GRANTS.GOV AND THE LEGACY OF THE COMMONS

RURAL DISTANCE LEARNING AND TELEMEDICINE GRANTS

HOW TO READ AN RFP

WHAT YOUR TECHNOLOGY PROJECT ISN’T
STREAM GRANTS INFORMATION TO YOUR OWN WEBSITE!

Have you ever considered providing grants information to your constituents on your Website or adding grants to a subscription service you already offer?

Now you can save the time and headache of maintaining all that grants information by using the GOstream API®! With GOstream, you can customize what types of grants your display and how, and because the information is streamed in real time from Grants Office UPstream® Interactive Grants Intelligence, it’s completely hands-free for you. There’s even a Wordpress Plug-in to simplify implementation of the GOstream on your Wordpress page!

Contact Grants Office today at info@grantsoffice.com for more information on the GOstream API and visit http://www.grantsoffice.com/GrantsOfficeServices.svc/Help for a list of available API calls.
Dear Readers,

In this month’s FUNDED, we look at the 2014 budget debate and the impact of rescission on the top grant programs. In his Between the Lines column, Chris LaPage takes some of the rhetoric out of the equation to understand how the federal budget process has been proceeding in recent years and what might change going forward.

We also look back this month at the evolution of the Grants.gov portal and how it became the go-to site for federal grant administration. It was a lengthy process to get where we are now, and there’s still a lot of work that needs to be done by everyone who is involved in the grants process, from funding agencies to recipients to grant administrators and even vendors.

A contribution from a new voice, Matthew Hawkes, provides us with insight into the Institute of Museum and Library Services and its part in facilitating the changing role of museums and libraries around the country.

As always, we look forward to your feedback and suggestions for future issues. To participate in the conversation, feel free to e-mail me at mpaddock@grantsoffice.com.

Sincerely,

Michael Paddock
Editor and Publisher, FUNDED
SUMMARY: The Make it in America Challenge coordinates complementary federal investments, providing applicants the opportunity to submit one project narrative to compete for multiple funding sources to support the development and implementation of regionally-driven economic development strategies that will accelerate job creation by encouraging re-shoring of productive activity by U.S. firms, fostering increased foreign direct investment (FDI), encouraging companies who are considering leaving the U.S. to keep or expand their businesses—and jobs—here at home, and training local workers to meet the needs of those businesses. The purpose of this program is to assist American communities with critical infrastructure, strategic planning, capacity building, technical assistance, and workforce development resources to help them become more attractive locations for business investment and to help workers develop the skills they need to do the jobs of a 21st century global economy.

PROJECT PRIORITIES:

1. Strengthening Regional Assets (funded by EDA). EDA will target investments that help distressed regions build on existing regional assets to create a competitive environment for foreign-owned and domestic firms to establish and grow their U.S. operations, and create jobs.

2. Connecting Regional Supply Chains and Assisting (funded by NIST MEP). Applicants must clearly identify and describe the proposed activities for which NIST MEP funds will be awarded to an MEP Center. Permitted activities include those activities or services typically provided by an MEP Center to enhance the competitive position of one or more U.S. manufacturers.

3. Building a Highly-Skilled and Diverse Workforce to Meet Employer Demand (funded by ETA). These grants are primarily training grants with only a modest amount of the total budget available for activities that support the selected training strategy.

DEADLINE: The due date for applications is May 31, 2013.

AWARD AMOUNTS: EDA maximum award is $500,000. NIST maximum award is $125,000. ETA maximum award is $1,300,000.

Traditionally, the key function of museums and libraries has been the management and preservation of the collections they maintain, as well as the access of those collections to the public. Not much has changed in the important classical role of these enduring institutions, but innovations providing a much greater emphasis on public engagement and accessibility are now being embraced. This pivotal shift goes back to the 1980s when a new trend of perceived pork barrel cleansing brought on by the recession in the United States had stemmed previously generous funding. Museums and libraries were forced to reevaluate themselves and their role in communities. In redefining themselves as learning hubs, museums and libraries have been rewarded not only by reinvigorated government allocations, but by the resounding support of the public with ever increasing demand for their facilities. In the context of the information age, now more than ever museums and libraries are competing for people’s time and attention and seek to engage and broaden their prospective audience by adopting an education model over a strict conservation/repository model. This change in focus toward public engagement has continued to give rise to approaches toward administration, education, technology integration, community outreach, and new ways for these unique institutions to develop a professional staff.

