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Searching for Federal Grants: An Overview of Resources

The diverse range of federal grant programs can be challenging to navigate. Congress has authorized over 1,800 federal grant programs to support national goals and objectives, and federal grant funding can be used for a variety of purposes based on the eligible use provisions of each program. Federal grants are often primarily available for state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and other entities; federal grant programs are not often available to businesses or individuals.

This In Focus provides information on selected key resources for searching and discovering information on federal grant opportunities. During the exploratory phase, grantseekers may use their familiarity with the details of their project to compare those details with grant program requirements and ask questions of administering agencies. This In Focus also briefly discusses grant administration.

There is no *single* resource that will provide comprehensive information on the specific provisions of all existing federal assistance programs for grantseekers. However, there are several key sources below that may be of assistance.

Who Administers Federal Grants?

Grantseekers are encouraged to identify who administers grants of interest, as they may be the most important source of information. There are over two dozen federal agencies providing funding opportunities to the public in the form of grants. Understanding more about typical awards processes and terminology will assist in identifying the entity that is administering a particular grant.

Many federal grant funds are first awarded to state and local governments through various formula grant or block grant programs (e.g., see Texas's *Top 100 Federal Funding Sources in the Texas State Budget*). The state and local governments receiving these direct awards are considered *prime* recipients, who then administer the program funding and may make *subawards* to other *subrecipients*. This subawarding is known as a “pass-through” process.

In addition to pass-through subawarding of federal funds (often from state entities, and sometimes local entities), some federal grant funding is *directly* awarded by federal agencies without a pass-through. These awards are considered discretionary grants, administered by the federal agency, and, typically, reviewed in a competitive process overseen by the awarding federal agency.

Identifying who administers a grant may help grantseekers identify official websites of administering agencies and grant program contacts. From these sources, questions can be answered about types and availability of federal assistance, eligibility requirements, application processes,

and award cycles/timeframes. For more information, see the sections on state and federal government websites below.

Assistance Listings at SAM.gov

SAM.gov (System for Award Management) is hosted by the General Services Administration (GSA) and is a public platform providing multiple databases, including the Assistance Listings (formerly known as the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance*). The Assistance Listings is a searchable database that describes over 2,200 federal assistance programs, including over 1,800 federal grant programs, and has a variety of search options. SAM's Assistance Listings provide a short summary of each grant program and contact information for grant-making federal agencies (e.g., see the *Assistance to Firefighters* grant program listing). SAM.gov Assistance Listings does not display grant program opportunities in “real time,” and it is possible that listed grant programs may not be currently available for application (or may not currently have any available funding to award).

In addition to information on all kinds of federal grant programs, SAM.gov provides summaries of federal programs for federal loans, direct payments, surplus equipment, and cooperative agreements. Programs can be searched by keyword and filtered by federal organization, eligibility, assistance type, and location.

Federal Program Inventory

In 2024, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) publicly launched the Federal Program Inventory (FPI). Using data from SAM.gov Assistance Listings, this site similarly provides “snapshot” summaries of federal financial assistance programs, including grant programs (e.g., see the *Assistance to Firefighters* grant program summary). Like SAM.gov, this site allows searching by agencies, type of program/assistance, and eligible applicants—but this site *also* offers a category search function that displays results by topic across multiple agencies. This added functionality may be particularly helpful for new grantseekers who are at the beginning or exploratory stage of the search process. Grantseekers can select categories (and subcategories) to search, such as agriculture, economic/community development, housing, disaster prevention and relief, transportation, and many others. The Federal Program Inventory also displays some overview data on federal program obligation amounts from USAspending.gov.

Grants.gov

Grants.gov lists federal Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), which are announcements that federal agencies publish when they are ready to accept applications. Grants.gov opportunities can be searched by keyword, opportunity status, funding instrument type, eligibility,

category, and agency. Grantseekers can sign up for a free account to receive email notification alerts of new postings. Grants.gov also hosts an online Grants Learning Center where grantseekers can learn basics about the federal grant lifecycle, management, and grant-related terminology.

