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Grants Work in a Congressional Office

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Summary

Members of Congress frequently receive requests from grant seekers needing funds for projects in districts and states. The congressional office should first determine its priorities regarding the appropriate assistance to give constituents, from providing information on grants programs to active advocacy of projects. Congressional grants staff can best help grant seekers by first themselves gaining some understanding of the grants process.

Each office handles grants requests in its own way, depending upon the Member's legislative agenda and overall organization and workload. There may be a full-time grants specialist or several staff members under the supervision of a grants coordinator working solely in the area of grants and projects. In some offices, all grants requests are handled in the district or state office; in others, they are answered by the Washington, DC, staff.

To assist grant seekers applying for federal funds, congressional offices can develop working relationships with grants officers in federal and state departments and agencies. Because more than 80% of federal funds go to state and local governments that, in turn, manage federal grants and sub-award to applicants in their state, congressional staff need to identify their own state administering offices.

To educate constituents, a congressional office may provide selected grant seekers information on funding programs or may sometimes sponsor workshops on federal and private assistance. Because most funding resources are on the Internet, Member home pages can also link to grants sources such as Assistance Listings at beta.SAM.gov and Grants.gov so that constituents themselves can search for grants programs and funding opportunities. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) web page, *Grants and Federal Domestic Assistance*, by Maria Kreiser (see sample at http://www.crs.gov/resources/MEMBER-GRANTS-PAGE), can be added to a Member's home page upon request and is updated automatically on House and Senate servers. Another CRS web page, *Grants and Federal Assistance*, by Maria Kreiser, at http://www.crs.gov/resources/GRANTS, covers key CRS products.

Congressional staff can use CRS reports to learn about grants work and to provide information on government and private funding. In addition to the current report, these include CRS Report RL34012, *Resources for Grantseekers*, by Maria Kreiser; and CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser. CRS also offers reports on block grants and the appropriations process; federal assistance for homeland security and terrorism preparedness; and federal programs on specific subjects and for specific groups, such as state and local governments, police and fire departments, libraries and museums, nonprofit organizations, small business, and other topics.

An internal grants manual outlining office policies and procedures, including perhaps templates for letters of support, might be developed to help grants staff. With reductions in federal programs, and with most government grants requiring matching funds, grants staff should also become familiar with other funding, such as private or corporate foundations, as alternatives or supplements to federal grants.

This report will be updated at the beginning of each Congress and as needed.

Contents

Introduction 1
Organizing Office Grants Operations 1
Managing Grants Requests 3
Office Grants Manual 3
File Systems and Logs 3
Communicating with Staff 4
Assessing Constituent Requests 5
Providing Information to Constituents 6
CRS Resources 6
Grants Newsletters and Targeted Mailings 7
Grants Seminars and Workshops 7
Proposal Writing Assistance and Sources 8
Writing Letters for Grant Seekers 9
Announcing Grants Awards 11
Federal Assistance and Sources 11
Federal Grants and the Appropriations Process 12
Types of Federal Assistance 13
Grants 13
Loans 13
Insurance 14
Goods and Properties 14
Services, Information, Training, and Employment 14
Assistance Listings at beta.SAM.gov 14
Grants.gov and FedConnect 16
Developing Federal and State Grants Contacts 16
Role of State Administering Agencies and Contacts 17
Foundations and Corporate Grants 18
Useful Sources of Grants Information 20
CRS Grants Web Pages 20
Additional Federal Sources 20
Other Resources 21

Contacts

Author Information 21
Acknowledgments 21

Introduction

Members of Congress receive numerous requests from grant seekers, including state and local governments, nonprofit social service and community action organizations, private research groups, small businesses, and individuals, for information and help in obtaining funds for projects. Both government and private foundation funding may be appropriate.

Federal grants are not benefits or entitlements to individuals. Most federal grant funds goes to state and local governments, which in turn sub-award to local entities such as nonprofit organizations. Grants may be available for projects serving communities and needs. For example, government assistance may be available for nonprofit organizations (including faith-based groups) for initiatives such as establishing soup kitchens or after-school programs benefitting entire communities; and local governments seeking funds for community services, infrastructure, and economic revitalization may be most eligible for state and federal funds.

Congressional offices may often need to direct constituents seeking government aid to funding options other than grants. Community fund-raising may be most suitable for school enrichment activities such as field trips or for band or sports uniforms. Local business or private foundation funding might be more appropriate for supporting projects such as construction of local memorials or commemorative programs. For others, such as for starting or expanding a small business or for students, loans may be available.

- Individuals looking for government benefits may find useful the website Benefits.gov at https://www.benefits.gov.
- Students seeking financial aid should search the Department of Education website at http://studentaid.ed.gov/sa.
- To start or expand a small business, the federal government provides assistance in the form of loans, advisory, or technical assistance. See the Small Business Administration website at http://www.sba.gov.

To respond to constituents who have seen ads promising federal grants for personal expenses, refer them to the Federal Trade Commission Consumer Alert *Government Grant Scams* at http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0113-government-grant-scams.

Given the competition for federal funds, the success rate in obtaining federal assistance is limited. A grants staff's effectiveness often depends both on an understanding of the grants process and on the relations it establishes with federal departments and agencies, state grants administering agencies (SAAs), private and local foundations, and other contacts.

This report does not constitute a blueprint for every office involved in grants and projects activity, nor does it present in-depth information about all aspects of staff activity in this area. The discussion describes some basics about the grants process and some of the approaches and techniques used by congressional offices in dealing with this type of constituent service.

Organizing Office Grants Operations

Senate and House offices allocate staff and other resources to grants work to assist constituents with projects of potential benefit to their districts, cities, or states. Each congressional office handles grants requests in its own way, depending upon such factors as the Member's philosophy on federal support for local projects, the relation of certain proposals to his or her legislative activity, or the Member's particular interest in specific locations or types of projects. Other

factors may include the degree of economic distress in any given locality and the current level of federal assistance it receives.