Grant seekers should note that given the overarching theme of community involvement and education, stewardship of collections should move beyond an internal function toward more efficient conservation of collections. Although that is a major goal, grants to integrate technology for stewardship such as digitizing collections, should have the broader goal of bringing increased accessibility to the public for perusal, study, or interactivity. The Learning Labs in Libraries program for example created a kind of 21st century information after school resource by combing digital and traditional media in order to establish a youth learning center that brings together academics and young people’s tendency for online consumption.

Given these trends, the most competitive projects will be those that are broad in scope and extend services into their communities, be it through innovative educational programs or through new technology that makes information more accessible.
WHAT YOUR TECHNOLOGY PROJECT ISN’T

by Michael Paddock

Agencies around the country initiate technology projects in different ways and for different reasons. For some, technology is a way of keeping current and of ensuring that stakeholders have access to the latest and greatest in services. For others, a governing body may mandate a greater focus on technology, in the broad, undefined way governing bodies sometimes have. Still others are won over by a compelling case for return on investment or quality improvement. Or a technology salesperson may have let you know that your current technology has reached the end of its useful life and needs to be replaced. Pursuing a technology-rich project usually also requires finding funding for the project. Indeed, funders at all levels support tens of billions of dollars in technology purchases each year, but technology for its own sake is rarely if ever a sufficient justification for a grant. Moreover, so-called “shopping cart proposals” that request only technology without a compelling basis are destined for failure.

It’s important to keep in mind, then that your technology project isn’t just a technology project. If you look carefully, it can at once be a powerful indicator of an unmet (if not specifically documented) need in your organization and a solution to meet that need.

Most technology projects are intended to solve a deeper problem. If it weren’t for this problem, most budget-conscious administrators would be satisfied with the status quo.

The good news is that nearly every technology-based project can be articulated as a project to address a need or objective within your organization.

The technology itself may be a little mind boggling, but its purpose should be simple and easy to articulate. If it isn’t, it may help to get some perspective by talking to tech-savvy advisers you trust.

Large manufacturers usually also employ experts who understand both sides of this equation, and although you may not have had occasion to meet them, your salesperson should be able to put together an introductory conference call without too much hassle. Remember when you’re dealing with vendors that although their experts may be Ph.D.s in your field, their P.A.Y. comes from selling products. So, take what they give you with a healthy dash of skepticism, and try to verify it with an outside source.

In any case, once you have someone on the line, ask them what these technologies can do, and why customers choose them. Let them tell you about the potential of the technology and how it has been implemented in other agencies like yours. You may also be able to obtain a customer reference who you can call to further explore the practical side of the solution.

Keep in mind as you’re learning about all the great things the technology can do that your project will be limited by the context in which it is implemented. For example, sharing critical information on recent gang activity with other law enforcement agencies in your region is a great goal, but if you’re the only one who can transmit and receive the information, either your project needs to expand or it needs to be modified to ensure its useful to your agency in the here and now.
It may help to get some insight into what the original planners for the technology were thinking. Technology officials are notoriously reluctant to advocate for their ideas, and although they may not point to it in Board presentations and inter-office memos, there is usually a basis for their interest in undertaking a project.

In a passing conversation, for example, a teacher may have mentioned that they were having a problem with sharing a single computer workstation to maintain their attendance records. The IT team might then have decided that a new IP-based phone system would enable teachers to track student attendance right from their classroom phones. Furthermore, the phones could be used to report emergencies and provide instructions to teachers on a classroom-by-classroom basis.

Without more information, this type of project could seem like nothing more than a minimally fundable (and unnecessary) phone upgrade. Further investigation reveals the potential to transform and improve upon several key operations within the school.

**BEST CASE SCENARIO**

All of these other scenarios assume that you have to do some detective work to arrive at the fundable purpose for your technology project, but there is a way to avoid most of this forensic footwork - and it is the best way to develop a technology project. Don’t start with the technology at all! Rather, begin with your operational needs and mission objectives in mind. Look at where gaps exist between where you want to be in terms of service, quality, responsiveness, and regulatory compliance, and use those gaps to determine the best route forward. In today’s world, technology solves a wide range of operational issues, but you’ll have a much easier time justifying the cost and time required to implement it if you have documented the planning process that concluded with the need for a particular technology solution.

