted to the site which reduces the intent of providing an easy-to-use, one-stop shop for grant seekers;
- **Stop requiring duplicative hard-copy grant application submissions.** If the Grants.gov system is working properly, there should be no reason to continue requiring duplicative hard-copy grant application submissions;
- **Expand the functionality of Grants.gov** to include finding, applying, submitting/receiving applications, sending award notifications and documents, submitting/receiving post-award management reports, closeout tools, grant award tracking, and training;



- **Combine the information at USASpending.gov into Grants.gov to eradicate duplication of effort and dual systems.** USASpending.gov provides information to the public on each federal grant award. Merging this information into Grants.gov can ensure that 100% of federal grant funds are tracked throughout the process, eventually aligning with existing grant data housed at the US Census Bureau; and,
- **Include grants training and technical assistance information on Grants.gov.** No central point currently exists to locate information on grants training. We recommend that Grants.gov also house training resources, including on-line or recorded training sessions conducted by other federal agencies, while also providing better training on Grants.gov itself.

These steps will go a long way towards making it possible to track all federal grant funds from the initial proposal phase all the way through the final reporting of which organizations and units of government were recipients of federal funds. Such consolidation of information would greatly improve accountability and transparency.

2. Consolidate and streamline the grants management structure.

A specific governance structure for all grant functions, including grants management, should be created within the federal government. Currently, the activities at Grants.gov and the policy recommendations of the federal Grants Policy Committee (GPC) do not appear to be connected. We believe that the role of the GPC within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should evolve into something that covers all grants activity, including the management of Grants.gov.

- **The GPC should also include representation from state and local governments, tribal governments, institutions of higher education, vendors, and non-profits(see below),** in partnership with the GPC and its officially designated lead grants federal personnel;
- **Open and transparent meetings of the GPC** conducted in as open and transparent a way as possible;
- **Program review and audit consistency** should be improved by all grantor agencies; and,
- **Efforts to improve grants payment systems** should continue, including standardizing the grant payment terms and data elements.

3. Involve and include stakeholder input.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has noted that a lack of stakeholder input, particularly from grantee organizations (state, local, tribal governments; institutions of higher education; non-profits), has made federal grants management policy less effective than it could be. The lack of a clear, unified structure and the failure to include stakeholders in the process has, in some cases, limited the progress of earlier efforts to address grants management under the Federal Financial Management and Improvement Act known as PL 106-107. Stakeholder input is imperative so that time and effort are not wasted creating products that have limited “real world” applicability.



- **Non-federal participation in grants management governance structure.** As noted in item 2 (above) non-federal participants should be included in any new or revised grants management governance structure;
- **Non-federal end users should be consulted as early as possible.** While the GPC now hosts webcasts for stakeholders, non-federal end users should be consulted as early as possible in any effort to change or improve proposed grant products, including new forms and formats, in addition to providing input on how federal fund data will be tracked and reported; and,
- **Participation and collaboration in the development of the Training and Certification Program of the Grants Management Professional.**

We believe these recommendations will result in better management, accountability, and transparency of taxpayer dollars. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss these issues further, please contact either Cornelia Chebinou, Co-Chair of the NGP (202-624-5451/thengp@aol.com) or Eric Brenner, Transition Report Coordinator for the NGP (410-974-5090, ebrenner@gov.state.md.us).