

APRIL 2005 STAKEHOLDER MEETING MINUTES
April 27, 2005

Next Meeting

Date: Wednesday, June 29, 2005

Time: 1:30 pm- 3:30 pm

Place: HHS – Hubert H. Humphrey Building

All meeting materials and presentations are available at Grants.gov by visiting <http://www.grants.gov/meetingmaterials042705>.

Opening Remarks and Presentation:

Mr. John Etcheverry, Grants.gov Deputy Program Manager, began the meeting at 1:30 pm with the following agenda:

- Grants.gov Update
- New Applicant Get Started Process
- HUD – Improving Business Process with Grants.gov
- 2004 Satisfaction Survey Review
- Applicant System-to-System: The Building Demand
- Questions & Answers

After welcoming the audience, Mr. Etcheverry provided the Grants.gov Update.

Grants.gov Update

The U.S. Department of Commerce was recognized with a Grants.gov “Goal” Star for reaching the first of two Office of Management and Budget (OMB) goals. The U.S. Department of Commerce posted 212 applicant packages on Apply, exceeding the 25% requirement mandated by OMB.

Grants.gov momentum and usage continues to be on the rise with 51+ Grants.gov pages viewed to date, averaging 242,000 hits per day and 5.5 million inquiries a month to Find grant opportunities. Plus, one million daily opportunity notification emails are sent weekly. Within the Grant Community, the number of registered users continues to grow approximately 20% each month with over 2,500 users registered in the last month. Also, electronic grant application submissions grew 58% in the last six months, and nearly 3,800 electronic applications have been successfully processed. Just last week, approximately 480 electronic grant applications were submitted compared to the first eight months it took to receive the same number of electronic submissions. Grants.gov growth is exponential and we expect to receive 1,000 electronic applications per week soon. Agencies have published over 820 grant application packages to date, with agency ramp-up in full swing.

There have been two additions to the Grants.gov Program Management Team, Vince Sprouls who is on detail from the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Jim Cain, a detailee from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Vince Sprouls is a Grants.gov

Program Advisor for the Department of Transportation (DOT), Small Business Administration (SBA), SSA, and Policy. Jim Cain is Grants.gov Program Advisor for National Science Foundation (NSF) and is overseeing e-authentication and the System-to-System Interface.

Grants.gov was recently named a Showcase of Excellence Award winner for the second consecutive year by the Federal Leadership Council at FOSE 2005. Grants.gov was also selected as a top 50 finalist for the esteemed 2005 Innovations in American Government Award. And finally, Grants.gov was named an American Productivity Quality Control (APQC) Best Practice Partner and was included in the APQC Best Practice benchmarking study. Grants.gov was the only government entity recognized for the study.

Mr. Etcheverry provided an update on the Forms Factory, which currently has 30 forms in production. The forms development process involves eight steps from streamlining to production. A printout of the Grants.gov Form Status Report is available with the Stakeholder Meeting Materials. For agencies posting application packages, please contact your designated Grants.gov Program Advisor to make use of the government-wide forms instead of replicating forms.

Grants.gov's "Spread the Word" Webcast was well received with more than 4,500 registered participants, 3,800 from the initial event and over 700 from the encore presentation. During the Webcast, participants submitted a combined 400 questions and comments with Agency Migration being the most common topic. The Webcast participants represented a broad community ranging from Academic/Research Institutions (24%), Not-for-Profit Organizations (23%) and Federal Agencies (22%) to name a few.

New Applicant Get Started Process

Ms. Katie Root from the Grants.gov Program Management Office (PMO) discussed the new applicant "Get Started" process. Grants.gov has implemented an email campaign to capture visitors to the site that have not fully completed the registration process. Since the launch of the email campaign, the number of registered users is now at 70% from 54%. Agency outreach has also contributed to the increased number of registrants.

The new "Get Started" content defines the different roles and different processes within Grants.gov. For example, identifying the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) as well as their role is more clearly defined during the registration process. Animated online demonstrations are being developed for these roles. The new "Get Started" content can be accessed at <http://www.grants.gov/GetStartedRoles>.

