Grant Professionals Association

Oregon and SW Washington Chapter

Notes from Chapter Meeting 5/18/22

Program: So You're Writing Gov't Grants - Now What?
Have you been applying for more government grants lately? Or are you new to the world of government grants? Or wondering how different they are from private foundation grants? Join us to hear from several colleagues with experience in government grants, as well as time for conversation and questions on this topic.

Tips and Tricks gained over time working on government grants

1. **What are key things to know about the application process for government grants, and what are some tips and tricks for navigating the process? (Susy Lacer)**

   ● All information is public records because these are gov funds (Public notices, scoring criteria, is public).

   ● Feds will solicit public input, when putting together a program/grant request.

   ● Processes cannot discriminate and must be transparent because using public funds – webinars, training, etc.

   ● Public servant will help with the application. Don't hesitate to ask questions or ask for help.

   ● Many forms are required – some may seem redundant or irrelevant. Look to see what is required and do this first to make sure all forms are completed ahead of the due date.

   ● Often, grants are on a cycle, so if org is not ready, they may be able to apply at the next cycle.

   ● Take time with training and tutorials offered. Application process or portal may be different based on which program you are applying for.

   ● Sign-up for updates, for program updates during application window, and funding announcement – find email links in application.

   ● If you have the ability and if there is a regional or local representative, reach out to them as those folks can help. Make those connections ahead of time.

   ● Some Federal funds, like NSF, have proposal development mentoring programs for certain funding like NSF ATE

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Follow-up questions:

What has helped your grant stand out when it's a competitive process?
Look at the criteria. Don't try to make your program fit to the grant, if it's not a competitive project, save your time. Write your application to the scoring criteria.

How much do you involve program staff in initially reviewing the RFPQ?
To be competitive, involve as many people as possible, as early as possible.

> Tip: Write a summary of the proposal (1-2 pages) core of the opportunity, which can be helpful. Then send out to those directly involved.

> Tip: Review and try to find pieces where your agency may not be eligible and highlight these early on.

What is the timeframe to complete an RFP?
Varies with the program, give yourself at least one month, and more likely 2-3 months. If an org has not done the work before to plan the program, they may not be competitive.

2. **What are key actions to take to be ready for government grants? (Deborah Steinkopf)**

Review the following with an agency before applying for government grants:

1. Basic infrastructure
   - Is your 501c3 secure, (rather than fiscal sponsor), 990 filings up-to-date, and any other filings with the state
   - Be current with all registrations
     - SAM (systems for award management), identify point of contact, designate an ebusiness point of contact (has to be a different person). May take 5 days to renew registration with SAM.
     - grants.gov
     - Justgrants
   - Have current personnel procedures, affirmative action policy, etc. in place
   - Have adequate insurance coverage in place
   - Have updated job descriptions on file, especially for those that will be included in the grant.

2. Governance
   - Orgs should have an active board that is compliant with bylaws.
   - Have a Conflict of Interest policy in place
   - Have a Whistleblower policy in place
   - Have defined process for setting executive compensation (procedure document)
   - Make sure your board composition reflects in part the community you serve.
3. Program Capacity
   - Do you have documentation that your approach meets community needs?
   - Are you using emerging practices or best practices?
   - Do you have adequate staff to cover the program or do you plan to staff up?
   - Do you have policies and procedures in place (to cite in application)?
   - Have a system for tracking service usage, client demographic, and program outcomes
4. Financial Capacity
   - Annual budget that shows functional breakdown of expenses (program, admin, fundraising)
   - Does your org follow generally accepted accounting principles?
   - Written fiscal policies and procedures in place (feds want to make sure you will be able to manage award)
   - Accounting system to track restricted funds from fed or gov grant
   - Can your org meet any requirement with matching funds? (Some may be up to 50% from total project cost)
5. Community engagement
   - System in place to document community needs
   - Systems in place to show how you involve community
   - Partnerships in place, to describe roles and responsibilities of partners. You may need to upload Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
   - Think strategically about who you want to be part of the conversation and invite them early on in the process

**You may have to submit pieces of the application to different portals. Make sure to check all the dates and where forms need to be submitted and by what time. Dates may vary.

