FUNDED

BEYOND THE BASICS OF AFG

POLITICS AND PROGRAMS: WHY THE NEXT SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE MATTERS

TECHHIRE: THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN JOBS?

CONTENTS

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- -New FUNDED issue notices

6

17

ON THE COVER
The Assistance to Firefighters Grant will be opening soon! Peek inside to see our veteran Grants Development Consultant's tips for putting together a winning proposal. (Photo: Thinkstock/Photodisc)

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

As fall comes to a close and much of the world prepares itself for the impending months of another undoubtedly (especially here in Upstate New York) brutal winter, there appears a single glimmer of hope, a North Star of funding if you will, that is AFG.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grants program is often the staple of funding for fire departments all over the country, hence its competitive nature. In this issue of FUNDED our resident AFG expert, Dan Casion takes us through not only grant writing basics (Page 4), but also "Beyond the Basics" (Page 18) to help you and your department make the most of your AFG proposal.

AFG isn't the only constant of fall in the United States, a battle over the federal budget now seems to be an annual affair. Expanding on his coverage of the budget battle from our last issue, Chris LaPage delves deeper into the impact the federal budget, including sequestration (Page 15), and the surprising retirement of Speaker of the House John Boehner has on grant programs.

Although the constant partisan disagreement over the federal budget can be discouraging, America remains a land of opportunity and the TechHire Initiative is a perfect example. Elizabeth Evans investigates the new program designed to bring high paying IT jobs to those groups, including minorities and women among others, previously edged out of such programs.

While winter can often seem like an abyss for those of us above the Mason-Dixon line, the numerous opportunities for funding remain a bright spot of warmth as we move steadily on towards the new year.

As always, if you have any questions, comments, or topics you would be interested in seeing in future issues, feel free to email me at ksleeman@grantsoffice.com

Sincerely,
Kirsten Sleeman
Editor, FUNDED

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GETTING IN THE GAME: TIPS FOR FIRST TIME GRANSEEKERS

BY DAN CASION

Throughout my near decade of grants consulting, I've had the opportunity to speak with thousands of organizations, many of which were having their first conversation about grants. In most cases, the people I spoke with were either new to their position, their organization didn't typically apply to grants, or they knew that their organization received grants, but they weren't historically part of the process. For whatever reason, there are some strategies and tips I'd like to offer those folks who are new to the process.

You must start by understanding your organization's approach to grants. Is there a single department or person that is tasked with grants (centralized)? Or, perhaps, there's a decentralized approach where individual departments are expected to apply for grants as their needs dictate.

In the case that there's a touch point for grants, you'll want to make contact with that person. It's important to understand your organization's grants history, what your organization's policy for applying to grants is, and what you, as an interested grant seeker, have to do to initiate the process.

If your organization is lucky enough to have a "grant writer" or grant department they will be crucial in your grant seeking endeavor. Keep in mind that these individuals aren't magicians. They can't simply pull a grant out of their hat that will be the "silver bullet" of funding for your project, nor can

> *"If your organization is lucky enough to have a… 'grant writer'….keep in mind that these individuals aren't magicians. They can't simply pull a grant out of their hat that will be the 'silver bullet of funding' for your project…"*

they "make up" a project out of thin air, so it's important to work closely with them throughout the process.

You will need to work with the grants team to identify what grant program(s) are available to fund your project.

Most grant professionals are well versed in where to find grants information, however, for those of you who may not have access to grants support there are numerous resources for information.

Some examples of sites where information can be obtained are grants.gov, the Foundation Center, and on your state's website.

There are a number of factors you need to contemplate when considering what grant(s) are worth pursuing including: Eligibility, total amount of funding available vs. number of anticipated awardees (competitiveness), application burden (time needed to prepare the application), and award ceilings and floors (the minimum and maximum amount you can apply for).

If your organization is new to grants, it may be worthwhile to pursue smaller opportunities at the local, foundation, or state level first, rather than ambitiously gunning for complex applications from federal funders such as the National Science Foundation.

These smaller efforts will help you gain much needed experience which will allow you to build up to larger, more financially lucrative grant opportunities at the federal level.