Q: Has Grants.gov conducted any forms usability testing to determine how long it takes for users to fill out the forms?

A: Forms usability testing in this respect has not yet been conducted.

Q: Is it possible to clarify what is defined as the Office of Sponsored Research?

A: The language that is used is common to make it consistent and clear. A suggestion would be for those agencies that intimately know their user group to send out instructions to their potential applicants to advise them on how to register with Grants.gov. Since Grants.gov does communicate with the entire grant community, it is not always possible for Grants.gov to be specific in its advice to applicants. Agencies that would like to provide more specific advice to their user group should feel free to do so.

Q: Are there any Grants.gov materials available in other languages?

A: At this time, there are no Grants.gov foreign language materials available. Please contact your designated Grants.gov Program Advisor regarding these inquiries.

HUD: Improving Business Process with Grants.gov & HUD

Ms. Terry Nicolosi, Grants.gov PMO and Barbara Dorf from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) discussed how HUD and Grants.gov collaborated to improve business process. HUD was originally a paper environment with over 250 agency specific data elements outside of the core SF 424. As part of the movement towards becoming electronic, HUD provided Grants.gov their ramp-up schedule. HUD and Grants.gov reviewed the matrix of HUD application forms across the agency.

In 2004, two core only HUD programs were piloted for testing. Grants.gov and HUD kicked off the electronic process by reviewing 69 submitted SuperNOFA forms requirements for 2005. HUD and Grants.gov agreed on twelve core department-wide agency forms. In August, once agreement was reached, the HUD Policy/IT team and Grants.gov held a deployment kick-off meeting. Grants.gov provided a Microsoft Office Project Plan to HUD and obtained consensus on incremental delivery of forms. This is an ensured schedule. The project plan was put into motion with sign off points across the schedule. This project plan is available on the Grants.gov site.

HUD invested time preparing the staff and grantees for the move towards electronic processing through many communication vehicles. Instead of taking a form-by-form approach, HUD's analysis focused on the expected number of applications by program. HUD also invested resources and is an active member of the Grants.gov Executive Board, which has been key for leadership and sign-off. HUD's commitment continues by being a strong supporter of Grants.gov. Several laws helped HUD in the efforts to move to an electronic government:

- PL 104-13, Government Paperwork Reduction Act (GPR) was instrumental in moving from paper to electronic
- PL 106-107 which required agencies to streamline and simplify their grant application and reporting requirements
- PL 106-229, Electronic Signatures in Global Commerce Act (ESIGN) which required electronic filing on the back-end

HUD also developed a proposed rule for mandatory electronic submission with a departmental standard HUD waiver provision. Thus far, only one waiver has been submitted.

HUD's SuperNOFA process sought to maximize the commonalities in the grant programs by making it easier for applicants to understand program requirements. The General Section establishes common rules pertaining to all programs and program specific forms required to publish on the Federal Register, which is costly. The General Section also established common forms or information requests.

HUD held a preliminary meeting with Grants.gov to review the ramp-up schedule and forms matrix. The team reviewed programs first followed by the individual forms and their associated DATs. Discussion topics included types of forms, edit checks, the shelf life of the forms, and which forms were likely to change due to program requirement changes. The forms were tied into the production schedule, which was developed and agreed to by Grants.gov and HUD. The forms and their DATs were transmitted to Grants.gov for review and evaluation. A second meeting was held with Grants.gov and HUD to go over issues or concerns and come to agreement for signoff. HUD provided Grants.gov a matrix of all application forms for its programs, which identified those utilized by many programs and helped prioritize. HUD looked to existing agency forms for reuse within HUD to build on the theory of "Build once. Use many." HUD standard forms are used in over 90% of HUD programs. Standardization helped reduce the number of forms by 11% while increasing the number of opportunities by 23%.

The Critical Design Review (CDR) process, which occurred from August 2004 to December 2004, was a positive experience for HUD. The CDR process allows for the agencies to review form functionality and help tips prior to full development, as well as allowing agency staff to participate in the review process and take ownership of the form and the process. Adherence to the project plan schedule is critical, as well as sign-off by the agency and Grants.gov for progress and deployment. It was made mandatory for programs involved with CDR to send a copy to Grants.gov to help finalize the form and eliminate confusion.