Grants activities in any congressional office depend very much upon the overall organization, staff, and workload of the office.

- Most offices divide responsibility by function (i.e., legislation is assigned to legislative assistants and correspondents, media relations and newsletters are handled by a press secretary, and caseworkers help with problems of individuals). Offices organized in this way may have a full-time grants specialist or several staff members under the supervision of a grants coordinator working solely in the area of grants and projects.
- Some offices divide responsibilities by subject area; that is, a specialist in health issues is involved with legislation, correspondence, casework, grants, projects, speeches, and press releases in that subject area.
- In some offices, all grants requests are handled in the district or state office; in others, they are answered by the Washington, DC, staff; still others divide grants and projects activity between the district or state office and the Washington, DC, office. Regardless of how this responsibility is assigned, it is helpful to have at least one person in the district or state office and one person in the Washington, DC, office familiar with the whole process. District or state staff may be more readily able to communicate and develop relationships with federal state and federal regional offices, or state administering agencies, often the preferred contact office for federal programs.
- State delegation cooperation: since some constituents request the aid of the entire state delegation for a grant or project, cooperation among Members of the delegation can minimize duplication of effort and permit more effective use of staff time. To increase the chances of a project's funding, Members may solicit the support of other Members either from the same geographic region if the proposal would benefit a wide area, or from those who hold key positions in leadership or on committees which exercise funding and oversight of the federal program. Political considerations can limit the amount of such cooperation. One state's delegation has established a State Projects Office to help its constituents learn about the grants process and follow through on all applications until awards are made.

The grants person in the congressional office can serve constituents not only as a source of information but also as a facilitator with agencies and foundations and, in some cases, even as an advocate. The congressional office is seen by constituents as a potential source of assistance, which includes

- providing facts about financial and nonfinancial assistance available through federal programs;
- clarifying the intricacies of proposal development, application, and follow-up procedures;
- writing letters of interest or support from the Member to the granting agency once a grant proposal is ready for submission;
- resolving problems that occur when an applicant is unsuccessful in obtaining funds or other assistance; and

- suggesting other sources for grant assistance in both the private and public sectors.

The congressional office should first determine the priorities of its particular office:

- assess the volume of incoming grants requests;
- determine criteria for how much attention should be given to each grants request, for example, number of people who will be affected, visibility of projects, or political implications;
- decide the role of the congressional office: information source or active advocacy, or sometimes even earmarking appropriations for a project that mirrors the Member's legislative agenda.

Congressional grants staff can help their constituents best when they thoroughly understand the entire grants process:

- defining the project;
- searching for likely funding sources, including federal grants administered and sub-awarded by states;
- developing and writing proposals;
- applying for grants;
- understanding review and award procedures; and
- knowing post-award requirements.

Managing Grants Requests

To assure continuity, particularly in cases of staff turnover and shifting responsibilities, and to monitor the progress of the grants and projects operation, several resources can be developed.

Office Grants Manual

An internal grants manual is a valuable tool for grants staff to develop. It can outline office policies and procedures and ensure continuity when staff changes. Among the items that might be included in such a manual are

- a statement of the Member's policy on letters of endorsement and press announcements, along with samples;
- a checklist of procedures to facilitate the training of new staff;
- sample project worksheets, allowing space for agency contacts, status reports, and follow-up timetables; and
- a continually updated telephone and email listing of contacts in federal, state, and local agencies, and foundations that have proven especially helpful.

File Systems and Logs

Whether electronic or paper, a congressional office may maintain detailed, cross-referenced files such as agency files, constituent files by county, and tracking records.

Agency Files

- Agency files, which could also be arranged under broad subjects, or use subject subdivisions: for example, Defense Department, district contracts; Education Department, curriculum development; Justice Department, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program.
- Program files, which include detailed information on the most frequently used programs in communities in the state or district, with a fact sheet describing each program, plus agency brochures, and contacts.
- Project files, which may contain lists of applicants for each project. Some offices keep records on the steps taken in support of all grant applications as documentation.

Constituent Files by County

- These can prove especially useful for the Member's visits to the state or district.
- Correspondence on each grant application, and local press coverage of awards can be added.
- These clippings, along with letters from grateful constituents, can serve as a source for favorable quotations.

Tracking Requests

- Monitor grant applications as they move through an agency's review process—develop contacts in agency congressional liaison offices or state or regional administering agencies.
- Maintain a follow-up calendar or log.
- Track all grants awarded in the district or state—even those your office did not work on.
- For sources that track federal funds by state, by county, and by congressional district, see the CRS web page, *Tracking Federal Funds*, by Maria Kreiser, at http://www.crs.gov/resources/TRACKING-FEDERAL-FUNDS. Contact the CRS author for search strategies and best sources.

Communicating with Staff

A weekly grants and projects report or letter is one way to keep both the Member and other staff fully informed of significant developments. This is particularly important for offices organized by functional responsibility.

- The report prepares the Member for the types of questions that may be asked during visits to the state or district and provides topics to be addressed in speeches.
- The legislative staff may benefit from knowing about pending state or local government actions that would have an impact on grants and projects. Conversely, grants and projects staff should also be able to rely on the legislative staff for information about pending bills that would alter or create federal programs or change relevant funding levels. Sometimes, comments from constituents can supply data on whether programs are carrying out legislative intent and whether changes in agency regulations or legislation are needed. Such

recommendations might then be the subject of congressional oversight hearings or might result in recommending changes in legislation.

- The press secretary should also be kept up to date on programs of interest in the district, so that current information can be presented in newsletters and press releases.