3. **What is uniform guidance, and what are the key requirements people should know about when considering a federal grant? (Melinda Stoops)**

- Uniform Guidance: Set of rules and requirements for orgs applying and receiving awards.
  - https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sfs/managingawards/guidance
  - https://www.grants.gov/learn-grants/grant-policies/omb-uniform-guidance-2014.html

- Subparts A-F: cover things like requirements for when you apply, after you apply, what you can spend the money on, audits required, also requirement for public agencies

- Appendices 1-7: specific to type of organization such as what you can spend money on (cost), indirect cost (finance and admin), covers orgs that are exempt, some hospital specific guidance, and integrity on performance

- Symbol of SS and then followed by number 200.., refers to a subsection of the uniform guidance. Can type it in, google it, and go directly to that uniform guidance.

- Unless explicitly stated somewhere, grant, cooperative agreement, any award you receive from the federal gov you have to follow uniform guidance. Whether it is $1 or $1million.

- Other Support: specific to NIH.

- Uniform guidance states the requirements but does not tell you exactly how to meet the requirement. Tells what you must do and what you can't do, but no specifics.

- How your organization's policies intersect or overlap uniform guidance is very important – if your policy is different, then you may be audited. May want to make sure policies are in line with uniform guidance or be able to demonstrate reason for difference.

- Uniform guidance also provides information on hiring laws

- The uniform guidance can be challenging for small organizations. It's important to have someone on staff who is familiar with the guidance or where to find the information.

- If you don't understand the question in a grant, you may refer to the uniform guidance

**It's mostly grey areas. Comes down to how policies are laid out, how it's meeting requirements. Be sure to document everything, and that your policies meet all the guidance. Organizations should have their own internal guidance on how to handle certain situations.
Some areas despite the guidance remain grey areas.

Follow-up question:

How often do audits happen with federal grants?
Around 2019, in higher education especially, there was new emphasis on smaller organizations. There was also a shift with pandemic funding, more gov funding was allocated to smaller agencies to help during COVID. Gov set aside funding for auditing which may result in smaller orgs being audited. However, in the past, the more money you get, the more likely you may be audited. Can be random, but this is changing a little bit. Spending/drawing down (or not drawing down funds) may kick an audit. Some orgs may be audited regularly.

4. **What are best practices for funder cultivation and stewardship? How do these practices differ from cultivating relationships with private foundations? (Amy Cannata)**

   ● Don't be afraid to reach out to program manager – usually listed on grant or website

   ● Don't be afraid to start a conversation – have some questions ready (e.g., what are some allowable activities?)

   ● Reach out via email, to give them time to respond on their own time, and to document. Number your questions in your email.

   ● Be patient, it may take some time to respond if its competitive

   ● More likely to get feedback if you ask questions before the start of the competition.

   ● Funders are open to hearing your ideas and may give you feedback

   ● Sometimes they can review a draft (if stated in the application)

   ● Make sure you request modification to budget well in advance

   ● Be organized if you are going to reach out – have ideas set and well thought out

   ● Program officers are people too - if they come to your organization, be good hosts, be prepared, have an agenda.

5. How does the review process for government grants work, and how is it different from foundation grant review? (Jessica Yen)

- Evaluation criteria is listed in the opportunity itself with a scoring matrix to have a sense of how each part will be weighted.

- Match up all questions to the evaluation criteria.

- Sometimes the questions don't match the evaluation numbering so make it easy for the reviewer.

- Some of the questions may be in the evaluation criteria and others not, still answer all questions, but you may want to spend more time on the ones included in the evaluation criteria.

- Peer review process – peers may review parts of the application but not all, usually they are subject matter experts (broad range of familiarity, expertise, and location) - how you present information to an "outsider" is important. Don't assume they are familiar with where you are or what you do.

- Gov grants have lots of requirements / technical requirements – format, attachments, etc. - you can be disqualified if you have 81 pages and the limit is 80 pages. Have a second set of eyes to review the requirements and make sure everything is in line with what is in the RFP.

- Because reviewers will often have many applications to review, with lots of forms and narrative – make it easy for readers (bold, bullet, number, underline, use white space, etc.)

Follow-up question:
Setting expectations for new entrants

- How close of a fit are you?
- Go through a grant readiness checklist, orgs can use that as a self-assessment
- Be able to make the case that your area is special or meets the need
- Look at how many grants will be given
- Look at prior awardees