Grant identification is merely the first stage, next comes the actual development of the proposal. You'll need to provide, at the very least, an idea of why you're seeking funding and what the funding will be used for. Is it equipment, staff, or general operating expenses? The grant professionals within your organization will need to know that information, as well as key staff involved with the implementation of the project, a project timeline, and a preliminary budget.

The more information you can provide your grants staff, the more complete, accurate, and competitive your proposal will be.

Whether you have internal grants support (centralized) or a decentralized grants process, you can utilize these strategies as you navigate the grants landscape either on your own or with the help of an outside grants consultant.

A quick note to those organizations with a decentralized process – it is highly advisable to explore the possibility of employing a more formal, centralized process. Having this type of process will ensure that projects are triaged in order of importance, receive necessary executive support, and grant seeking efforts aren't duplicated.

It isn't a particularly time consuming or difficult task to employ a more centralized process, it simply takes some effort to determine what process work for your organization, to document said process, and, most importantly, stick to that process.

If you are tasked with writing proposals, but don't have any internal support and are looking to acquire grant writing skills, I would suggest perusing earlier issues of FUNDED which contain tips for grant writers. I would also point to the Grant Professionals Association (GPA) which is focused solely on the advancement of grantsmanship as a profession and the support of its practitioners and their educational resources are nearly endless. They can also help you find qualified consultants if you don't have the time or will to develop proposals yourself.

Writing grant proposals may seem a daunting task, however, with a little preparation and effort you may come to find that grant writing isn't as intimidating as it seems.

With all the funding opportunities available for just about any project imaginable, mastering grant writing, whether with internal support or on your own, will benefit you and your organization well into the future

Funding to Help You Do More with the Data You're Collecting

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Want to hear more tips about grant writing? Tune into our next Grantscast on 11/17 for free information on grant programs. Register by clicking the image above. (Photo: Thinkstock/ artolympic)

TECHHIRE INITIATIVE

SUMMARY: The TechHire Initiative will support innovative approaches to training and successfully employing low-skill individuals with barriers to training and employment in technology and other in-demand fields.

Target populations served by projects include those with child care responsibilities, people with disabilities, disconnected youth, and limited English proficient workers, among others.

This grant competition will support the scaling up of evidence-based strategies such as accelerated learning, work-based learning, and Registered Apprenticeships.

Grants will pilot and scale innovative partnerships between employers, workforce boards, training institutions, non-profit organizations, and cities and states across the country. These partnerships will support the implementation of job-driven training strategies for well-paying information technology and high growth jobs in industries like healthcare, advanced manufacturing, financial services and other in-demand sectors.

Successful partnerships will include:
- Using data and innovative hiring practices to expand openness to non-traditional hiring
- Expanding models for training that prepare students in months, not years
- Active local leadership to connect people to jobs with hiring on ramp programs

NEXT DEADLINE: Official program guidance is expected to be released in late fall 2015. A winter 2016 deadline is anticipated.

TechHire aims to open the employee base for IT jobs to those who have been typically excluded. (Photo: Thinkstock/Ryan McVay)

ELIGIBILITY: Eligible applicants are U.S. cities.

AWARD AMOUNTS: Approximately $100,000,000 from H-1B funds is anticipated to be available in FY16.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/technology/techhire

TECHHIRE: THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN JOBS?

BY ELIZABETH EVANS

In March, President Obama announced plans for a new, multi-sector workforce development program known as the "TechHire Initiative."

According to the President the Department of Labor planned to dedicate $100 million (collected from H-1B visa fees) towards a new competitive grant competition.

Its aim? Promoting the comeback of an ever shrinking middle class through training and education programs that would enable Americans to earn higher wages.

At the time of the President's notice, more than half a million jobs laid vacant, specifically within Information Technology (IT) career pathways. Software development, network administration, and cybersecurity were just a few of the fields mentioned that currently have a higher demand for staffing than there are trained workers to fill positions.

Moreover, regardless of sector (manufacturing, retail, advertising, banking), the average salary for a job requiring IT skills is 50% higher than the average private-sector job. That's where the TechHire Initiative comes in.