Assessing Constituent Requests

If a proposal or serious inquiry is submitted to a congressional office, an assessment of the stated problem should be made. First, this benefits the grant seeker, since any application for assistance will require that the problem be clearly stated and that the proposed solution provide some remedy. Second, this initial assessment can provide staff with a sense of direction: Are there other projects currently under way that address the problem? Is there already an appropriate federal or state program that is designed for such a project, or is the issue better addressed through local, state, or private organizations, or through legislation? Will the sought-after aid produce other problems for the community? What are its chances for success?

The initial review of the request should also involve an assessment of the applicant. A formal grant proposal will require an applicant to establish credibility. Individuals connected with a proposal might mention education, training, and professional credentials. Credibility for an organization may be established by giving its history, goals, activities, and primary accomplishments, as well as by letters of support, including by local governments. By reviewing such information, an office may avoid the hazard of offering support for a questionable applicant and may be in a better position to make decisions about support when several communities or organizations are applying for the same program—will all be treated equally or will support be given to selected applicants?

A written request from a constituent should always be acknowledged. If the request is a fairly common one, the office may be able to respond with a prepared packet of materials on available programs.

For large grants-in-aid projects, the congressional office may contact the federal or state agency congressional liaison and ask to speak to a grants specialist for a particular program or funding need. This procedure is generally more time consuming for a congressional staffer than a simple referral, but it is often more informative. The agency may provide facts about budget levels, authorizations and appropriations, the amount of money available for the program, the total amount requested in applications on file, the number of applications received, and the number likely to be approved, agency priorities, categories of competition or targets by region, key dates and deadlines, and information on who makes recommendations and decisions.

If your constituent decides to submit a formal grant application for a particular program, the congressional office may recommend or arrange a meeting with agency offices in the district or state. Another way to get input from the agency early in the process is a pre-review of the application. Some agencies provide procedural review of proposals one or two months before the application deadline. Such a review, while not dealing with the substance of the proposal, allows an agency to inform the applicant of any technical problems or omissions to be corrected before the proposal is formally submitted.

When a constituent notifies the congressional office that a proposal has been submitted, the office can send a letter to the agency expressing the Member's interest in being kept informed of developments relating to the application. In addition, the letter may also request a list of all applicants for the particular grant from the Member's state or district. This enables the office to

consider initiating letters of support from the Member to those applicants in his or her state or district who did not approach the office prior to submission of their application. Whether the Member chooses to support an applicant or extends support to all applicants from the state or district, the office should maintain contact with all interested parties as it is notified of progress reports from agency contacts.

Providing Information to Constituents

Cutbacks in federal programs mean many projects are made possible only through a combination of funding sources—federal and state government grants as well as private or corporate foundation grants should be considered. Grant seekers should know that most federal funding goes to states in the form of formula or block grants. For many programs, application for federal funds must be made through state administering agencies (SAAs). Whatever the funding source, it is important to emphasize that once a project has been clearly defined, constituents can improve their likelihood of success by doing preliminary research to find potential funding sources whose goals are most nearly consistent with their own.

Congressional offices can assist state, local, or private groups in identifying and obtaining available funding sources. Congressional grants staff can also serve as liaison between grant seekers and government executive offices, including their own state offices that administer federal grants.

Some congressional offices may help grant seekers by forwarding to them descriptions and contact information on federal grants programs for particular projects. The site beta.SAM.gov offers keyword searching, searching by assistance type (grant, loan, etc.), and listings by department, agency, and program title. The assistance listing descriptions also link to related websites, such as federal department and agency home pages and Office of Management and Budget grants management circulars. Grant seekers themselves can then track notices of actual federal funding opportunities at websites such as Grants.gov at http://www.grants.gov and FedConnect at https://www.fedconnect.net.

Congressional offices can also prepare their own information packets on federal grants programs, which are requested most frequently. Such packets could include program descriptions, brochures, the latest rules and regulations, changes in agency policy, application forms, and so on. For example, Members of rural states can become familiar with Department of Agriculture Rural Development programs; Members with urban constituencies and projects may want to consider Department of Housing and Urban Development programs.

CRS Resources

To assist Members in their representational duties, and to help congressional offices respond to grants questions, CRS has developed two Grants web pages:

- For congressional staff, the *Grants and Federal Assistance* web page, by Maria Kreiser, focuses on key CRS products, available at http://www.crs.gov/resources/GRANTS. It includes CRS publications on grants and programs that congressional offices can forward to their constituents and a separate web page of key sources (see next bullet) that Members may add to their home page for constituents.
- For grant seekers in districts and states, Members may add to their website the CRS *Grants and Federal Domestic Assistance* web page, by Maria Kreiser (see sample at http://www.crs.gov/resources/MEMBER-GRANTS-PAGE) to provide

useful information directly to constituents. It gives guidance and links to key Internet sources covering information readily available to the public. CRS automatically updates the web page for Members on the House and Senate servers.

CRS also has a number of publications to help both congressional staff and grant seekers. Sources described cover key Internet sources and publications about federal and private funding. Constituents may search Internet sites from home computers or in local libraries and can consult many of the published sources at public or university libraries or in government depository libraries in every state. Key useful CRS reports (in addition to the current report) to assist staff undertaking grants work include

- CRS Report RL34012, *Resources for Grantseekers*, by Maria Kreiser and
- CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser.

Grants Newsletters and Targeted Mailings

Newsletters (print or email) or Member web page news releases are a good way of reaching a large number of people. Some offices choose to either send out a special grants and projects newsletter or include a section on grants and projects in their regular newsletter. Subjects that could be developed include new programs, new appropriations, and descriptions of recently awarded grants.

A congressional office may occasionally choose to communicate with selected audiences through targeted mailings to inform constituents of the possible impact of new legislative or executive actions that might revise existing programs, create new ones, or alter funding levels; important dates and deadlines; and the advantages and limitations of various programs. This is especially important as new programs are created and receive congressional appropriations: for example, a newly funded economic development program may be announced on Grants.gov with a short application deadline, of which constituents should be made aware.