Several lessons learned from HUD's experience with and teaming with Grants.gov include:

- The CDR process helped eliminate confusion regarding the development of DATs and help tips
- Agency staff were better able to define requirements and help tips instead of outsourcing the work
- Excessive edit checks limit form flexibility
- Forms must remain stable to allow data movement to the back-end system for reuse and to create a back-end model
- Reviewing application packages instead of individual forms promote form reuse
- Communication is important
 - HUD continuously communicated across the agency and the grantee community about the proposed move to electronic grant applications
- Reuse Grants.gov information
 - HUD's Grants.gov brochures are available on the site in English and Spanish; "Getting Ready for Electronic Application Submission" and

“Finding and Applying for Grants Opportunities, Information for Applicants and Grantees

- HUD held satellite broadcasts to provide progress updates to agency staff and grantees of HUD’s efforts to use Grants.gov Find and Apply
- HUD mailed out postcards in English and Spanish to individuals previously interested in HUD grant opportunities encouraging them to “Get Ready for Electronic Application Submission and Register with Grants.gov”
- HUD placed information on the Intranet and Internet grant pages and utilized Grants.gov’s link to the registration process

Other elements critical to HUD’s success involved HUD conducting two pilots;

- Housing Counseling training – May 2004, 18 applications
- Capacity Building grants – October 2004, 6 applications

HUD expects anywhere from 20,000-25,000 electronic grant applications to be submitted through SuperNOFA. HUD and Grants.gov continue to coordinate with communications throughout the grants submission process via the Contact Center and the Grants.gov team.

HUD has moved 53 funding opportunities through 43 announcements from a paper process to an electronic format in a short period of time. Electronic grant submission allows HUD to have access to data and form business process improvements. Work continues for HUD and Grants.gov on the coordination and streamlining of the remaining agency forms and programs as well as the web-enabled systems.

2004 Satisfaction Survey Review

Mr. Charles Colby of Rockbridge Associates Inc. discussed Grants.gov’s 2004 Satisfaction Survey Review with the following agenda:

- Background and methodology
- Top-line findings
- Overall satisfaction and meeting expectations
- Perceptions, strengths and challenges: Grant Community
- Perceptions, strengths and challenges: Grantor
- Customer support
- Effect of Grants.gov on grants process
- System preference for future usage

The purpose of the satisfaction survey is to measure customer satisfaction with Grants.gov and assess perceived value among users. A ten minute online survey was administered to the grant community members and grant making agency representatives who visited Grants.gov in the prior two months during:

- April 2004 – Wave 1
- Late July – early August 2004 – Wave 2
- October 2004 – Wave 3
- Late January – early February 2005 – Wave 4

The survey covered the following areas:

- Overall satisfaction with Grants.gov
- Satisfaction with Grants.gov attributes
- Usage of and satisfaction with customer support
- Evaluation of Grants.gov compared to current grant processes
- Organizational demographics

Grant community activities continue to be searching, downloading, registering and asking for email notification. The most common type of organization in the grant community continues to be not-for-profit.

More than half of grantors have published grant opportunities on Grants.gov with downloading submitted applications on the rise. Wave 3 of the satisfaction survey was not conducted due to a small grantor sample size. The most common activities among grantors was publishing grant opportunities, registering to use Grants.gov and downloading submitted applications.

Top-line findings include:

- Overall satisfaction with Grants.gov continues to increase among the grant community. Currently, almost half are highly satisfied.
- Grantors' satisfaction also improved since the previous wave
- A strong majority of both groups also feel that Grants.gov meets or exceeds their expectations. This has increased over the past year.
- Six-in-ten grant community members and four-in-ten grantors feel the grant application process is better with Grants.gov. This has not changed much.
- Six-in-ten grant community members prefer Grants.gov to their original grant application process which is down from previous waves.
- Half of grantors prefer Grants.gov which is higher than previous waves, an indication of momentum amongst grantors.
- Grant community satisfaction with site functionality has remained steady over the past year.
- The grant community believes there is room for Grants.gov to continue to improve applying and submitting applications, the AOR registration process, and search functionality.
- Grantors' satisfaction with site functionality has increased over the past year in key areas including security of information, reliability, and page downloading speeds. Overall, a third of grantors are highly satisfied with Grants.gov.
- Grantor functionality satisfactions is up in all areas, most significantly in being easier to post opportunities, having flexible roles/agency profiles, and being easier to download completed applications.
- Priorities for improvement for grantors focus on usability issues including search functionality.