Simply put, the main goal of TechHire is to create pathways to better,

Grant Programs such as TechHire encourage innovative training and hiring practices to make high paying and high demand IT jobs available to more Americans. (Photo: https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/technology/techhire)

higher paying technology jobs in order to meet the urgent demands of IT employers across the nation.

Specifically, TechHire grants will support innovative approaches to IT training as well as the successful employment of Americans in technology and other in-demand jobs.

Considering that many of these high-demand positions do not require a 4-year collegiate degree, TechHire certainly focuses much funding on training. Specifically, TechHire will fund projects that empower individuals to cultivate the skills they need through both traditional and non-traditional settings.

"Target populations for projects are expected to include those low-skill individuals who most often face barriers to training and employment in IT and related fields."

Be it in-brick courses at a University or College, high-quality online courses, or even "coding bootcamps" – initiatives that seek to rapidly train workers in a matter of months, rather than years, are likely to be viewed favorably.

Target populations for projects are expected to include those low-skill individuals who most often face barriers to training and employment in IT and related fields. This includes individuals with child care responsibilities, persons with disabilities, disconnected youths, and limited English proficient workers.

To empower these individuals with the job skills they will need, TechHire will focus on funding projects that involve multi-sector collaborations.

TechHire will likely be interested in partnerships between employers, workforce boards, training institutions, non-profit organizations, and/or cities and states across the country.

Further, the Department of Labor has already provided us with a hint of what a successful partnership will look like. The qualities of successful partnerships include: Using data and innovative hiring practices to expand openness to non-traditional hiring programs; expanding models for training that rapidly prepare participants for hire in a matter of months; and active local leadership wherein partnerships are fostered and local tech community gatherings are hosted to engage employers and training providers and to bring visibility to current efforts.

So, as fall arrives the weather has grown colder and the leaves have started to change their colors, but what about TechHire?

Well, we're still waiting, and that's okay, there are a few actions you can take in the mean time:

- Take advantage of this time to foster and strengthen your partnerships.
- Clearly assess what the workforce development needs are within your community.
- Brainstorm some solutions to common hiring and training issues.
- Take a look at what the 21 communities who have already committed to taking action are doing as well (https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/technology/techhire).
- Finally, and most importantly, keep checking www.grants.gov too see when this opportunity's guidance is officially released!

TechHire has the potential to change who and how we hire for IT positions in the 21st century. And really, what's more American than inclusion and innovation?

POLITICS AND PROGRAMS: WHY THE NEXT SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE MATTERS

BY CHRIS LAPAGE

"*Last night I started thinking about this, and I woke up. I said my prayers as I always do, and I decided, you know, today's the day I'm going to do this. As simple as that,*" John Boehner, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives

On September 25, 2015, Congressman John Boehner announced he would be vacating the Speakership and retiring from Congress. With those thirty-six mostly innocuous words, John Boehner set in motion a chain of events that shocked political pundits and the public alike.

However, Speaker Boehner's resignation was not surprising in itself, the writing had been on the wall.

Shock followed when his chief deputy, who was widely assumed to become the next Speaker, withdrew himself from consideration two weeks later.

Last month's column ([Groundhog Day](#)) was premised on the assumption that major political players in Washington would remain unchanged. The conclusion being that we have seen this budget battle before and we can almost certainly predict how the 2016 budget fight would end.

This development has the potential to not only disrupt, but turn those conclusions on their head.

By the time you read this article, Congressman Paul Ryan from Wisconsin may very well be the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives.