Grants Seminars and Workshops

Another way to get information to interested constituents is for a congressional office to coordinate seminars on federal and private assistance at state and district locations. An office can sponsor programs bringing together federal, state, and local officials, as well as foundation, academic, and corporate specialists, experienced volunteers, and constituents who share common concerns. Many agencies, foundations, and corporations are willing to provide speakers for district seminars arranged by congressional offices and also to provide materials such as brochures, sample proposals, and lists of information contacts. For telephone numbers to contact speakers from federal departments and agencies, congressional staff can use the CRS *Congressional Liaison Offices of Selected Federal Agencies*, http://www.crs.gov/resources/LiaisonOffices, or use their own state contacts for government speakers. For constituent orientation and group seminars, Members may consider use of CRS products as handouts and presentation materials.

Although well-planned, balanced programs tailored to a particular audience can create good will, coordinating and following through on such seminars takes a great deal of staff work and time. Such programs may also result in additional requests and demands on the sponsoring office.

Proposal Writing Assistance and Sources

Although congressional staff do not write grant proposals, they are frequently approached by inexperienced constituents seeking guidance on what makes a good proposal. Offices aiding such constituents may find helpful CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Maria Kreiser, which discusses preliminary information gathering and preparation, developing ideas for the proposal, gathering community support, identifying funding resources, and seeking preliminary review of the proposal and support of relevant administrative officials. It also covers all aspects of writing the proposal, from outlining of project goals, stating the purpose and objectives of the proposal, explaining the program methods to solve the stated problem, and how the results of the project will be evaluated, to long-term project planning, and developing the proposal budget. The last section of the report lists free grants writing websites.

The Foundation Center and other organizations also publish guides to writing proposals; the Foundation Center offers a "Proposal Writing Short Course" on its website at https://grantspace.org/training/introduction-to-proposal-writing/ and includes a version in Spanish. Constituents may also be advised that computer software templates can be found by searching the Internet under terms such as *grant proposal AND template*.

Congressional offices may pass on the following suggestions:

- Allow sufficient time to prepare a thoroughly documented proposal, well before the application deadline. If possible, have someone outside the organization critique the proposal prior to submission.
- Follow the instructions given in the application form or in other material provided by the agency or foundation. Answer questions as asked.
- See that the proposal is clear and brief. Avoid jargon. Take pains to make the proposal interesting. Reviewing panels have limited time to devote to any single proposal. Whenever possible, fit the style of the proposal to the style of the agency or foundation being approached.
- When no form or instructions for submitting grant proposals are provided, the proposal should include the following:

1. a cover letter on the applicant's letterhead giving a brief description of the purpose and amount of the grant proposal, conveying the applicant's willingness to discuss the proposal in further detail;
2. a half-page summary that includes identification of the applicant, the reasons for the request, proposed objectives and means to accomplish them, along with the total cost of the project, an indication of funds already obtained, and the amount being requested for this grant;
3. an introduction in which the history, credentials, and accomplishments of the applicant are presented briefly (supporting documents can be included in an appendix);
4. a description of current conditions demonstrating the need for the proposed project;
5. a statement of the project's objectives in specific, measurable terms;
6. a description of the methods to be used to accomplish these objectives;
7. a description of the means by which the project will be monitored and evaluated;

8. a discussion of plans for continuing the project beyond the period covered by the grant; and
9. a detailed budget.

Writing Letters for Grant Seekers

Constituents seeking funds for projects frequently ask congressional offices to write letters to federal departments and agencies on their behalf. Some grants, such as funding for homeland security, are determined by formula to states and jurisdictions and letters may not be needed.

Explain to constituents that the federal grants process is competitive and that your office can consider writing a letter to the department or agency once they submit a fully developed grant proposal. For most requests, use neutral language expressing the Member's "interest" in a proposal, rather than "support." Lending "support" to a proposal that might not be funded under the competitive process (and when there are competing applications from several constituents) might lead to disappointment and reflect negatively on the Member.

For most constituent requests, write a letter only when the grantseeker is ready to submit the grant proposal to the department or agency. Check with the department or agency congressional liaison to learn where letters should be sent.

- Information needed from the grant seeker:
  - name of applicant; contact person for the project if different
  - grant program name and number
  - agency contact address, grants officer's name if available
  - deadline for proposal submission
  - project name and summary
- The project summary should highlight:
  - what the project/program does and how many people will benefit
  - why this program is important to the community
  - any unique features of the project, needs not already being met
  - other support for the project such as local government
  - specifically how the grant money will be used
- Write directly to the person in the department of agency; provide a copy of the letter to the constituent to submit with the proposal.
- The Member's letter could say why this is important to his or her district, what needs are being met, etc.—the summary supplied by the constituent should give the objectives of the proposal/project.
- Close by asking the grants officer to let the Member know when a decision will be made and to keep your office informed about the progress of the proposal.

A sample letter of support, written on the Member's letterhead, might read as follows:

Ms. Ronda Mason, Acting Administrator
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
810 Seventh Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20531

Dear Ms. Mason,

I am writing on behalf of the Local Youth Mentoring Initiative grant application submitted by a coalition of Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) affiliates from across the state to expand their mentoring programs for at-risk youth.

The three coalition member groups have been working with families in our state for more than 40 years. Each of the affiliates currently serves between 350 and 500 children, matching each young person with a professionally supported mentor. Since 2000, the state's BBBS agencies have expanded their program offerings. With the support of grants from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, they now serve the children of prisoners and children in after-school and in-school sites.

This funding will allow the coalition to offer mentoring programs to 500 more at-risk youth in the state, including those in foster care. Each agency already has more than 100 children currently on waiting lists and all are ready to expand their programs as soon as new resources become available.

