

Notification of a Public Meeting of the Government Accountability and Transparency Board

Agenda: The purpose of the January 22, 2014 meeting is to allow the public to make presentations to the GAT Board regarding accountability and transparency for federal expenditures made through contracts and grants.

The GAT Board Chairman will make a brief opening statement. The rest of the meeting will feature presentations by members of the public on the following:

1. Who do you represent?

Commonwealth of Mass. Executive Office for Administration and Finance, Federal Grants Management Office

2. What questions are you trying to answer with federal spending information?

Real time data on:

- The amount federal funding currently available throughout across all state departments and secretariats – broken down by individual grant award
- Fiscal and Programmatic start and end dates for each federal grant award
- How much of a particular grant award is spent vs. committed vs. unspent within an award year, the federal fiscal year and the state fiscal year
- How much has been reimbursed for the spending to date
- Amount of state match required to sustain each federal grant (aka – operating budget exposure in cash and kind)
- What programs the dollars are spent on and the outcomes?
- All information drilled down to sub-recipients, prime vendors and sub recipient vendors
- Analytics related to this spending - mandatory versus discretionary programs, continuing versus one time awards, competitive versus formulaic grants

Historical financial and performance data highlighted above related to federal grants for the same programs

Additionally, it is not simply spending but also what are the active eligible grant opportunities for programs that are being pursued by our state agencies and the status of such applications

3. What federal spending information do you need to answer these questions?

Technically, we may not need any information directly from the federal systems. However, given the complexity and volume of data that is exchanged between state and federal agencies, it is critical we are all looking at the same information as all levels of the public sector information and especially data that is expected to be public through automated web sites and also meets financial consistency. In the systems environment we operate today, that is not possible or easy, making for potential errors in decision making and miscommunication.

4. Where do you find that federal spending information now?

We get it by combining manual information requests from our state agencies with information from our State enterprise wide financial system on an as-needed basis. Unfortunately, information in our financial system is tracked on an appropriation account basis and not on a grant award basis and also the focus is the state fiscal year data aggregation, which makes this a difficult exercise. We also use web sites provided by CFDA, FFIS, SAM, etc. to identify characteristics and metrics (competitive versus formulaic, mandatory versus discretionary ,etc.)

5. Where does federal spending information need clearer instructions or explanations?

There is a lack of standardization on data gathered and requested by different federal agencies, which then filters down to the data & information gathering tools and databases of their prime recipients (aka – state agencies) and that in turn, renders any enterprise-wide view of significant federal spending at a state level difficult and often a collection of “apples and oranges” in a fruit basket.

6. What suggestions do you have for prioritizing federal spending information enhancements?

- Standardization of data elements and a common data dictionary for all federal grants modeled on the ARRA learnings and approach. For instance, FAIN numbers should be unique across all federal agencies, and every federal opportunity should have a funding opportunity number that is unique.
- A common federal grant database & reporting system that all prime recipients use to submit spending information in a standardized manner and one which requires all federal agencies use to extract information they need.
- Eliminate the multiple and contradictory data collection mechanisms & reports in place agency to agency
- Allow states like Massachusetts who are at the cutting edge of developing a standardized enterprise-wide grants mgmt. system to have the ability to centrally access federal systems for information submitted by their state agencies to improve oversight as well financial & program planning.