- The grant community's satisfaction with customer support has decreased slightly since Wave 3.

Within the grant community, meeting/exceeding expectations are significantly higher than a year ago. Seven-in-ten grant community members believe Grants.gov meets or exceeds their expectations. Meeting/exceeding expectations with grantors have also increased over the year with more than three-quarters of grantors believing that Grants.gov meets or exceeds their expectations.

In Wave 4, 37% of grant community members had questions or problems while using Grants.gov, with no significant changes since earlier waves. The most common issues related to applying for grants or finding grant opportunities on Grants.gov. Also in Wave 4, 47% of grantors had questions or problems while using Grants.gov mostly associated with general site functionality and logging into Grants.gov.

Usage of particular customer support methods by grant community members with questions about Grants.gov has varied over the past year. Currently, grant community members are using FAQs, calling, and referring to the user guide most to answer their questions. In the past year, they are more likely to call and less likely to email customer support. Grantors who have questions about Grants.gov continue to call, email, or use the FAQs most to address their problems. This has not changed much over the past year. However, grantors use the tutorial less than they did a year ago.

As for training and support on Grants.gov, almost half of grant community members claim they received enough training and support to use Grants.gov. This has not changed over the past year. In Wave 4, two-thirds of grantors believe they received enough training and support to use Grants.gov, which is significantly higher than in previous waves.

The majority of grant community members submit most of their grant applications on paper. Grant community members' preference for using Grants.gov over their original grant submission process is down this wave, but 60% of grant community members prefer to use Grants.gov instead of their original process. Seven-in-ten grantors receive most of their grant applications on paper, which is similar to previous waves. Half of grantors prefer to use Grants.gov over their original process for grant submission. Fewer prefer their original process than in previous waves.

Applicant System to System Update: The Building Demand

Mr. Peter Brunner, Grants.gov Program Advisor provided an update on the Applicant System to System Interface (S2S). Please note that a background and overview of the Applicant S2S Interface was provided during the February 2005 Grants.gov Stakeholder Meeting.

The Applicant S2S Interface allows applicant organizations to submit electronic applications via their back office grants management systems rather than using PureEdge. It also eliminates the need to re-enter data into the applicant organization's back office

grant system to retain information for their internal processes. The S2S Interface supports integration with the applicant organization back office grants management systems by simplifying/decentralizing user registration requirements. Establishing a trusted/secure relationship is outsourced and controlled by the applicant organization – similar to the agency relationship to Grants.gov. The Applicant S2S Interface also promotes the usage of the Research & Related (R&R) forms in research institutions and promotes the usage of the SF 424 Mandatory form.

Since February 2005, InFlow Suite, the back-end process of Grants.gov, was released to pilot participants for testing on March 28th. A general user workshop was conducted on March 31st – April 1st and was attended by 30 universities, hospitals, organizations, and seven Federal agencies. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has completed testing of their interface and is ready to deploy to production. A live demonstration of the product was conducted at the workshop. Also, a rollout schedule is being set with the different pilot groups.

The Applicant S2S Interface outsources some activities currently performed by Grants.gov:

- Validation of the AOR
- Editing now done in the PureEdge forms
- Submission of the XML file

To leverage investments, applicant organizations need stable, streamlined, and consolidated data sets/forms from the agencies. New data sets/forms require a systems change for the applicant organization to continue to use the Applicant S2S Interface. Agencies also need to prepare to handle the latent demand for rapid adoption of the R&R data set. With the widespread adoption by both agencies and applicant organizations of the S2S Interface, Grants.gov is becoming a “crossroad” between these two environments to establish stability, satisfying the needs of both types of organizations. This creates opportunities for greater exchange of information and imposes significant coordinative challenges. It is crucial that agencies strictly adhere to the W3C standards.