Paul Ryan is a known commodity as the current Chairman of the powerful House Committee on Ways and Means (which handles all appropriation matters
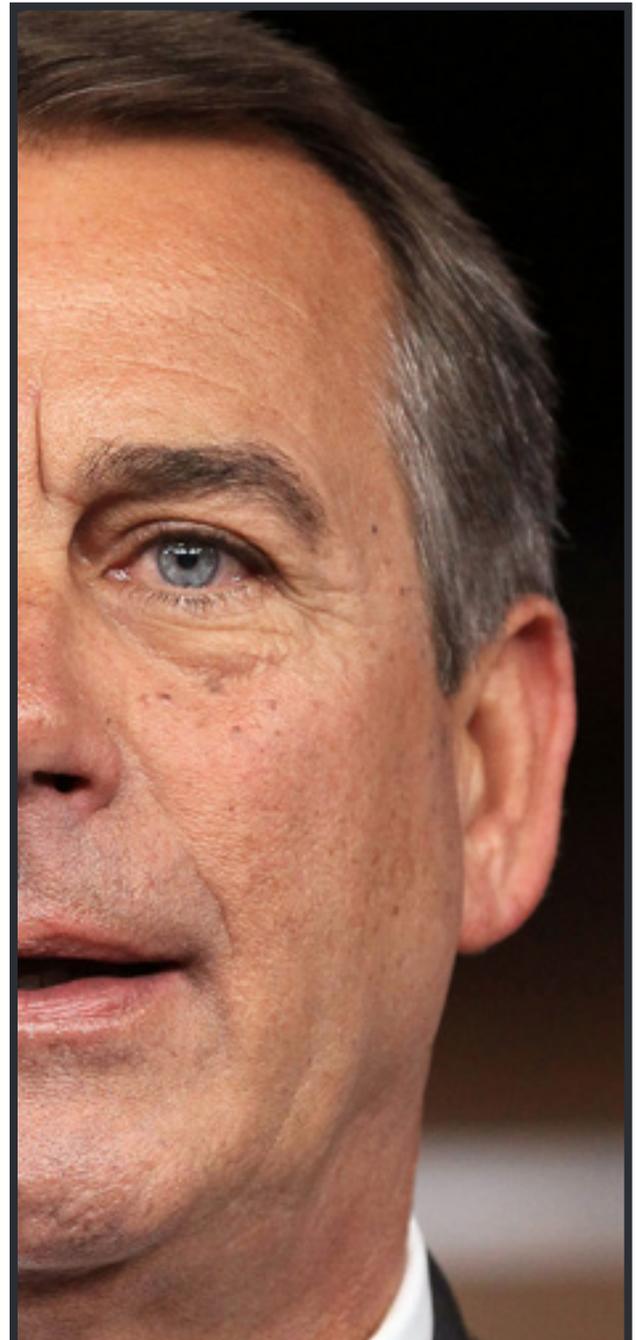
Speaker Boehner often compromised with Democrats throughout his tenure, an act that will be vital for any future Speaker's success. (Photo: Thinkstock/Mark Wilson)

of the federal government) and a former candidate for Vice President of the United States in 2012.

Ryan is a fiscally conservative policy wonk that believes in a balanced budget that includes major reforms to many entitlement programs, such as Social Security and Medicare.

Knowing where Ryan stands on substantive policy issues goes a long way in attempting to predict upcoming political battles.

For instance, many conservatives in the House want to extract concessions from President Obama and Democrats on spending and Planned Parenthood in order to raise the debt ceiling.

If Congress does not act sometime around November 3rd, the U.S. government will not be able to pay its bills for programs and services that were already authorized in previous budgets.

"If Congress does not act sometime around November 3rd, the U.S. government will not be able to pay its bills for programs and services that were already authorized in previous budgets."

This would include important grant programs that ensure low-income children receive a quality education and law enforcement has the resources it needs to maintain public safety.

While Ryan will need to maneuver carefully to avoid the fate of John Boehner, given his position on fiscal policy, he is unlikely to put the creditworthiness of the United States in serious jeopardy.

This means the bulk of bargaining will likely happen around the 2016 budget, which must be addressed by December.

It's not only Ryan's policy positions that will impact the 2016 budget battle, but his leadership approach and style as well.

Historically, the U.S. Constitution and its rules governing the House have made the role of Speaker an immensely powerful position. The Speaker essentially dictates a top-down approach, solely determining the agenda for consideration of motions and legislative votes.

In other words, a bill that has support from 434 (note: there are 435 representatives in the House) members in the House will not be acted on if the Speaker so chooses.

A Speaker can unilaterally put their foot down on certain matters and even prevent a budget from being passed, creating the accompanying uncertainty for grant programming.

Some Speakers have embraced the leadership philosophy of former Speaker Dennis Hastert, who implemented the "majority of the majority" rule. This requires a majority of the political party in control of the chamber (currently Republicans) to be in favor of a proposal before it can reach a vote in the House.

