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Tracking Federal Awards in States and Congressional Districts Using USAspending.gov

Overview

USAspending.gov is a government source for data on federal awards by state, congressional district (CD), zip code, city, and county. The awards data in USAspending.gov are provided by federal agencies and represent grants, contracts, loans, and other forms of financial assistance. Grant awards include money the federal government commits for projects in states, local jurisdictions, regions, territories, and tribal reservations, as well as payments for eligible needs to help individuals and families. Contract awards refer to bids and agreements the federal government makes for specific goods and services. Award funding data include both obligations (money committed to be spent) and outlays (money actually paid out).

USAspending.gov also provides tools for examining the broader picture of federal spending obligations within the categories of budget function, agency, and object class. Budget function refers to the major purpose that the spending serves, such as Social Security, Medicare, and national defense. Object class refers to the type of item or service purchased by the federal government, such as grants, contracts, and personnel compensation and benefits.

The COVID-19 pandemic spurred multiple pieces of legislation providing relief to individuals and families, state and local governments, businesses, and health care providers. USAspending.gov provides access to data on COVID-19 funding through visual displays and specific search filters. For more information, see CRS Report R46491, *Resources for Tracking Federal COVID-19 Spending*, by Jennifer Teefy and Maria Kreiser.

Additional search filters to enable tracking awards made through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58) have also been added to USAspending.gov.

Using USAspending.gov to locate and compile accurate data on federal awards presents challenges, in part, because of continued data quality issues that have been identified by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). Researchers need to be aware that search results may be incomplete or contain inaccuracies.

USAspending.gov includes the following features:

- **Award Search** of prime and first-tier subaward data (i.e., subawards awarded directly by the prime recipients) back to FY2008 allows filtering by award type, awarding agency, recipient, country, state, zip, city, county, CD, and other criteria. To identify where money is being spent, search on *Place of Performance*

versus *Recipient Location*. The search results list displayed can be downloaded at either the award or transaction level, along with additional details about each award, into a spreadsheet. Details on an individual award, including transaction history and subawards, may be viewed by clicking on the *Award ID*. Interactive displays below the search results allow users to view aggregated award transactions data from different perspectives. The award search is continually being developed and improved, so new features may have become available since the publication of this report.

- **Spending Explorer** enables “big picture” browsing of federal spending obligations back to FY2017 and offers interactive data visualization by budget function, agency, and object class. With this tool, users can see the budget function breakdown by categories such as Social Security, Medicare, and national defense; obligated amounts by agency; and obligations by object class categories such as grants, contracts, and personnel compensation and benefits.
- **Profiles of Agencies and Federal Accounts** feature data back to FY2017 on each agency’s budgetary resources, dollar amounts that have been obligated and outlaid against those budgetary resources, and amounts the agency has obligated for awards. Users can also browse a list of more than 2,000 federal accounts and track spending obligations and outlays, including awards, within each. The data in this section are presented visually through interactive charts.
- **Profiles of States and Territories** provides tables, interactive maps, and graphs showing a breakdown of a total awarded amount to each state and territory back to FY2008. Breakdowns include totals by award type, county, and CD. Profiles also include top five rankings in various categories, such as awarding agencies and recipients.
- **Profiles of Recipients** contains information on entities that have received federal awards in the form of contracts, grants, loans, or other financial assistance back to FY2008. Recipient profiles include data on award trends over time and top five rankings in various categories.
- **Data Download** allows bulk exporting of large award datasets by agency, award type, and fiscal year going back to FY2008 through the *Award Data Archive*. The custom download pages—*Custom Award Data* and *Custom Account Data* (which covers all spending data, including nonaward spending)—also allow downloading of large datasets but provide additional filtering options. Custom award data is available going back to FY2001

and custom account data is available going back to FY2017.

Key Challenges in Tracking Awards

Key challenges may be usefully considered in two general categories: (1) reporting issues and (2) pass-through issues. In addition, tracking awards in CDs presents several specific issues that are addressed separately below.

Reporting Issues

Federal agencies are required to submit reports on awards transactions within 30 days after they are implemented. There may be a longer lag-time with data from the Department of Defense, generally 90 days. Although this reporting requirement is in place, issues still remain involving of the data's completeness, consistency, and accuracy (see "Background on USAspending.gov").

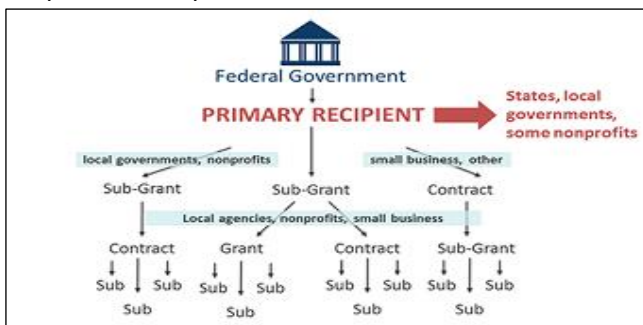
Pass-Through Issues

Most federal grants funding is awarded to states, which then pass through funds to eligible recipients elsewhere in the state. Funds may then be further subawarded or subcontracted (see **Figure 1**). This sublevel location may be a project's place of performance as opposed to the initial recipient location. Consider the following pass-through scenarios:

- A grant award may pass through different jurisdictions in a state (located in different CDs) before reaching the final place of performance.
- Federal grant monies may first go to the state (an agency or agencies in the state capital in one or more CDs), then be distributed to a city or county government (in one or more additional CDs), which then may subaward funds to an organization that spends the money in other CDs.
- Procurement awards may be given to a corporation headquartered in one state (and one CD). The company may spend the money manufacturing the purchased product at one or more of its manufacturing facilities in one or more additional states (and CDs).

Figure 1. Examples of Federal Spending Streams

Recipients at Multiple Levels



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