The Applicant S2S Interface poses a number of challenges and opportunities. For example, the Applicant S2S Interface is creating an increased demand for agencies to adopt the R&R forms set. Adopting an effective change management process also poses as a challenge, but also an opportunity to create a stable and predictive process and environment. Grants.gov also hopes to identify requirements of state grants offices in order to better control the grants submission process and capture information coming back to the states. The Program also hopes to develop a model for providing technical assistance with limited resources in an open environment to validate organization activities and viable system validation models. Grants.gov is beginning to explore the need for users groups and planning capacity for anticipated rapid growth.

Regarding capacity planning, there are several factors to consider. Usage is accelerating due to increased agency acceptance. However, some key agencies are late adopters of Grants.gov, many of which are expected users of the R&R form set. OMB requires

agencies to post at least 25% of its grant application packages on Grants.gov and any grant application package that uses just the basic SF 424. This target is expected to rise in future fiscal years. Also, use of the SF 424 Mandatory will increase and become ubiquitous. Grants.gov's target for electronic applications received is 15,000-16,000 by June 30, 2005. The total application pool may be as high as 250,000-300,000 per fiscal year. These targets were extrapolated based on agency ramp-up schedules.

Based on early finding from the pilot, Grants.gov was able to conclude that:

- Pilot agencies represent large user constituencies. For example, MIT's COEUS has sold 100 licenses to other organizations and universities and has over 35 active universities using it. Cayuse Software has more the 30 user organizations and the Minnesota's system is used through the state.
- Pilot universities with multiple campuses estimate a combined total of 10,000 applications, the majority using the R&R data set. MIT estimates aggregate COEUS demand at 15,000.
- Demand for Applicant S2S access is coming from the customers, i.e. from the bottom up, such as from the Principal Investigators (PIs).
- MIT's FY 2004 submissions were 1,250. The average submission size was under 1MB for non-hard science submissions and over 1MB for hard sciences. Submissions over 10 MB were rare.
- Other universities reported larger average file sizes.
- States are more likely to want to make use of the SF 424 Mandatory forms but demand is still in its infancy. Demand from the states will likely be in support of reporting, awards and related information.

The Applicant S2S will be activated for production in early May. MIT is almost ready to go into production and will pilot on behalf of the COEUS community. After several weeks, the code will be exported. Grants.gov is also working with the State of Maryland on behalf of several additional states and the National Grants Partnership (NGP) to keep the states involved. Additional roll-out activity of the Applicant S2S Interface is scheduled as follows:

- April – ERA Software and the University of Texas – Austin
- May – Minnesota and the University of Texas Southwest Medical
- June – Cayuse Software (InfoEd has also expressed interest in rolling out.)

Stakeholder Questions & Answers

Mr. John Etcheverry answered questions from the Stakeholder audience.

Q: The Office of Justice Programs administers the Grant making process for much of the U.S. Department of Justice. We have a constituency of grant applicants that utilize Apple MACs rather than WinTel systems. The PureEdge Viewer utilized by Grants.gov does not provide native support for MAC users and an adapter program for the grant applicant incurs a cost of \$125 per license. To avoid excluding this small but important part of our constituency, will the Grants.Gov PMO provide this license at no cost to the prospective grant applicant or provide an appropriate interface to Grants.gov for MAC users?

A: No, Grants.gov will not provide the license for free. An alternative option would be the Applicant S2S Interface which eliminates the need for PureEdge. However, PureEdge is developing a native MAC viewer. They are scheduled to deliver within 18-24 months. Grants.gov will work with Apple for a general public statement, addressing this very issue. This statement will be made available on the Grants.gov site once it has been released.

Q: What is the cost of the Applicant S2S Interface?

A: The Applicant S2S Interface is an extensive application and can be costly on the backend. However, building an open source is free. Please contact Grants.gov at support@grants.gov if you are interested in the S2S Interface.