However, the United States would not have reached budget compromises in the past three fiscal years had John Boehner used the same approach, as he often relied on Democrats to pass certain pieces of required legislation.

Paul Ryan has a vision for a united Republican Party, and he ultimately must navigate the same fractious Republican Caucus that is sending John Boehner into retirement. If he cannot achieve this goal, we may see more government shutdowns and a budget that is not settled until the spring.

Likewise, we will likely see long delays in the release of grant programs and potentially severe cuts when a budget is

finally passed.

Ryan's views on fiscal policy paints a picture of someone who is interested in a long-term plan.

Additional review of his role in previous budget accords unveils a politician who understands the importance of compromise, especially considering the potential of a Democratic filibuster in the Senate and with Obama maintaining Veto power as President.

This development may mean another extension is required come December to work out a long-term budget. However, it most likely indicates that we will have some certainty around the budget sooner rather than later.

The projected timeline for a 2016 budget and its impact on grant programs laid out in last month's column remains unchanged.

This may lead some to inappropriately conclude that the role of the Speaker is irrelevant. On the contrary, Paul Ryan's assumed ascent to the Speakership is a critical reason why we are still likely to see a budget compromise ahead of the New Year.

With the surprise retirement of Speaker of the House John Boehner, it appears that Paul Ryan is the likely successor to the Speakership, an important role that will undoubtedly have an effect on this years grant programs. (Photo: http://www.speaker.gov)

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS PROGRAM (SIP)

SUMMARY: The Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) provides grants to eligible institutions of higher education (IHEs) to help them become self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the institution's academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability.

The Competitive Preference Priority for this program is "Supporting Strategies for which there is Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness" -- Projects that propose a process, product, strategy, or practice supported by moderate evidence of effectiveness. To qualify as moderate evidence of effectiveness, among other things, a study's evaluation design must meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Evidence Standards. Applicants seeking to address this competitive preference priority should identify a minimum of one up to a maximum of two studies that support their proposed project and meet the definition of ''moderate evidence of effectiveness.'

Funds may be used for planning, faculty development, and establishing endowment funds. Administrative management, and the development and improvement of academic programs also are supported. Other projects include joint use of instructional facilities, construction and maintenance, and student service programs designed to improve academic success, including innovative, customized, instruction courses designed to help retain students and move the students rapidly into core courses and through program completion, which may include remedial education and English language instruction.

NEXT DEADLINE: The 2016 competition is anticipated to fund down the slait of 2015 applicants. The anticipated deadline is June 2016.

ELIGIBILITY:
Institutions of Higher Education who meet the following criteria:
• be accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association
• be legally authorized by the State to be a junior college or provide an educational program for which it awards a bachelor's degree
• have at least 50% of its degree students who receive need-based assistance or a substantial number of enrolled students who receive Pell Grants
• have low educational expenditures

AWARD AMOUNTS: In 2015 $17,197,309 was available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/iduestitle3a/index.html

REQUEST DESIGNATION AS AN ELIGIBLE TITLE III OR TITLE V INSTITUTION BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

BY ELIZABETH EVANS

Hey readers from Higher Education Institutions! Yes, you! November is here and do you know what that means? It's almost time for your institution to submit its request for designation as an eligible Title III or Title V school.

You may recall that last year the Department of Education deviated from the norm, opting for a November 3rd, 2014 release and December 22nd, 2014 deadline rather than its usual springtime release. Based on that shift, prudent grant administrators are probably already getting their materials together in anticipation of the 2015 deadline. Why not join their ranks?

Requesting designation as a Title III or Title V eligible institution is the gateway to several competitive higher education grant opportunities from the Department of Education.

> *"…Colleges are Universities must reapply for designation…each year, so if your institution is already receiving grant funding…you won't want to miss reconfirming your eligibility."*

Generally speaking, these funds are provided to eligible institutions to increase their self-sufficiency by improving academic programs, institutional management, and fiscal stability. Given the broad nature of priorities funds they are highly desirable as a means to implement or expand new programs or services. Further, colleges and universities must reapply for designation as a Title III or Title V eligible institution each year, so if your institution is already receiving grant funding for a Title III or Title V supported program you won't want to miss reconfirming your eligibility.