"YOUR TECHNOLOGY PROJECT ISN’T JUST A TECHNOLOGY PROJECT. IF YOU LOOK CAREFULLY, IT CAN AT ONCE BE A POWERFUL INDICATOR OF AN UNMET (IF NOT SPECIFICALLY DOCUMENTED) NEED IN YOUR ORGANIZATION AND A SOLUTION TO MEET THAT NEED."
HOW TO READ AN RFP

By Michael Paddock

Even if you've been successful at obtaining grants in the past, the prospect of poring over a federal or state grant guidance document may still rate right up there with oral surgery.

The good news though is that these large documents (often 100+ pages in length) actually follow a fairly consistent format, and with a few tips from Grants Office's reserve of hard-earned experience, you can approach new grant programs much more confidently.

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

Imagine you are the person responsible for writing a grant guidance document for a medium sized federal program. You have several stakeholders you will want to accommodate and a few parameters you'll have to meet.

First off, you'll need to follow the statutory requirements that are stated in the authorizing legislation and any directives that were included in the appropriation for that year.

Once you have all the legal bases covered, you'll need to articulate the program in a way that serves a number of stakeholders, including:

- **potential applicants** looking for a quick assessment of their eligibility
- **grant seekers who are familiar with the program** and want to know what’s changed from the prior year
- **grant seekers who are new to the program** and need to know enough to develop a compliant application on equal footing with everyone else
- **grant writers** who need to know what is required and how the grant will be evaluated
- **agency legal advisors** who want to ensure that the document references the legal requirements of the grant recipients and protects the agency from future liability
- **mid-level and junior agency staff** who need to be able to answer questions and speak intelligently about the program
- **senior agency executives** who interpret the statutory

APPROPRIATION VS. AUTHORIZING STATUTE: TIME FOR A LITTLE PUBLIC POLICY 101?

Federal grant programs are created in two parts. First, Congress creates the program by passing an authorizing statute. The authorizing statute defines the program’s intent, describes who is eligible to receive funds, restricts how the funds can be distributed, and explains any priorities for the use of funds. In some cases, the authorizing statute is buried in a larger piece of legislation (as the Homeland Security Grant Program was part of the larger PATRIOT ACT). Although the authorizing statute “authorizes” funding for the grant(s) it creates, the actual amount of funding that is made available from year to year is determined entirely by the federal appropriations process.

The appropriation for a program comes as part of the annual federal budgeting process. Funding for each grant program is included, either individually (a line item) or part of a larger amount, in one of the (usually 13) appropriations bills that make up the federal budget each year. Because it has to do with all the money the federal government spends, the appropriations process is rife with political wrangling.
requirements of the program and may add a few of their own

In the end, you’ll probably produce a document that looks very similar to other grants - not because you lack creativity, but the stakeholders in the process are best served by the tried and true format.

A TYPICAL FORMAT

For all these reasons, the typical grant guidance includes the following components, usually in this order:

SUMMARY INFORMATION

- A cover page with the program title, funding agency, Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number, program contact, and deadline
- Background on the priorities and legislative basis for the program
- A summary of the program parameters
- A summary of relevant changes from the prior year
- A checklist of what is required for a complete application

PROGRAM DETAILS

- Narrative guidance by section
- Scoring and proposal review information
- Further information on allowable uses of the funds
- Additional forms instructions
- Further reading bibliography

5 TIPS FOR DIGESTING AN RFP

1. **Read the summary information twice** before you read any further

2. **Use the proposal checklist** (not the table of contents) to guide your reading

3. **Re-read the scoring criteria until you know it well** - It may be the most valuable piece of intelligence in the document

4. **Take notes as you read** - there’s too much information to remember it all. Be sure to use a note taking format you can easily refer back to. Ideally, create the following headings first, then (rfp review pad) fill in your notes below each section:

   - Grant program title
   - Working project title
   - Deadline
   - Submission method
   - Project ideas
   - Forms
   - Program priorities
   - Program narrative
   - Budget
   - Potential collaborators
   - Next steps

5. **Develop your own presentation** based on the guidance document to present the program to colleagues and potential collaborators.

