CRS Report for Congress

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 about how much assistance to give constituents, from providing information about grants programs to active advocacy of projects. Congressional grants staff can best help grant seekers when they understand the entire 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 departments and agencies, including their state and regional offices. A congressional office may sometimes choose to communicate with a selected constituency by targeted mailings or sponsoring seminars on federal and private assistance. Member home pages can link to grants/Internet sources such as the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* and *Grants.gov* so that constituents themselves can search for grants and funding opportunities. The CRS Grants Information Web page, which .can be found at [http://www.crs.gov/reference/general/grantsinfo.shtml], links to key CRS products and Internet sources, including a ready-made *Grants and Federal Domestic Assistance* Web page that Members may add to their home page for constituents to use.

The congressional office can use CRS reports to learn about grants work and to provide information on government and private funding. These include CRS Report RS21117, *Ethical Considerations in Assisting Constituents with Grant Requests Before Federal Agencies*; CRS Report RS20514, *Grants Information for Constituents*; CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*; reports on block grants and the appropriations process; reports covering federal assistance for homeland security and terrorism preparedness; and reports on federal programs on specific subjects and for specific groups such as states and local governments, police and fire departments, libraries and museums, nonprofit organizations, small business, and so forth.

An internal grants manual is a valuable tool for grants staff to develop. It can outline office policies and procedures. With reductions in federal programs, grants specialists may suggest other funding sources to their constituents, such as private or corporate foundations, as alternatives or supplements to federal grants.

This report will be updated periodically.

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Grants Work in a Congressional Office

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 should be considered.

Given the competition for federal funds, the success rate in obtaining federal assistance is not high. A grants staff's effectiveness often depends on both an understanding of the grants process and on the relations it establishes with federal departments and agencies, and other contacts.

Senate and House offices allocate staff and other resources to grants and projects activities in order to assist these constituents with projects of potential benefit to their districts, cities, or states. 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 in

- 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;

- 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:

- Where do grants requests fall within the operations of the office?

- Should grants officers be located in DC or the state or district?

- What should be the role of the congressional office: information source or active advocacy, or sometimes even earmarking appropriations for a project?

- What is the assess volume of incoming grants requests?

- What criteria determines how much attention should be given to each grants request (e.g., number of people who will be affected, visibility of projects, and political implications)?

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

- Defining the project

- Searching for likely funding sources

- Writing proposals

- Applying for grants

- Understanding review and award procedures

- Knowing post-award requirements

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.

Providing Information to Constituents

Cutbacks in federal programs mean many projects are made possible only through a combination of funding sources — government grants as well as private foundation or corporate grants. 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 in order to find potential funding sources whose goals are most nearly consistent with their own.

Because the state, local, or private groups needing assistance may be unaware of available funding, or uncertain how to go about obtaining it, a congressional office can help identify sources. To assist Members in their representational duties, and to help congressional offices respond to grants questions, CRS developed two Grants Web pages:

- for congressional staff, the CRS *Grants Information* Web page [http://www.crs.gov/reference/general/grantsinfo.shtml] focuses on key CRS products. It includes an audio/slide show, *Grants Work in a Congressional Office,* highlighting grants strategy, key sources, and demonstrating how to find funding information for a typical grant request; CRS publications on

grants and programs that congressional offices can forward to their constituents; and a separate Web page (see next bullet) that Members may add to their home page for constituents.

- for grant seekers in districts and states, Members may request the *Grants and Federal Domestic Assistance* page from the CRS website at [http://www.crs.gov/reference/general/grants/member-grant.html] to provide useful information via their home page. It gives guidance and links to key Internet sources and includes a slide program, *Grants Information for Constituents,* covering information readily available to the public.

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 consult many of the published sources at large public or university libraries or in government depository libraries, and may search Internet sites from home computers or in local libraries. Key useful CRS reports on grants work include:

- CRS Report RS21117, *Ethical Considerations in Assisting Constituents With Grant Requests Before Federal Agencies*
- CRS Report RS20514, *Grants Information for Constituents*
- CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*

Some congressional offices may wish to help grant seekers by forwarding to them descriptions and contact information on federal grants programs for particular projects. The *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (CFDA) is available full text on the Internet. The site [http://www.cfda.gov/] offers keyword searching, broad subject and recipient indexes, and listings by department, agency, and program title. The CFDA program descriptions also link to related websites such as federal department and agency home pages and Office of Management and Budget grants management circulars. Your constituent should also be advised that notices of actual federal funding opportunities under CFDA programs can be tracked at the website *Grants.gov* at [http://www.grants.gov].