Principally, those competitive grant funds that fall under Title III and Title V of the Higher Education Act include:

- Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP),
- Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (ANNH),
- Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI), Native American-Serving Non tribal Institutions (NASNTI),
- Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI),
- Hispanic-Serving Institutions STEM and Articulation (HSI STEM and Articulation),
- Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI),
- Promoting Post-baccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA), etc.

These grants all have a two-step application process. First, an institution must apply for eligibility (we anticipate a December deadline provided the opportunity is released by early November as it was in 2014). Second, if the institution is approved for either Title III or Title V funding eligibility, they may then apply to the aforementioned grant competitions when the specific competition is announced.

Now, you may be wondering, "What

kind of information will you need to start pulling together in anticipation of this application for designation?" Luckily, not much.

So long as there are no extenuating circumstances and your institution isn't requesting a waiver of one of the requirements, the application process takes on a "plug and chug" approach. Meaning, you fill in your institution's data, check the correct boxes, and select the appropriate options from the drop down boxes.

Below is a snapshot of the information you'll need to have on hand when starting your request:

- Total institutional enrollment
- Total minority enrollment
- Number of domestic undergraduate degree students
- Number of domestic graduate degree students
- Unduplicated student head count of degree students receiving Title I need-based assistance (e.g. Pell Grants, Work Study, Perkins Loan, or Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants).
- Total Core Expenses (e.g. expenses for instruction, research, public service, academic support, student services, institutional support, operation and maintenance of plant, depreciation, scholarships and fellowships, interest and other operating and non-operating expenses)
- Average Core Expenses per Full Time Enrolled Student

Please note that the above list is by no means exhaustive, but merely a place to start. Once the official notice requesting applications for designation as a Title III or Title V eligible institution is released, additional details may be required of applicants. Best of luck!

For more information on last year's cycle, and updates for 2015, see: http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/idues/eligibility.html#tl

Requesting designation as a Title III or Title V institution can open your University to funding opportunities that wouldn't be accessible otherwise. So, whether you are already designated or hope to be soon, make sure to confirm your eligibility! (Photo: Thinkstock/SimmiSimons)

SAYONARA SEQUESTRATION?

BY CHRIS LAPAGE

If the rumors hold true, 2016 could be a banner year for federal spending and funding levels for popular grant programs.

Remember the budget sequestration process in 2013 ([See May 2013 "A Look at How the 2014 Budget Battle Impacts Grants"](#))? Congress and President Obama agreed to institute 5% across-the-board cuts across all government spending, including defense.

The sequestration directly reduced funding levels for almost all federal grant programs. Furthermore, these spending cuts were not limited to a single fiscal year as automatic spending caps were established through 2021.

The idea was that these sequestration cuts would not be palatable long-term to both Democrats and Republicans alike, and would provide an incentive for compromise down the road.

Why does sequestration matter now?

Flash forward to November 2015 and there is optimism in Washington as the White House and Congress have tentatively agreed to a two-year budget framework that will authorize spending levels through 2017. The goal would be to allow the federal government to return to a normal appropriations schedule next year, which is expected to begin in the spring.

The compromise budget package would raise government spending levels by $80 billion (above the sequestration cap established in 2013) over the next two fiscal years, evenly divided between defense and domestic programs.

The bulk of popular grant programs are funded out of the domestic budget, which is expected to rise $25 billion in 2016 and $15 billion in 2017.

If this package of legislation is

For the past few years the budget sequestration put forth in 2013 has kept government spending lower than usual. However, we may see an increase in spending after the newest Congressional budget deal. (Photo: Thinkstock/ClubhouseArts)

passed, there is expected to be more money on the table for grant programs. This will allow federal grantmaking agencies to raise award ceilings for individual applicants, increase the number of grants made, or both.

Should we pop the champaign bottles?

There are numerous reasons to delay any release of confetti and celebration, as tempting as it may seem.

First and foremost, this is merely a tentative deal that was negotiated behind closed doors in secret amongst top leaders in the House, Senate, and White House. This package must still garner support from a plurality of House Members and avoid a filibuster in the Senate that has the potential block the legislation.