Pursuing grants takes resources - internal staff time at the least, and often outside grantwriting support and cost- sharing funds - but a thorough understanding of your potential funders based on the official guidance will help ensure you use these resources most efficiently and effectively.

Identity Crisis

Grant application guidance comes under many names:

- Request for Proposals (RFP)
- Request for Applications (RFA)
- Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)
- Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)

Don’t be confused by the alphabet soup – these are all common terms for Grant Guidance documents when they are issued by a grantmaking soliciting applications for a grant program!
“I am disappointed that instead of moving toward compromise and a truly balanced approach to tackling our economic and fiscal challenges, House Republicans decided to double down on the failed policies that the American people rejected just a few months ago.” ~ Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), commenting on the 2014 budget that passed the Republican-controlled House of Representatives on March 21, 2013.

“It never balances... We need to stop shielding government bureaucrats, which is what is hurting people. When Democrats raise taxes, they’re enriching that bureaucracy at the expense of the people.” ~ Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AK) commenting on the 2014 budget that passed the Democratic-controlled Senate on March 23, 2013.

“I think it is fair that we ask in this debate why we have been denied a chance to look at the president’s budget.” ~ Congressman Rob Woodall (R-GA) during comments made immediately following passage of the House budget bill.

May the finger-pointing and intense partisan rhetoric commence! Shortly after finally passing a continuing resolution to fund the government through the rest of fiscal year 2013 (which ends September 30th), both chambers of Congress went to work on a budget for 2014. Recent history suggests that having a federal budget in place by the start of the fiscal year is a long shot. The truth is that the federal government has not passed an actual budget bill, nevermind an on-time one, since April 2009. Instead, we have seen a long line of continuing resolutions, or temporary stopgap measures that extend funding in an effort to avoid government shutdowns. While these resolutions keep funds flowing, they wreak havoc on the ability of federal agencies to effectively plan their grant programming and financial obligations for the year. That uncertainty amongst federal agencies trickles all the way down to public and non-profit organizations that rely on federal grant funds to fund their programs and initiatives.

In 2013, the unknowns around sequestration exacerbated the overall uncertainty, as agencies held back on the release of their annual grant solicitations or released them with the caveat that applicants were taking a risk that the funds may not be appropriated. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that the 5% across the board sequestration cut that went into effect on March 1, 2013 stings. However, in some ways, at the least having it resolved shifts the landscape back to a status quo level of uncertainty that has become the new normal for federal agencies. As expected, with the continuing FY 2013 continuing budget resolution passed and sequestration in effect, we are beginning to see a flurry of activity around the release of traditional grant programs.

As we move through the second half of FY 2013, we can only hope that the politicians in Washington can push through partisan gridlock and give us a financial blueprint (for FY 2014) for the first time.
in four years. The rhetoric you hear from Senators like Patt Murray and Jeff Sessions (see quotes above) indicate that we are in for more of the same when it comes to passing a budget. Most would say that you can’t expect to do the same things and get different results.

But there may yet be hope for a change - at least in the order in which the budget is developed. In fact, the process that is unfolding for the 2014 budget is one that we have not witnessed for 100 years. Typically, the President submits a budget proposal to Congress in February. From there, each chamber of Congress uses that as a starting point and then develops and passes their respective versions of the bill. This is followed by a conference committee that attempts to resolve differences in Senate and House versions of the budgets. Of course, the President has to be a part of the compromise process as he/she has the choice to veto or sign the budget legislation.

