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Tracking Federal Grant Awards: A Brief Overview

This In Focus briefly discusses the primary government tool for tracking federal grant awards, USAspending.gov, as well as selected other federal grant award data sources. For background on USAspending.gov, see CRS Report R44027, *Tracking Federal Awards: USAspending.gov and Other Data Sources*.

Federal grant awards are the transfer of money, property, services, or other items of value from the federal government to an eligible recipient for which the principal purpose is to accomplish a goal authorized by Congress. Eligible recipients typically include state, local, tribal and territorial (SLTT) governments, and certain nonprofit and for-profit entities. Individuals can also be beneficiaries of federally funded grants. Tracking federal grant awards enables Congress to conduct oversight of federal grant programs and stay informed about grant funding received in their states, congressional districts (CDs), and other local geographies.

As frequent prime or primary recipients of federal grant funding, state governments may provide services directly to beneficiaries, or “pass through” and subaward grant funding to localities by using a formula or a competitive process. This pass-through or subaward process makes tracking federally originated funds challenging due to the potential for reporting delays or errors. It also makes calculating the total dollar amounts of awards received in local areas a challenge, as summing prime awards and subawards for the same federally originated funding would be double-counting.

USAspending.gov

USAspending.gov, maintained by the Department of the Treasury, provides data on federal prime grant awards and first-tier subawards (or subawards awarded directly by the prime recipient) by state, county, city, CD, and zip code. The prime grant awards data in USAspending.gov are reported by federal awarding agencies, and the first-tier subaward data are reported by prime recipients (usually SLTT governments, nonprofit, or for-profit entities).

Using USAspending.gov to locate and compile accurate data on federal grant awards presents challenges, in part because of ongoing data quality issues that have been identified by the Government Accountability Office (e.g., *Federal Spending Transparency: Opportunities to Improve USAspending.gov Data*). Researchers need to be aware that search results may be incomplete or contain inaccuracies.

Searching for Grant Awards in USAspending.gov

USAspending.gov’s Award Search page provides multiple filters for identifying prime and subawards by different criteria, such as the following:

- **Time period.** Searching by date (fiscal year or date range) captures grant awards that have had transactions during that time period, regardless of the period of performance start date. Users can opt to limit searches to new awards only.
- **Award type.** Under the “Grant” category, choices include block, formula, and project grants, as well as cooperative agreements.
- **Awarding agency.** The awarding agency is the federal agency designated as the lead agency for the purposes of administering the grant program used to originate grant funding award payments.
- **Location.** Generally, searching by state, county, city, or CD provides award information based on the location of the primary recipient rather than the project location. To better capture where the work is being performed and the money is being spent, search on “Place of Performance.” Searching by “Recipient Location” may be useful in identifying competitive grants that were awarded directly by the federal government to recipients in local areas.
- **Recipient name.** This field enables searching for a specific primary recipient or first-tier subrecipient.
- **Recipient type,** such as a nonprofit organization, higher education institution, or local government agency.
- **Assistance listing (formerly Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, or CFDA)** is the federal program through which the award was made. Assistance listing descriptions can be found on the site SAM.gov (“System for Award Management”), which is maintained by the General Services Administration (GSA). Additionally, the Office of Management and Budget created a Federal Program Inventory, which allows browsing and searching for programs that are organized by broad subject area, such as education, community development, and transportation.

The default search results display shows information on each prime grant award as captured by the search, including

recipient name, total obligations and outlays to date, and federal awarding agency.

Details on an individual prime award, including transaction history and subawards, are included in the award record. Search results can be downloaded at either the award (summary) or transaction level, along with additional details about each award, into a spreadsheet. Prime and subawards are downloaded in separate files.

The award search function is continually being developed and improved, so new features may have become available since the publication of this In Focus.

Significance of Subawards

Most federal prime grant awards initially go to state governments, which then award or pass through at least some of these funds to entities in counties, towns, and congressional districts in the state. Most federal funding reaches local areas through these subawards.

A search for grants in USAspending.gov yields, in addition to prime grant awards, a separate list of subawards that meet the search criteria. These subawards can be viewed by using the dropdown filter at the top of the page above the prime grant search results:



Prime award and subaward dollar amount totals should not be combined, as there could be overlap that could lead to double-counting of the same federal award spending.

For more information on USAspending.gov and how it can be used to track grant awards, see CRS In Focus IF10231, *Tracking Federal Awards in States and Congressional Districts Using USAspending.gov*.

Tracking Grant Awards Funded by COVID-19 and Infrastructure Legislation

USAspending.gov's Award Search page includes filters through which users can identify grants funded by various COVID-19 funding legislation and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58).

For more information on tracking COVID-19 funding to state and local areas, see CRS Report R46491, *Resources for Tracking Federal COVID-19 Spending*. The USAspending.gov site also provides instructional videos for different aspects of searching and downloading awards data. Several of these videos focus specifically on searching for COVID-19- and IIJA-funded awards.

U.S. Budget: Aid to State and Local Governments

The President's annual budget often includes a volume titled *Analytical Perspectives*, which covers various topics, including "Aid to State and Local Governments." This aid represents federal financial assistance, primarily as grants, to SLTT governments to help fund programs administered by those entities. Most often, federal grants are awarded as cash assistance to be used by the grantee to fund specific projects, but federal grants can also include in-kind assistance, such as commodities purchased for the National School Lunch Program.

Data accompanying the "Aid to State and Local Governments" chapter include individual program tables with state-by-state obligation data for grants-in-aid programs to state and local governments. This source can be useful for determining, at a glance, how funding from assistance programs is distributed nationwide by state in dollars and percentages.

Federal Audit Clearinghouse

States, local governments, and nonprofits (including universities) spending \$750,000 or more in federal grants during a fiscal year are required to submit an audit evaluating the grant management activities of both prime award and subaward recipients. GSA maintains the Federal Audit Clearinghouse (FAC) and enables searching of audits going back to 2016. These audits evaluate cash management practices of grant recipients. While audits do not provide a line-item assessment for individual grant awards, they can be helpful in understanding grant recipient compliance with general financial management requirements. Searches may be conducted by organization or institution, assistance listing number, and state.

Federal Funds Information for States

Federal Funds Information for States (FFIS) is a subscription-only service that tracks federal formula (and some competitive) grant funding to states. Aggregated data are provided at the state level as well as by type of grant and specific program. Filters enable identification of funding by criteria not included in USAspending.gov, such as grants funded by discretionary versus mandatory spending. FFIS also maintains products that track funding to states from COVID-19 legislation, IIJA, the Inflation Reduction Act (P.L. 117-169), and the CHIPS and Science Act (P.L. 117-167). Many state governments subscribe to FFIS. Information is limited for nonsubscribers.

Other Grant-Tracking Sources

CRS report R44027, cited at the beginning of this In Focus, provides more information and background on USAspending.gov and features additional sources for tracking federal grants, including a list of selected agency websites that provide grant award details, either through announcements or searchable databases. Many grant awards are also announced by congressional offices, recipients, or local news sources.

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