Additionally, the House is undergoing a change in leadership (see Between the Lines Column: "Politics and Programs: Why the Next Speaker of the House Matters When It Comes to Grants" printed earlier in this issue) that was largely precipitated by a contingent of the Republican Caucus that yearns for a more bottom-up approach to setting the legislative agenda.

It is safe to assume that this contingent will not be pleased about the top-down nature of the negotiations that lead to this deal.

Even if the legislation passes, most likely due to substantial support from Democrats in the House, this is merely a budget framework.

In other words, it authorizes spending levels, but will still require the various Appropriation Committees in Congress to develop and pass appropriation bills.

Many programs are authorized through legislation, authorization that is irrelevant until appropriations are made. When appropriations are made, they may exceed or fall short of authorized spending levels. Thus, even if this deal passes, there may be protracted fights within the actual appropriations process that will follow.

Finally, this would be a two-year framework. Unless subsequent legislation is passed, the sequestration caps will still be in effect for 2018 through 2021. In that sense, this compromise budget package does not provide the finality that is required to say "Sayonara Sequestration". In fact, "See you later" is more accurate.
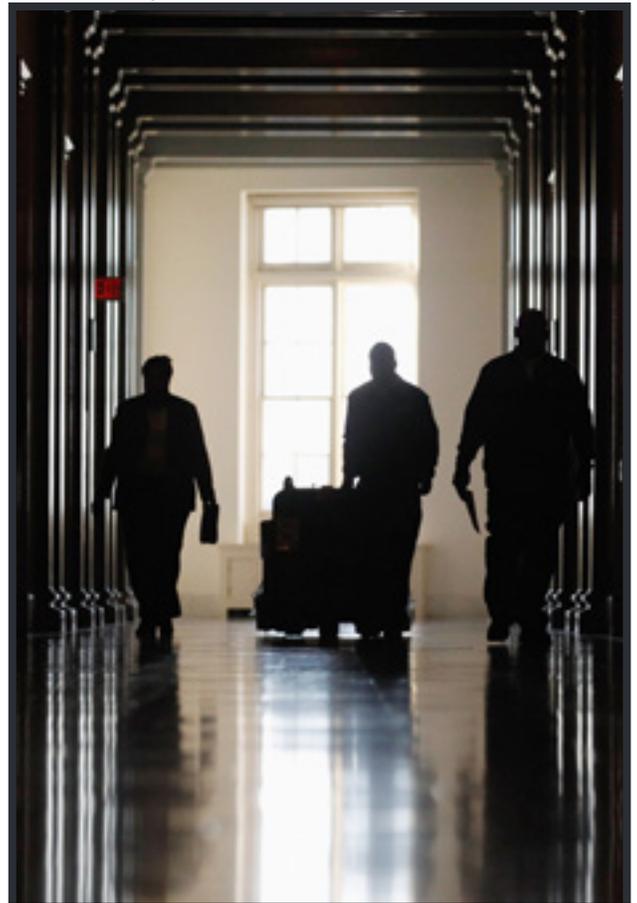
Federal budgets tend to come about after quite a fight and while the newest budget deal seems promising for grant funding, it's important to keep in mind that it is, technically, only tentative. (Photo: Think-stock/Chip Somodevilla)

ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANTS (AFG)

SUMMARY: The purpose of AFG is to enhance through financial assistance the safety of the public and firefighters regarding fire and fire-related hazards. The objective of the AFG is to award grants directly to fire departments and EMS organizations that are unaffiliated with a hospital to enhance their ability to protect the health and safety of the public, as well as that of first-responder personnel.

There are three categories of eligible applications:
- <u>Operations and safety</u> - The five fundable activities included in this program are: (a) firefighter training, (b) firefighter equipment, (c) firefighter personal protective equipment (PPE), (d) firefighter wellness and fitness, (e) modifications to fire stations and facilities.
- <u>Vehicles</u> - New, custom, or stock AFG Program-compliant Vehicles are eligible for funding.
- <u>Regional</u> - Any eligible entity may act as a "host" applicant and apply for large-scale projects on behalf of itself and any number of other local AFG eligible organizations that will be participating partners in the award. Joint/Regional projects should achieve greater cost effectiveness and regional efficiency and resilience. If an applicant wishes to submit a Joint/Regional application, they should select the "Regional" radio button when filling out the application. For the purpose of this document and the AFG Application, the term "Regional" will serve the same meaning as "Joint/Regional."