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.

Newsletters (print or e-mail) are a good way of reaching a large number of people. Some offices choose to send out either 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 for

homeland security and terrorism preparedness are created and receive congressional appropriations: for example, a newly funded program for first responders may be announced in the *Federal Register* with short application deadlines, of which constituents should be made aware.

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 or the Foundation Center at [http://www.fdncenter.org], and corporations are willing to provide speakers for district seminars arranged by congressional offices and also to provide such materials as brochures, sample proposals, and lists of information contacts. For telephone number to contact speakers from federal departments and agencies, congressional staff can use CRS Report 98-446, *Congressional Liaison Offices of Selected Federal Agencies*. For constituent orientation and group seminars, CRS products may be used 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 take a great deal of staff work and time. Such programs may also result in additional requests and demands on the sponsoring office.

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. CRS Report RS21117, *Ethical Considerations in Assisting Constituents With Grants Requests Before Federal Agencies*, provides some guidance. Some grants, such as for firefighters and other funding for homeland security, are determined by formula to states and jurisdictions and letters are not needed.

Explain to your constituent that the federal grants process is competitive, that your office can consider writing a letter to the department or agency once the individual submits 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 for letters:

- Write a letter only when your constituent has submitted the grant proposal to the department or agency.

- Information needed from the grant seeker:

    — Name of applicant; contact person for the project if different;
    — Grant program, CFDA number, agency address, and grants officer's name;
    — Deadline for proposal submission;
    — Project name and summary.

- The project summary should highlight

    — What the project/program does and who it serves;
    — Why this program is important to the community;
    — Any unique features of the project, needs that are not already being met;
    — Specifically how the grant money will be used.

- Write directly to the person in the department of agency (do not give a letter to your constituent to submit with the proposal, unless the department or agency specifically requires it) and provide a copy to your constituent.

- The Member's letter could say why this is important to his district (what needs are being met, etc.; the summary supplied by your constituent should give the objectives of the propsal/project).

- Close by asking the grants officer to let the Member know when a decision about recipients of the grant will be made; and to keep your office informed about the progress of the proposal.

In cases where your constituent's proposal is unsuccessful, tell him they may ask the department or agency to review the proposal to suggest how to improve it, and that he may be able to resubmit the proposal if the program continues to be funded.

Federal Assistance

There are hundreds of grants or loans for various purposes available from federal departments and agencies. New programs and federal funding to enhance homeland security are of particular interest to local jurisdictions. Other federal funds not dispensed through grants, but much 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 and eligible private sector organizations 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

The House of Representatives and Senate Explained

Congressional Procedure

A Practical Guide to the Legislative Process in the U.S. Congress

Richard A. Arenberg

TheCapitol.Net

frequently keep in touch with agencies. Contact can be maintained by letter, phone, e-mail, 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. On the House side, staff can track department and agency awards and disbursements down to state, county, and congressional district level through a House Information Resources database, *Federal Funds Express* (Intranet.House.gov; call HIR, ext. 56002, for information). Since there is no counterpart of this system on the Senate side, Senate staff could ask House state delegation staff to search for them. For information available from the Bureau of the Census, General Services Administration, and Office of Management and Budget, see the CRS website *Tracking the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds* at [http://www.crs.gov/reference/general/geotracking.shtml].

Grant seekers may apply directly to federal departments and agencies for funding or nonfinancial assistance. Program and contact information is given in the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* [http://www.cfda.gov]. Current notices of grant opportunities appear on the website *Grants.gov* [http://www.grants.gov]. See sections below for more information about these key sources.

To provide better coordination of state and local efforts in requesting federal funding through the grant programs already in place, state government agencies have people who are familiar with federal program requirements, can assist with proposals, and 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. State contacts for federal departments and agencies are given in CFDA Appendix IV *Regional and Local Office Addresses* (by agency and by state) at [http://12.46.245.173/pls/portal30/CATALOG.BROWSE_CATALOG_DYN.show].

Federal Grants and the Appropriations Process

Federal funds for projects in districts and states may also be designated or "earmarked" in annual appropriations legislation passed by Congress. 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 wish to seek 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 feasability 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.