This time around, Obama never proposed a budget and allowed both chambers of Congress to pass their own competing appropriations bills. On April 10, 2013, Obama submitted a budget proposal to Congress that he is positioning as a middle ground compared to liberal approach of the Senate and conservativeness of the House. One needs to look no further than the aforementioned quote by Congressman Woodall to realize that this approach is not sitting well with Republicans. It appears to be a savvy move by the Obama administration that may incite enough public pressure across the board to actually get a budget passed. When a President submits a budget as the first step in the process, it usually gets attacked from both sides of the political aisle. Those on the left would argue his budget is not liberal enough while those on the right would indicate the opposite. At the end of the day, when the conference committee fails to reach a compromise, all three institutions share in the blame when it comes to public opinion. Rather than simply kicking off the budget negotiations, this new strategy seeks to position Obama’s budget as a compromise package between the House and Senate. It includes some significant cuts to entitlement programs like Medicare and Social Security in exchange for additional revenues through caps and reforms in the tax code. Likewise, harking back to his State of the Union address, Obama’s proposal increases spending in the areas of infrastructure deployment, research and education. If these measures are ultimately included, that would be welcome news to grant-seekers. The calculated risk is that by presenting the President’s Budget as a post-facto compromise offer, the snipping from both sides will be somewhat muted in an effort to avoid negative backlash in the public opinion polls.

This all boils down to two intertwined questions that will be answered over the next several months. First, will this non-traditional approach buck recent history and result in a budget being passed? If so, does it result in a budget that includes some of Obama’s major priorities, such as targeted spending increases and tax reform? If the answer is yes to both, the federal appropriations cycle may be forever altered along with the President’s influence in the outcome. Organizations that rely on federal funding or people that make a living on it might have to ask the following question during the next presidential election: Is this candidate good for grants? Either way, if we can just get a budget passed, regardless of the details, the transparency and certainty would go a long way in helping federal agencies and grant-seekers plan their efforts.

This image is from the Funded May 2013 issue.
SUMMARY: The Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program is specifically designed to meet the educational and health care needs of rural America through the use of advanced telecommunications technologies. The DLT Grant Program is primarily focused on providing equipment that operates via telecommunications to rural end-users of telemedicine and distance learning. It is useful to keep in mind that while the equipment is eligible, it does not fund the telecommunications that connects that equipment. DLT does not fund communications links between sites (wireless or wire-line) and it does not fund telecommunications or Internet connections. Grants (and eligible matching funds) can be expended only for the costs associated with the initial capital assets associated with the project. The DLT program is legislatively authorized to provide three kinds of financial assistance: (a) 100% grant; (b) Combination Loan-Grant; and, (c) 100% Loan.

PROJECT PRIORITIES:

1. **Eligible equipment** such as:
   - Computer hardware and software
   - Audio and video equipment
   - Computer network components
   - Terminal equipment
   - Data terminal equipment
   - Interactive audio/video equipment
   - Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) or OEM authorized extended warranties on eligible equipment up to the 3 year life of the grant
   - Inside wiring

2. First-time acquisition (not renewal) of **instructional programming** that is a capital asset, including the purchase or lease of instructional programming already on the market

3. **Technical assistance and instruction** for using eligible equipment (TA&I), including any related software. The costs for this category cannot exceed 10% of the grant amount requested or 10% of the eligible matching funds calculated separately.

DEADLINE: The 2013 solicitation has not yet been released, but the 2013 deadline is expected to be in late May.

AWARD AMOUNTS: Awards typically range from $50,000 to $500,000.


ADVERTISEMENT: For updates on this and other high profile grant programs, subscribe to the Grants Intelligence Podcast at iTunes and check out our www.DLTGrants.info site!
Today, most grantseekers are familiar with the Federal Electronic Grants Clearinghouse, better known by its URL, Grants.gov. You may not know that when it was launched, the portal represented nearly ten years of work by federal officials, often volunteers working with no budget and extremely limited support.

Grants.gov serves as a single point of entry in federal grants, a repository of funding opportunities and guidance documents, and a portal wherein applications to many of the twenty-six federal grantmaking agencies can be developed, submitted, and monitored.

Officially, Grants.gov has its origins in the E-Grants Initiative, part of the President’s 2002 Fiscal Year Management Agenda to improve government services to the public. But the history of this tool extends well beyond the establishment of the Grants.gov Website.

Predictably, the first foray into electronic grants administration was undertaken by the university research community, beginning as early as 1986 with the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the new term “electronic research administration” (ERA). NSF and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) were instrumental in developing the early collection of standards and insight on the use of what were then called “electronic commerce” technologies in the grantmaking process.