I am proud to support programs to improve the criminal justice system, assist victims of crime, and support youth mentoring. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention studies have documented that mentoring leads to significant reductions in illegal drug and alcohol use, truancy and aggressive behavior, as well as improvements in confidence and school performance. In the midst of this economic recession the good work of organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters is critical to maintaining the strength of families and communities.

I ask your serious consideration of this worthy project. If you have any questions, please contact my Grants Coordinator, Natalie Keegan, at (202) 555-1212.

Sincerely,

Mike Firestone
United States Member of Congress

Announcing Grants Awards

Although there is some variation, the usual announcement procedure in cases of allocated federal funds is for the agency making the award to notify the Senate office first (a Senator of the President's party may be first notified), then the House office, and finally the recipient. This allows Members of Congress an opportunity to notify recipients of grants. Not all awards are announced publicly. In the case of block grants, the Office of Management and Budget notifies Senate offices of the allocations among the states. The state's decision on how to distribute funds among local communities is, however, not necessarily communicated to congressional offices. In these cases, a good state agency contact may be willing to provide the office with this information. Announcements of grants awarded are often posted on Member websites.

Many congressional offices develop files or databases of grants awarded to track funding to their districts and states. Detailed information is difficult to obtain. P.L. 109-282, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, called for the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to develop a database, which became USAspending.gov. For a summary of sources and limitations of currently available data, and the new law's requirements, see CRS web page, *Tracking Federal Funds*, by Maria Kreiser, at http://www.crs.gov/resources/TRACKING-FEDERAL-FUNDS. Contact the CRS author for search strategies and best sources.

To avoid disappointment, congressional staff might consider cautioning grant seekers from making requests that are unlikely to be approved at the federal level. Suggest considering other funding sources early in the process. In cases where grant applications are made and turned down, the congressional office may notify constituents of their right to know why the award was not granted and what the appeals process is. Constituents may ask the agency for an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal or may give the agency permission to provide the congressional office with this information. Alternative programs or other approaches may be suggested following an adverse decision. The constituent might also decide to improve the initial application and start the process again.

Federal Assistance and Sources

Hundreds of grants or loans for various purposes are available from federal departments and agencies. Most federal funding (more than 80%) goes to state and local governments that determine state and local needs, and they themselves offer competitive grants and funding opportunities. New programs and federal funding to enhance homeland security or enhance emergency services are of particular interest to many local jurisdictions. Other federal funds not dispensed through grants, but highly sought after, are used for defense procurement, construction of federal installations, or infrastructure (e.g., military bases, federal office buildings, and federal projects such as flood control and highway construction). Congressional offices can assist state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and other grant seekers in becoming aware of available funds and how to go about obtaining them.

Staff members can contact federal agencies to find agency interest in certain projects; relay the findings to those interested and qualified for assistance in their states and districts; and notify home state governments, organizations, businesses, and people of what funds are available.

Once a grant application is filed, offices frequently keep in touch with agencies. Contact can be maintained by email, phone, letter, or in person as the situation dictates. Concerted action on the part of the staff may result in more federal funds being spent in a state or district, thereby providing greater benefit to the constituency.

Federal program and contact information for each program is given at beta.SAM.gov. Current notices of competitive project grant opportunities for grant seekers themselves appear on the websites Grants.gov at http://www.grants.gov and FedConnect at https://www.fedconnect.net. See sections below for more information about these key sources.

Federal Grants and the Appropriations Process

Congress may also designate or "earmark" federal funds for projects in districts and states in annual appropriations legislation, though appropriations committees in recent years have chosen to limit the practice. Because much of the annual U.S. budget consists of expenditures for entitlement programs such as Social Security, mandatory spending through authorizing legislation and interest payments, or allocations in the form of formula and block grants to states and local governments, discretionary funding for new grant awards is limited. The appropriations measure that a congressional office chooses to submit often reflects the Member's legislative agenda as well as the needs of the state or district.

Grant seekers who ask support of their Senator or Representative for project funding should consider the congressional budget process calendar. Appropriations measures for the next fiscal year (October 1-September 30) are usually submitted as early as February.

If congressionally directed spending seems appropriate, applicants may be asked by the Member to make a formal request accompanied by supporting materials, including

- project description;
- research and documentation of the need for the project (such as a feasibility study and history of community support);
- letters of support from elected officials and local community leaders; and
- amount requested, anticipated total project cost, sources of other funding (state, private, local match), and any history of past funding.

Grant seekers may contact both Representatives and Senators about their project. Although an "earmark" may appear in either a House or Senate committee report, a conference committee (composed of an equal number of House and Senate Members) makes the final decisions on funding. Having support of both Representatives and Senators for a project may enhance a grant seeker's success for an "earmark."

The congressional appropriations process follows an annual time line, beginning in February of each year. Grant seekers such as state and local governments or nonprofit organizations can submit requests for project support and funding to Representatives and Senators before the beginning of the budget cycle.

- February: The President submits to Congress the proposed Budget of the United States.
- Members submit requests for discretionary funding on behalf of projects in their districts or states prior to the start of appropriations hearings in early March.
- Early March: The House Appropriations Committee's 12 subcommittees begin hearings on proposed spending bills.
- May-August: The House votes on appropriations bills beginning in May and tries to finish before the end of the fiscal year, September 30. The Senate generally follows the House in considering appropriations measures. In recent years, voting

has continued into the fall, and continuing resolutions are passed to ensure that federal offices and programs do not close down.

- After each chamber votes on its version of an appropriations bill, a conference committee, consisting of equal numbers of House and Senate Members, meets to reconcile any differences and makes final decisions on spending.
- Funding for district and state projects included in both House and Senate appropriations bills will generally be approved by the conferees, and submitted for floor vote by the full House and Senate.
- After approval, appropriations bills are forwarded to the President for signature.
- Members notify grant seekers of projects successfully funded.