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 13 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.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

The key sources of information about federal programs, projects, services, and activities that provide assistance or benefits to the American public are the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (CFDA) and *Grants.gov*. CFDA is produced by the General Services Administration and searchable for free on the Internet [http://www.cfda.gov/]. The Government Printing Office publishes and sells an annual print edition for government depository libraries and the public [http://bookstore.gpo.gov/]. Only the Internet version is updated throughout the year. The *Catalog* describes some 1,500 authorized financial and nonfinancial

assistance programs administered by departments and agencies of the federal government. For grants programs, money that is actually available (appropriated by Congress in the annual budget) appears in notices of current funding opportunities posted at *Grants.gov* [http://www.grants.gov].

CFDA program descriptions include:

- Federal agency administering a program
- Legislation which authorizes the program
- Objectives and goals of program
- Types of financial and nonfinancial assistance provided
- Uses and restrictions
- Eligibility requirements
- Application and award process, including deadlines
- Criteria for selecting proposals
- Amount of obligations for the past, current, and future fiscal years
- 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* [http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html]. House Information Resources (HIR) makes available to Congress and to the general public at [http://www.house.gov/ffr/federal_funding_reports.shtml] the *Federal Funding Report*, a weekly compilation of notices from the previous week's *Federal Register* dealing with federal domestic assistance programs.

Congressional staff may suggest that constituents seeking federal funding search CFDA themselves by subject, keyword, beneficiary and other options for identifying appropriate program information. Some congressional offices will go ahead and forward to constituents a preliminary CFDA 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 grantseeker should contact the department or agency indicated in the CFDA program description for latest information on funding availability, program requirements, and deadlines; often a referral to a local or state office will be given. Agencies often prepare guidelines and application packets for specific programs. They may also provide a list of grantees from the previous fiscal year and indicate the amount of money still available for the coming year.

Grants.gov

Grants.gov is the single access point for current funding notices from over 900 federal grant programs. Grant seekers may search current notices (including by CFDA program number), sign up for e-mail notification of future grant opportunities, download grants application packages and instructions, and submit applications electronically through a uniform process for all federal grant-making agencies.

Types of Federal Assistance

Currently, programs in the CFDA are classified into several types of financial and nonfinancial assistance. For a fuller explanation of these categories, see the CFDA itself and various CRS publications, including CRS Report RS20669, *Federal Grants to State and Local Governments: Overview and Characteristics* and CRS Report RL30818, *Block Grants: An Overview*.

Grants. Grants are generally considered desirable by applicants since 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. Since 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 times, 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 which 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 which 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 which provide federal personnel to directly perform certain tasks for the benefit of communities or individuals.

- **Advisory Services and Counseling:** programs which provide federal specialists to consult, advise, or counsel communities or individuals, to include conferences, workshops, or personal contacts.

- **Dissemination of Technical Information:** programs which provide for the publication and distribution of information or data of a specialized technical nature frequently through clearinghouses or libraries.

- **Training:** programs which 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 which reflect the government-wide responsibilities of the Office of Personnel Management in the recruitment and hiring of federal civilian agency personnel.

Establishing and Maintaining Federal Contacts

Many federal agencies have a number of offices: a central office in Washington; a series of regional and state offices; and, in some cases, local or area offices. Each program in the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* includes information contacts, either giving the name, address, and telephone number of the program officer, or referring applicants to the regional, state, or local office of the agency. Regional and Local Office Addresses are given in Appendix IV of the *Catalog* [http://12.46.245.173/pls/portal30/CATALOG.BROWSE_CATALOG_DYN.show].

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,* for telephone numbers). Establishing a good relationship with the 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 set up a tour of the agency for 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 and Senators, with state and local elected officials, and with 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 veterans 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.

Organizing Office Grants Operations

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 and workload of the office.

- Most offices divide responsibility by function (i.e., legislation is assigned to legislative assistants and correspondents, press and newsletters are under the purview of a press secretary, and caseworkers do casework). 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 (i.e., a specialist in health issues is involved with legislation, correspondence, casework, grants, projects, speeches, and press releases in that subject area).

- DC, state, or district office? 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 staff will be more readily able to communicate and develop relationships with federal department and agency state and regional offices (listed in Appendix IV of the print or Web version of the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance),* 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.

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. Commercial computer software packages are available to manage correspondence, projects, and workload. Congressional office systems administrators should contact HIR (ext. 56002) or the Senate Sergeant at Arms' Senate Service Team (ext. 41517) for recommendations.

Office Grants Manual

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

- 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.

- A constantly-updated telephone listing of contacts in federal, state, and local agencies, and foundations which are heavily relied upon because of the frequency of requests under their supervision, or which have proven especially helpful.

File Systems and Logs

A congressional office may wish to 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, education pilot projects.