NEXT DEADLINE: The 2014 deadline was December 5, 2014. Similar deadlines are expected for 2015.

ELIGIBILITY:
Eligible applicants include fire departments and non-affiliated EMS organizations operating in:
- any of the 50 states
- the District of Columbia
- a U.S. territory
- any federally recognized Native American tribe or authorized tribal organization
- an Alaskan native village, Alaska Regional Native Corporation, or the Alaska Village Initiatives
- any State Fire Training Academy operating in any of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, or a U.S. territory

AWARD AMOUNTS: In 2014 $304,503,764 was available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: http://www.fema.gov/assistance-firefighters-grant

BEYOND THE BASICS OF AFG

BY DAN CASION

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) should be released any day now and it's time to start thinking about your application for this year.

In a previous issue of FUNDED I covered the basics of AFG, so if you're unfamiliar with this funding opportunity, you may want to refer back to the aforementioned article before proceeding.

In this issue we will focus on best practices and tactics for making your department's application more competitive.

First, you'll want to ready the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) as soon as it becomes available. The NOFO contains valuable information and tools for constructing a compliant and competitive application.

Failure to follow the directions in the NOFO could result in a less competitive, and possibly incomplete application that doesn't make it to the review stage.

Also, take the opportunity to attend an AFG Workshop or Webinar, these sessions provide tremendous insight beyond what the NOFO offers and provides attendees with vital instruction.

Next, think about the project(s) and needs you're looking to have funded through the program.

If possible, it's advisable to conduct a Risk Assessment to determine the needs of your department.

Take the projects and match them with the fund-

AFG is open and Grants Office is here to help! Follow these tips to increase your chances of winning funding, or just contact us. (Photo: Thinkstock/Ingram Publishing)

ing priorities in the NOFO. Funding priorities are: High (H) Medium (M) and Low (L).

Only focus on those one or two projects that are high priority, since AFG is intended to address the most pressing needs of fire departments and the program office receives far more requests for funding than it has to award.

Gather as much information as possible in advance. The application calls for quite a bit of information and it can be time consuming to assemble, as it requires departmental, financial, equipment/vehicle, and regional information.

You can begin advanced preparation by accessing the 2015 AFG Grant Application Get Ready Guide in the FY 2015 Application Assistance Tools: https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/110252 .

Often time vendors will provide applicants narrative templates. I suggest avoiding these at all costs.

Narrative templates typically don't reflect what's happening at your department and they usually don't offer the kind of customized information that re-

viewers are looking for.

It may be tempting to utilize such a template, however, it's not worth jeopardizing your department's opportunity to have its important project funded.

Grants Office always suggests having your proposal reviewed and edited by at least one or, ideally, two people.

Having someone who's not involved in the development of the proposal edit and review the proposal with a "fresh set

"If you're concerned that you lack the time or ability to write an AFG proposal, feel free to reach out to us...we'd be happy to discuss how we may be able to help..."

of eyes" ensures that you haven't missed any details and/or written a confusing/misleading narrative.

Since the funding period for AFG is one year, it's vital to ensure that your project, likewise, can be completed within that one year time frame.

Also, be sure to confirm that your department can meet the matching requirements. The aforementioned FY 2015 Application Assistance Tools link contains a Cost Share Calculator that can help

you figure out exactly what your matching requirement will be.

If you haven't, confirm that you have the support of your department's executives and local governmental leaders.

If you don't have this support there's a chance you may not be able to meet the match requirement and/or will not be authorized to submit the application.

I'd suggest solidifying this support as soon as possible and before constructing your application. There's nothing more frustrating than putting all this time and effort into an application, only to not have it submitted.

If you're concerned that you lack the time or ability to write an AFG proposal, feel free to reach out to us at Grants Office. We'd be happy to discuss how we may be able to help you in your quest for AFG funding.

Whether you're doing it yourself or with the help of others, now's the time get moving on this opportunity, the more time you have to spend on your application, the more competitive it will be!

GRANTSCAST EVENTS

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