Types of Federal Assistance

Currently, programs in beta.SAM.gov, the key source to federal program information (see "Assistance Listings at beta.SAM.gov," below), are classified into several types of financial and nonfinancial assistance.

Grants

Grants are generally considered desirable by applicants because they are an outright award of funds.

- *Formula Grants*: allocations of money to states or their subdivisions for activities of a continuing nature not confined to a specific project. Includes block grants to states and local governments.
- *Project Grants*: funding, for fixed or known periods, of specific projects or the delivery of specific services or products, including fellowships, scholarships, research grants, training grants, traineeships, experimental and demonstration grants, evaluation grants, planning grants, technical assistance grants, survey grants, construction grants, and unsolicited contractual agreements. Can also be referred to as discretionary or categorical grants or funding.
- *Direct Payments for Specified Use*: federal financial assistance provided directly to individuals, private firms, and other private institutions to encourage or subsidize a particular activity.
- *Direct Payments with Unrestricted Use:* federal financial assistance provided directly to beneficiaries who satisfy federal eligibility requirements with no restrictions as to how the money is spent.

Loans

Because loans must be repaid, they are often viewed by applicants as less desirable than grants. However, with the reduction of federal funds available for grants and the increasing level of competition for such funds, loans are often the only form of assistance available.

- *Direct Loans*: lending of federal funds for a specific period of time, with a reasonable expectation of repayment; may or may not require the payment of interest.

- *Guaranteed/Insured Loans*: programs in which the federal government makes an arrangement to indemnify a lender against part or all of any defaults by those responsible for repayment of loans.

Insurance

Some federal programs provide financial assistance to assure reimbursement for losses sustained under specified conditions. Coverage may be provided directly by the federal government or through private carriers and may or may not require the payment of premiums.

Goods and Properties

The federal government has programs both for the sale, exchange, or donation of property and for temporary use or loan of goods and property.

- *Sale, Exchange, or Donation of Property and Goods*: programs that provide for the sale, exchange, or donation of federal real property, personal property, commodities, and other goods including land, buildings, equipment, food, and drugs.
- *Use of Property, Facilities, and Equipment*: programs that provide for the loan of, use of, or access to federal facilities or property wherein the federally owned facilities or property do not remain in the possession of the recipient of the assistance.

Services, Information, Training, and Employment

The federal government offers a variety of programs to assist communities and citizens.

- *Provision of Specialized Services*: programs that provide federal personnel to directly perform certain tasks for the benefit of communities or individuals.
- *Advisory Services and Counseling*: programs that provide federal specialists to consult, advise, or counsel communities or individuals, to include conferences, workshops, or personal contacts.
- *Dissemination of Technical Information*: programs that provide for the publication and distribution of information or data of a specialized technical nature frequently through clearinghouses or libraries.
- *Training*: programs that provide instructional activities conducted directly by a federal agency for individuals not employed by the federal government.
- *Investigation of Complaints*: federal administrative agency activities that are initiated in response to requests, either formal or informal, to examine or investigate claims of violations of federal statutes, policy, or procedure.
- *Federal Employment*: programs that reflect the government-wide responsibilities of the Office of Personnel Management in the recruitment and hiring of federal civilian agency personnel.

Assistance Listings at beta.SAM.gov

Official descriptions of more than 2,200 federal assistance programs (including grants, loans, and other financial and nonfinancial assistance) can be found on beta.SAM.gov. The website, produced by the General Services Administration (GSA), is currently in beta, and it houses

federal assistance listings previously found on the now-retired Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA). Each federal assistance program has a corresponding CFDA program number; these CFDA numbers are still used as numerical program identifiers. Programs are searchable at the "Assistance Listings" domain at beta.SAM.gov; descriptions are updated by departments and agencies, and they cover authorizing legislation, objectives, and eligibility and compliance requirements. The site will eventually be renamed SAM.gov.

About 1,800 assistance programs are classified as grants. Assistance listing descriptions include the following:

- federal agency administering a program
- legislation authorizing the program
- objectives and goals of program
- types of financial or nonfinancial assistance provided
- uses and restrictions
- eligibility requirements
- application and award process
- criteria for selecting proposals
- amount of obligations for some past and current fiscal years
- range and average of financial assistance
- regulations, guidelines, and literature relevant to a program
- information contacts and headquarters, regional, and local offices
- related programs
- examples of funded projects
- formula and matching requirements, where applicable
- requirements for post-assistance reports

Updated information on federal programs also appears in the daily *Federal Register*, at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=FR. Federal departments, and agencies may also provide information and guidelines for specific programs on their websites. These websites may also provide a list of grantees from the previous fiscal year and indicate the amount of money still available for the coming year.

Congressional staff may suggest that constituents seeking federal funding search beta.SAM.gov themselves by keyword, beneficiary, and other options for identifying appropriate program information.

Some congressional offices may forward to constituents a preliminary beta.SAM.gov search of potential federal funding. Descriptions of programs identified will have to be carefully analyzed by grant seekers themselves to see whether they may be appropriate. Early in the process, the grant seeker should contact the department or agency indicated in the beta.SAM.gov program description(s) for latest information on funding availability, program requirements, and deadlines. Often a referral to a local or state office will be given. Many may be project or formula (block) grants to states that in turn accept grants applications and determine award recipients.

Grants.gov and FedConnect

More than 80% of federal grant funding is allocated to states to administer, or directly to local governments, and funding opportunities may be posted at the state level. However, for competitive project grants, as part of the federal government's e-grants initiative, federal departments and agencies are required to post grants opportunities notices on websites, such as Grants.gov at http://www.grants.gov and FedConnect at https://www.fedconnect.net. These websites post federal funding notices, give guidelines and registration information, and provide a uniform application procedure.