- 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.
- Maintain a follow-up calendar or log.
- Track all grants awarded in the district or state — even those your office did not work on.

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 will 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.

- The staff may want to maintain a listing of federal grant recipients and the amount of federal dollars received each year for their state or district. Figures by state and counties can be found in the Bureau of the Census annual publications *Consolidated Federal Funds Report*, available on the Internet at [http://www.census.gov/govs/www/cffr.html], and *Federal Aid to States* at [http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/fas.html]. HIR (ext. 56002) also provides quarterly data on recipients of grants by congressional districts for House offices.

Proposal Writing

Although most offices do not write proposals, they are frequently approached by inexperienced constituents seeking guidance on what makes a good proposal. Constituents may find helpful CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, 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, some in Spanish as well as English.

The Foundation Center and other organizations also publish guides to writing proposals; the Foundation Center offers a mini "Proposal Writing Course" on its website at [http://www.fdncenter.org] and includes versions in Spanish and French. 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 wish to 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.

  9. A detailed budget.

Following Up on Constituents' 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. Secondly, this initial assessment can provide staff with a sense of direction: Are there other projects currently under way that address the problem? Is there an appropriate federal 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. 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. Another alternative would be to send a copy of your constituent's letter to the agency with a buck slip, asking the agency's attention, and to inform your constituent of your action and advise that he or she will be hearing more from the office once the agency reports back.

Another approach is to call the agency contact. 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. Many 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. 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

Pocket Constitution

The Declaration of Independence
The Constitution of the United States
The Bill of Rights
Amendments XI–XXVII

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.

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.

It is a good practice to discourage people 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. Your constituent might also decide to improve the initial application and start the process again.

Foundations and Corporate Grants

With reductions in federal programs, congressional grants specialists may wish to suggest other funding possibilities to their constituents as alternatives and supplements to federal grants. Grants staff will want to get to know the kinds and levels of private sector support that is available to their constituents. The Foundation Center, [http://www.fdncenter.org], with an office in Washington, DC (202) 331-1400, provides each office with its yearly *Foundation Directory* and can advise staff on other sources on private funding.

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. In fact, evidence of such community-based support may lead the way to additional outside funding.

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 grantmakers whose priorities and goals are consistent with their own.

Grantmaking 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.

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.

Because of this variety, different strategies may be needed for dealing with different foundations. There are a few foundations that 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 is an independent national service organization, which serves as a clearinghouse of information on private philanthropic giving. The center produces a number of directories and guides to private and corporate funding sources, in print, CD-ROM, Web, and other electronic formats. In addition to its major reference collections in New York, Washington, DC, Cleveland, and San Francisco, it maintains a national network of cooperating library collections in each state, all available free to the public. Addresses of these library collections are provided on the Foundation Center website. Titles in these collections include:

- *Foundation Directory,* Part 1 (describing the 10,000 largest foundations, based upon total giving) and Part 2 (describing some 10,000 of the smaller national, state, and local foundations, by total giving)
- *Foundation Grants Index,* which lists by state over 125,000 grants awarded by the largest foundations in the last year or two, useful for identifying potential funding sources based on previously awarded grants
- *Guide to U.S. Foundations, Their Trustees, Officers, and Donors*, which covers over 65,000 foundations, many local or community.

Data included in these directories can also be searched electronically; check the Foundation Center website at [http://www.fdncenter.org] for information.

It is generally a good idea to try to identify state or local foundations. They may have a greater interest in local projects than do larger foundations mainly concerned

with programs of national significance. Foundation Center resources are a good starting point for identifying likely funding sources. The next step is to find out more about these foundations by obtaining from them copies of their annual reports or guidelines. Grant seekers need to find out whether their proposals match the foundation's areas of interest and geographic guidelines, whether the proposal is within the its budgetary constraints, and whether it normally funds the type of project being considered.

Direct corporate giving is another potential funding source not to be overlooked. Many corporations support local projects in areas where they have their headquarters or plants, or sponsor projects which somehow enhance their corporate image. The Foundation Center's *National Directory of Corporate Giving* describes approximately 3,600 corporate foundations that often make grants reflecting the interests of their parent companies.

Some Foundation Center directories are available for congressional staff use in CRS House and Senate Research Centers and the La Follette Congressional Reading Room.

Basic Grants Resources for a Congressional Office

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance. Washington: GPO. Annual. Full-text, continuously updated on the Web at [http://www.cfda.gov/].

