

## Managing the Process: Indiana State Department of Health Success Story

### OVERVIEW

#### CHALLENGE

The Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) was required to use Grants.gov in order to apply for a key grant in 2005. Although they were already registered, they had never actually used Grants.gov before, so as they embarked on the new process there was a certain amount of anxiety to overcome.

#### SOLUTION

It was a great relief to discover just how easy it was to use Grants.gov. By investing a little time in learning unfamiliar navigational procedures and practicing with the system interface, the ISDH users were thrilled to have this new tool that made all their grant applications easier and much faster.

#### WHY GRANTS.GOV?

The Grants.gov system carried over to the entire grant administration operation by bringing organizational control to a process that had previously been operating with a largely undefined agency grant policy and a mix of individual procedures.

**“We submit about one grant application every two weeks, and the submission process end-to-end takes only about 15 minutes. Everyone is amazed at how easy it is the first time they do it. After that, it’s standard practice” says Jennifer Hoffman, Director, Policy & Grant Management Division, Indiana State Department of Health.**

### USER STORY

When Jennifer Hoffman joined the ISDH in July 2005, there was no grant tracking database within her agency and no agency policies established around grants. Submissions were done on an individual basis. Then came the major HIV research “ALOHA grant” which required applicants to complete a grants submission through Grants.gov. Most people at ISDH had little or no idea what Grants.gov was, but when Jennifer checked she discovered that the agency was, in fact, already registered. So, step one was in place, but no one was quite sure what to do next.

As Director of the Policy & Grant Management Division, Jennifer spent time on the phone with the Indiana Governor’s office figuring out what Grants.gov was and why it might be beneficial to use. She began by thoroughly exploring the website, and her initial reaction was that the site was laid out clearly, in a step-by-step manner. Jennifer practiced and used Grants.gov until she became familiar with the navigation tools and understood when she was connected to the Internet and when she was working offline. Soon she was comfortable enough to submit the first ALOHA grant application. She admits that she and her staff, and the grant authors, experienced some anxiety about relying on a new method of submitting online.

Nervousness turned immediately to elation when they hit the submit button and got a confirmation that the application had

been properly received. It was a great reassurance to know right away that they had used and submitted all the right forms – which had always been a worry with manual submissions – and that the agency had received it.

With all the practice, Jennifer probably invested 10 hours in this first Grants.gov submission. Now, she says, when they apply for a grant it takes under 15 minutes to actually fill in the fields and submit, once the numbers have been calculated. Plus, they can share working on the application during its preparation, which has encouraged and allowed for more flexibility and increased communication among the staff.

#### ***ISDH Made Grants.gov an Agency Policy***

The simplicity of using Grants.gov, after a brief learning curve about navigation, and the clarity it instilled led the ISDH to make Grants.gov the backbone of agency policies and procedures. This, in turn, resulted in a management system that was reliable, consistent and understandable to everyone involved. Previously, the programmatic aspects of grant submission were relatively easy, if not always consistent, but management of the process was far from easy. Grants.gov provided ISDH with a tool to control and manage all grant activities, from who sent it out and when, to what is the most up-to-date status.

In particular, the Grants.gov forms are an excellent tool. Previously the department used to just write “on file” on the Federal Checklist form, but it became necessary to look more closely at how specific questions are answered. Grants.gov forces more accurate answers in order to complete set fields on a form. This encouraged and enabled ISDH to question their internal policies and procedures, while providing a new set of tools and resources for the agency to become more effective.

### ***Training Was Easy and Remains Ongoing***

Training and practice makes the process easier and program management more effective and pervasive throughout her organization. To strengthen the training function even more, ISDH put together their own User Guide for Grants.gov. Not only has this helped them become a State knowledge leader about Grants.gov, it has also proven to be a great networking tool. Jennifer explains that working on their Grants.gov User Guide has been a great way to get to know other State agencies and also to work with Federal partners.

### ***Grants.gov Streamlined the Process from a State Level***

The ISDH perspective is that Grants.gov smoothes out the grant submission process, speeds it up to a time commitment of less than 20 minutes, and makes what were complex processes consistent and easy to complete. Furthermore, it offers a reassurance that everything has been done correctly. A user can scan a grant alert email in 4 minutes in the morning and know just what is available that will be of interest to the agency.

Jennifer has found the Grants.gov Help Desk to be terrific, usually answering within 2-3 rings and doing an outstanding job not only of explaining the website but also offering helpful nuances and tips for getting the most value from it.

When program staff come in, Jennifer says they are nervous about working on a grant and they will try to schedule 1 hour of her time. She always tells them that with Grants.gov they will only need 15 minutes beginning to end. Seeing is believing, and the Indiana State Department of Health is now full of believers.

### **Grants.gov Features:**

*Advanced Search Options* – Search a wider selection of grants, from a broad search to searches for more specific subject areas.

*Downloadable Applications* – Applications can be completed offline when and where convenient for users. Applications are easily distributed via email as an attachment and submitted electronically at Grants.gov upon completion.

*Online Tools* – Enhanced FAQs, user guides and online demonstrations guide users through the application process, along with lots of resources to learn more about Grants.gov.

*Personalized Support* – Complementing the online help and support features, Grants.gov also provides users with a dedicated Contact Center accessible via email or phone.

### **About Grants.gov**

Grants.gov is the secure, reliable entry way to Federal grants from multiple agencies. Through Grants.gov, state, local, and tribal governments, colleges and universities, non-profits, research institutions, and other organizations can access, find, and apply for grants from more than 1,000 grant programs representing over \$400 billion in annual grant funds offered by the 26 Federal grant-making agencies.

*Grants.gov, one of 24 E-government initiatives, is a collaborative effort led by 26 Federal grant-making agencies and 11 commissions, including: Agency for International Development, U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, the Environmental Protection Agency, Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation, Small Business Administration, Social Security Administration, Corporation for National and Community Service, African Development Foundation, Appalachian Regional Commission, Barry Goldwater Scholarship Foundation, Christopher Columbus Foundation, Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation, Inter-American Foundation, James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, Japan-U.S. Friendship Foundation, and the Morris K. Udall Foundation.*