Except for familiarizing themselves with information provided on the Grants.gov site, and sometimes posting Grants.gov funding notices on Member websites if they wish, congressional staff generally need not search this website for funding opportunities for constituents. CRS grants websites and reports include Grants.gov, which is free to the public, as a key source for grant seekers themselves to access and search.

Registration by the grant seeker who will be making the application is required at Grants.gov and FedConnect. Before applying, grant seekers must also obtain a Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number and register with the System for Awards Management (SAM). Grants.gov includes instructions and links at http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-1-obtain-duns-number.html and http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-2-register-with-sam.html.

For grant seekers who have identified appropriate federal funding programs (through beta.SAM.gov or department and agency websites), Grants.gov enables them to

- search for current funding opportunity notices (including by CFDA program number);
- sign up for email notification of future grant opportunities;
- download grants application packages and instructions or go to another website to apply;
- submit applications electronically through a uniform process for all federal grant-making agencies; and
- track the progress of their applications using unique IDs and passwords.

Developing Federal and State Grants Contacts

Many federal agencies have a number of offices: a central office in Washington, DC; a series of regional and state offices; and, in some cases, local or area offices. Each assistance listing at beta.SAM.gov includes information contacts, either providing the name, address, and telephone number of the main program officer, or referring applicants to the regional, state, or local office of the agency.

Congressional offices can channel their requests for program funding information and get help identifying appropriate grants officers through federal department and agency congressional liaison offices (see CRS Report 98-446, *Congressional Liaison Offices of Selected Federal Agencies*, by Audrey Celeste Crane-Hirsch, for emails and phone numbers). Establishing a good relationship with program grants officers is usually beneficial—they are normally well informed and willing to share information with congressional grants and projects staff. The liaison office may also be willing to brief congressional staff so that they may become more familiar with the

way the agency is organized and where responsibilities are assigned, as well as with published materials that may be available on various programs.

State and district grants and projects staff usually work closely with federal agency representatives in their areas, with their state Members of Congress, with state and local elected officials, and with state councils of government. Many federal programs are administered directly by state agencies or other entities within the state, and many states have programs funded out of their own appropriations that supplement or complement federal programs. Local councils of government, where they exist, have access to federal funds for providing technical assistance, guidance, and counseling in the grants process. Constituents are, as a rule, best served by being put in touch with program officers closest to them as early as possible.

Some congressional grants and projects staff report that a congressional office that encourages cooperation among local organizations, foundations, units of government, and councils of government can serve as a catalyst for applicants by improving communications, which may in turn enhance the chances for proposal approval. When congressional staff take the time to express appreciation for assistance provided by federal personnel, foundation officials, and others involved in the grants process, they may possibly improve their chances for future assistance.

Role of State Administering Agencies and Contacts

Many federal grants such as formula and block grants are awarded directly to state governments, which then set priorities and allocate funds within that state. To help constituents, congressional grants staff need to identify their State Administering Agencies (SAAs), the state counterpart offices accepting grants applications and disbursing federal formula and other grants. For more information on how a state intends to distribute formula grant funds, grant seekers need to contact the state administering agency.

Many federal department and agency websites provide state contacts. Often the site will have an interactive U.S. map where grant seekers can click on their state and obtain program and funding contact information. State government agencies provide coordination of local efforts to obtain federal funds through grant programs that are already allocated to the state; and state government agencies are familiar with federal program requirements, can assist with proposals, and can provide other guidance. In fact, many federal grant programs require that an applicant complete a pre-application screening at the state level before submitting requests.

- Federal congressional liaison offices can help congressional staff identify SAAs for their programs, see CRS Congressional Liaison Offices of Selected Federal Agencies at http://www.crs.gov/resources/LiaisonOffices.
- Many states require federal grants applicant to submit a copy of their application for state government-level review and comment, and have designated a “Single Point of Contact” under Executive Order 12372, listed by Office of Management and Budget (OMB) at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SPOC-February-2019.pdf. The state offices listed here coordinate government (both federal and state) grants development and may provide guidance to grant seekers.
- Other state government agency websites may be identified at the federal government site USA.gov, State Government, https://www.usa.gov/states-and-territories.

Many federal department and agency websites include SAAs and often the site will have an interactive U.S. map. Grant seekers can click on their state and obtain program and state contact information. A selection of some executive department websites includes the following:[1]

Agriculture Rural Development State Contacts
http://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Partners
https://www.arts.gov/partners/state-regional

Commerce Offices and Services
https://www.commerce.gov/locations#2/40.5/-13.0

Education (ED) State Contacts
http://www2.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Grant Regional Office
https://www.epa.gov/grants/regional-grants-information

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) State Offices and Agencies
https://www.fema.gov/emergency-management-agencies

Health and Human Services (HHS), Social Services Block Grants State Officials & Program Contacts
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/resource/ssbg-state-officials-program-contacts

Homeland Security (DHS) State Homeland Security Contacts
https://www.dhs.gov/state-homeland-security-and-emergency-services

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) State/Local Offices
http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/field_policy_mgt/localoffices

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) State Councils
http://www.neh.gov/about/state-humanities-councils

Office of Justice Programs (OJP) State Administering Agencies
http://ojp.gov/saa/

Labor (DOL) Education and Training Administration, State and Local Contacts
https://www.doleta.gov/regions/

Small Business Administration
https://www.sba.gov/tools/local-assistance/districtoffices

Transportation, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Regional Offices
http://www.fta.dot.gov/12926.html

Veterans Affairs State/Territory Offices
http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm

Foundations and Corporate Grants

With reductions in federal programs, congressional grants specialists may suggest other funding possibilities to their constituents as alternatives or supplements to federal grants. Private foundation funding can also be used for federal grants that have matching requirements.