Key directory of information on federal financial and nonfinancial assistance programs. Entries include eligibility, objectives, award process, application procedure, information contacts, and related programs. Grant seekers should also check individual department and agency websites, which are linked via First.gov at [http://www.firstgov.gov], and must contact departments or agencies directly for available funds and application deadlines.

Foundation Directory, Parts 1 and 2. New York: Foundation Center. Annual with supplement.

Key directory of private funding information, arranged by state. Part one describes over 10,000 largest American foundations; part two includes over 10,000 smaller private and community foundations geared to supporting local organizations and projects. Entries include factual and financial data, statements of purpose and activities, types of support, limitations, application information, and names of donors, officers, and trustees. Includes a subject index, by broad topic of interest. Distributed to each congressional office by the Foundation Center, (202) 331-1400. Data are also available electronically via Web subscription and CD-ROM. The center also publishes a number of other directories and guides to private funding, some of which are available for use in CRS Research Centers and the La Follette Congressional Reading Room. Users may also search its website at [http://www.fdncenter.org/].

Grants.gov. [http://www.grants.gov].

> While the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* provides program descriptions, *Grants.gov* lists actual funding available under these programs. Users may search the site for free (including by CFDA program number), sign up for email notication of funding opportunities, and apply for federal grants through a uniform application process.

CRS Products

Key Sources

CRS Web page, *Grants Information*
[http://www.crs.gov/reference/general/grantsinfo.shtml]

CRS Web page, *Grants and Federal Domestic Assistance*
[http://www.crs.gov/reference/general/grants/member-grant.html]

> These two CRS Web pages link to key grants and funding information. The first focuses on CRS information products and publications; the second on Internet resources, including the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance*, *Grants.gov* and other federal websites, the Foundation Center, and other Internet funding resources. Members may add the CRS Web page, *Grants and Federal Domestic Assistance*, to their home page so grant seekers in districts and states can access Internet information directly (order CRS Product CA90001; also available in Spanish).

CRS Report RS21117, *Ethical Considerations in Assisting Constituents With Grant Requests Before Federal Agencies*

CRS Report RS20514, *Grants Information for Constituents*

CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*

General Information and Contacts

CRS Report RL30818, *Block Grants: An Overview*

CRS Report RS20124, *Community Services Block Grants: Background and Funding*

CRS Report 97-684, *The Congressional Appropriations Process: An Introduction*

CRS Report 98-446, *Congressional Liaison Offices of Selected Federal Agencies*

CRS Report 98-79, *Federal Funds: Tracking Their Geographic Distribution*

CRS Report RS20669, *Federal Grants to State and Local Governments: Overview and Characteristics*

CRS Report RL30778, *Federal Grants to State and Local Governments: Concepts for Legislative Design and Oversight*

Terrorism and Homeland Security

CRS Report RS21736, *FY2005 Appropriations for First Responder Preparedness*

CRS Report RL32036, *Homeland Security: Federal Assistance Funding and Business Opportunities*

CRS Report RL31465, *Protecting Critical Infrastructure from Terrorist Attack: A Catalog of Selected Federal Assistance Programs*

CRS Report RL31227, *Terrorism Preparedness: a Catalog of Federal Assistance Programs*

CRS Report RL31734, *Federal Disaster Recovery Programs: Brief Summaries*

Other CRS Grants Publications

On the CRS Products page at [http://www.crs.gov/search/searchpage.shtml], Search for CRS Products under subject keywords AND "grant*," "grants information," "grants-in-aid," "funding," "federal fund*," "federal aid," or "block grants" to find federal programs on specific subjects and for specific groups such as states and local governments, police and fire departments, libraries and museums, nonprofit organizations, small business, and so forth. Some examples include:

CRS Report RS21302, *Assistance to Firefighters Program*

CRS Report 98-507, *Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grants*

CRS Report RS21924, *Charitable Choice: Expansion by Executive Action*

CRS Report 98-113, *Child Day Care Centers: Resources for Starting and Operating a Child Day Care Center*

CRS Report 97-196, *The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program: An Overview*

CRS Report RL31065, *Forestry Assistance Program*

CRS Report RL31128, *Funding for Public Charter School Facilities: Federal Policy Under the ESEA*

CRS Report 96-123, *Historic Preservation: Background and Funding*

CRS Report RL31540, *Second Chance Homes: Federal Funding, Programs, and Services*

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Congressional Procedure — Richard A. Arenberg

Citizen's Handbook To Influencing Elected Officials

Persuading Congress — By Joseph Gibson