Possible Limitations of Grants.gov

Grants.gov lists primarily grant program funds that are awarded directly from federal agencies to *prime* grant recipients through a competitive process—grantseekers will *not* find state-administered subgrant/subaward opportunities on Grants.gov; those “pass-through” funds are generally only available through individual state-level agencies. Also, Grants.gov largely functions as an administrative and submission tool for grantseekers applying for competitive grant programs. Prior to utilizing Grants.gov features, a grantseeker is generally already aware of a particular competitive funding opportunity that aligns with their project and has prepared for the application in the weeks and months *prior* to the NOFO being posted on Grants.gov (many postings on Grants.gov have relatively short windows of opportunity, often announced 30 to 60 days before the submission deadline).

Federal Agency Websites

Federal agency websites often provide information about active grant programs and include deadlines, program contacts, and eligibility. This information can vary from agency to agency, and many post *Frequently Asked Questions*, recorded presentations, or guides on funding programs, as well as detailed program guidance. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development provides several fact sheets, which provide information on USDA federal assistance programs that support rural areas.

Grantseekers can often sign up to receive upcoming notifications or announcements from an agency, or agency’s divisions or offices of interest. Some agencies might also announce funding opportunities that are expected to be available later in the year.

Some federal agencies have developed special dashboards or other sites to help grantseekers identify potential funding. For example:

- The U.S. Dept. of Transportation provides a discretionary transportation grants dashboard.
- SchoolSafety.gov has a grants finder tool.
- Rural Community Toolbox lists U.S. Depts. of Justice and Health and Human Services funding opportunities for substance abuse projects.
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides a grants dashboard that also includes forecasted opportunities.

State Government Websites

State agency websites might provide information about available federal grant funding that will be passed through the state and sub-granted at the community level to local

governments, nonprofits, or other grantseekers. Many state level agencies accept grant applications or proposals.

For example, the Secretary of the Interior provides financial assistance to states for outdoor recreation purposes, under a formula grant program (through the *Land and Water Conservation Fund*). Under National Park Service program guidance (2023), states may award this federal funding to local units of governments and tribes, among others. Eligible purposes include the acquisition of lands and waters and the development of parks and other public outdoor recreation facilities. A local government looking to fund an outdoor recreation area might explore their state’s parks/recreation or similar agency to learn about this federal program (e.g., see Colorado’s administering agency).

Some states might also provide broader search tools; for example, Virginia provides an informational grants portal listing federal, state, and private funding, and Ohio also provides a searchable database of grant opportunities that are administered by the state.

Regional Development Organizations (RDOs)

RDOs are multijurisdictional planning and development organizations that offer a range of services to their member governments. RDO refers to a broad category of organizations that includes local or area development districts, councils of governments, regional planning commissions, and others (e.g., Illinois’s tri-county area, or a metropolitan area, like Nashville). RDOs are sometimes involved in facilitating federal grantseeking or grantmaking at the regional or local level for certain kinds of multijurisdictional projects (e.g., transportation, tourism, and hazard mitigation—but this will vary widely, depending on the region, as well as the capacity and goals of the RDO). Contacting RDOs may also yield information and possible partnerships for a desired project. There is no centralized directory of all RDOs, but grantseekers could utilize search engines, the Economic Development Administration’s (EDA’s) Economic Development Directory, or an interactive map from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). See *CRS In Focus IF11511, The Role of Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) in Economic Development*.

Congressional Research Service (CRS)

CRS provides a variety of reports related to grant programs. Some reports are centered on programs for a particular topic (such as food aid) or agency (such as the Economic Development Administration). Congressional personnel can access these reports at the CRS Grants Resources webpage, and the public can search for and access reports on subjects of interest at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>. These products may be particularly useful for grantseekers:

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

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