[1] Compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) from executive department and agency websites.

Small local projects should begin their search for help at the community level from local businesses or institutions. Support may be available in the form of cash contributions or in-kind contributions of property, buildings, equipment, or professional expertise. Evidence of such community-based support may strengthen a federal grant proposal.

Grant making foundations are established for the express purpose of providing funds for projects in their areas of interest, and all must comply with specific Internal Revenue Service regulations to maintain their tax-exempt status. Every year, each is required to give away money equal to at least 5% of the market value of its assets, and each must make its tax records public.

Although there are all kinds of foundation and corporate grants available, competition for these funds is great, and, just as is the case in searching for federal support, grant seekers enhance their chances for success by doing preliminary research to find grant makers whose priorities and goals match their own. By searching foundation websites, grant seekers can find guidelines, copies of annual reports, and tax returns to learn whether their proposals match a foundation's areas of interest and geographic guidelines; whether the proposal is within its budgetary constraints; and whether it normally funds the type of project being considered.

There are many different kinds of foundations, with widely varying resources and purposes. Some are national in scope; others are set up purely for the purpose of local giving. Some are endowed by an individual or family to provide funds for specific social, educational, or religious purposes; others are company-sponsored; still others are publicly supported community foundations. Grant seekers might begin by identifying state or local foundations. These may have a greater interest in local projects than larger foundations mainly concerned with programs of national significance. Direct corporate giving should also be explored: many corporations support local projects in areas where they have their headquarters or plants, or sponsor projects which somehow enhance their corporate image.

Because of this variety, different strategies may be needed for dealing with different foundations. A few foundations publicize their funding policies, and even initiate projects, but generally they do not. Usually, the grant seeker must take the first step and approach the foundation about his or her proposal. Although it is hard to generalize about foundations, they tend to be more flexible than federal funding agencies and to have fewer bureaucratic requirements. Many foundations see their purpose as providing short-term, startup funding for demonstration projects. Frequently, such foundations are the best source to turn to for funding emergency situations or small, high-risk, innovative programs. In some cases, foundation officials will work closely with inexperienced grant seekers to help them develop realistic proposals.

The Foundation Center serves as a clearinghouse of information on private philanthropic giving and is a good starting point for identifying likely funding sources. The center's office in Washington, DC, can advise staff on other sources of private funding. The Foundation Center can be contacted via phone at (202) 331-1400. The center's website, http://www.foundationcenter.org, includes extensive information about private funders; posts requests for proposals (RFPs) for funding opportunities from foundations in all subject fields; offers web and in-person training, many of them free, including a "Proposal Writing Short Course"; and produces a number of directories and guides to private and corporate funding sources, in print, CD-ROM, web, and other electronic formats. The Foundation Center also posts IRS Form 990 for nonprofit organizations at http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/990finder/.

In addition to its major reference collections in New York, Washington, DC, Cleveland, and San Francisco, the Foundation Center maintains a national network of cooperating library collections in each state, with print and electronic resources available free to the public. Addresses of these library collections are provided on the Foundation Center website at http://foundationcenter.org/

fin. At these libraries, grant seekers may search the *Foundation Directory Online* by field of interest, by foundation location, and other categories to produce lists of likely funding sources for projects. For congressional staff, the Library of Congress maintains a subscription to the *Foundation Directory Online*.

Other websites that provide free listings of foundations include the Council on Foundations web page, Community Foundation Locator by state, at http://www.cof.org/community-foundation-locator; and the Grantsmanship Center's Funding Sources, which for each state lists "top," corporate, and community foundations, at http://tgci.com/funding-sources. Congressional offices may send constituents state listings from these websites.

Useful Sources of Grants Information

CRS Grants Web Pages

Grants and Federal Assistance web page, by Maria Kreiser
http://www.crs.gov/resources/GRANTS
Focuses on CRS grants web products and publications. CRS reports provide guidance to congressional staff on federal programs and funding, and may be forwarded to constituents in response to grants requests.

Grants and Federal Domestic Assistance web page, by Maria Kreiser
http://www.crs.gov/resources/MEMBER-GRANTS-PAGE

Provides Internet links to free key federal and private grants and funding information, including beta.SAM.gov, Grants.gov, and other federal websites; and the Foundation Center, and other private funding resources. Members may add this CRS web page to their home page so grant seekers in districts and states can access web information directly using the Member's home page as portal to key grants sources.

Additional Federal Sources

For beta.SAM.gov and Grants.gov, see sections of this report and the CRS websites described above.

A-Z Index of U.S. Government Departments and Agencies (General Services Administration)
https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/a

To better develop a grant proposal, search a department or agency's home page to learn more about its programs and objectives. The site also includes the following:

- Government Benefits, Grants and Loans
  https://www.usa.gov/benefits-grants-loans
- Starting a Nonprofit Organization
  https://www.usa.gov/start-nonprofit
  Links to federal department and agency information on several types of nonprofit organizations and outlines the process of incorporating and applying for tax-exempt status.

Grants Management Circulars (Office of Management and Budget)
https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-for-agencies/circulars/

OMB establishes government-wide grants management policies and guidelines through circulars and common rules. OMB Circulars are cited in beta.SAM.gov program descriptions. Circulars target grants recipients and audit requirements for educational institutions, state and local governments, and nonprofit organizations.

Other Resources

Grants and Related Resources (Michigan State University Libraries)
http://staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/index.htm

The site provides government and private grants resources, primarily Internet, by subject or group categories, and is updated frequently. Subpages include the following:

Grants for Nonprofits
https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=622545
https://grantspace.org/resources/knowledge-base/finding-grants/

Grants for Individuals (primarily financial aid and scholarships)
https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=622546

Crowdfunding
https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=867834
https://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=96743&p=622546
https://grantspace.org/search/?keyword=crowdfunding

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