Government-wide effort

A government-wide effort to put grants online began with Vice President Al Gore’s 1993 National Performance Review (NPR) and its operational derivative, the National Partnership for Reinventing Government. Based on the findings of the NPR and with the encouragement of the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (not to mention excitement surrounding the transformative potential of technology and the Internet), representatives from several of the (then) thirty-three federal grantmaking agencies came together to form the US Interagency Electronic Grants Committee (IAEGC). The Committee was led by members from the Office of Management and Budget (Jimmy Charney), Department of Transportation (J. Ann Fisher), Department of Education (Tony Cavataio), Office of Naval Research (Brad Stanford), Department of Health and Human Services (Beth Phillips), Department of Justice (Karen Evans), and National Institutes of Health (Paul Markovitz), among many others, including several state representatives from Illinois (Eric Brenner), Texas (Denise Francis), and New York (the author).

The stated goals of the IAEGC were to:

- Establish a comprehensive, one-stop, federal gateway for all electronic grants processing
- Coordinate a unified federal electronic grants policy
- Conduct outreach to establish the IAEGC as the recognized leader in electronic grants processing
- Improve management consistency and instill results oriented performance in all electronic grants activities

The Federal Commons

The committee eventually accomplished nearly all of its goals, beginning with the development of an early, far less integrated, version of the Grants.gov portal called the “Federal Commons,” after the English tradition of land that was made available for shared livestock grazing. Inasmuch as the Federal Commons was a first step at a truly “one-stop federal gateway,” it also revealed the difficulty of coordinating the grantmaking (or any) policies of thirty-three of the largest government agencies in the world.

The Federal Commons also revealed the need for standardization of the data that was used to administer grants across the agencies.
Propelled by legislation including the Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999 (PL 106-107) and the Government Paperwork Elimination Act, the committee continued to develop data standards for grant application and award and a Grants Data Dictionary for all grants transactions.

As time went on, the Federal Commons evolved into the more collaborative (and at last well-funded) Grants.gov portal, and the IAEGC evolved into the National Grants Partnership (NGP).

The Future

From 2004-2012, the NGP has grown in participation and impact, developing partnerships outside government, including several prominent nonprofit-focused grants and fundraising associations. However, the organization has not had a meeting in nearly a year. Its loosely organized, volunteer-driven legacy is partly to blame for its loss of momentum. But despite its recent drop off in activity, the entire grants community has benefitted from its work and the work of its predecessors, and there’s still much that can only be accomplished through a broad, national coalition such as the NGP provides, including:

- Further developing electronic grants standards across federal, state, and even private foundation grantmaking
- Simplifying the process of registering and submitting federal grant applications
- Standardizing the reporting and vouchering process across all grants
- Developing an effective training platform to empower and educate grantseekers
- Assisting in the development of technology to enable greater transparency in state grantmaking, particularly when redistributing federal funds

Membership in the NGP is free, and participation is encouraged, now more than ever. Visit www.thengp.org for more information.
UPCOMING WEBCAST EVENTS

• Funding Public Health and Prevention Efforts—Sponsored by Cisco
  May 21, 2013 at 2:00PM ET
  Register at www.healthitgrants.info/Webcasts.aspx

• Realizing the Potential of Promise Neighborhoods in Your Community—Sponsored by Cisco
  June 11, 2013 at 2:00PM ET
  Register at www.schoolitgrants.info/Webcasts.aspx

• Funding School Based Health Centers—Sponsored by Cisco
  July 23, 2013 at 2:00PM ET
  Register at www.healthitgrants.info/Webcasts.aspx

RECENT WEBCAST RECORDINGS

• Funding for Healthcare Preparedness Initiatives—Sponsored by Cisco
  Recorded April 9, 2013

• Getting the Most out of Your 2013 AFG Application—Sponsored by Cisco
  Recorded March 12, 2013

• 2013 Homeland Security Funding: Bringing IT Home—Sponsored by Cisco
  Recorded February 12, 2013

• Getting a Handle on 2013 Funding for Public Safety Initiatives—Sponsored by Cisco
  Recorded January 15, 2013

• 2013 and Beyond: A Forecast of Homeland Security and Public Safety Funding – Sponsored by IBM
  Recorded December 13, 2012

• Funding Educational Innovation—Sponsored by Cisco
  Recorded December 11, 2012

These and other recordings are available for playback or download at http://www.grantsoffice.info/Webcasts.aspx