

Get A Leg Up: Volunteer as a Grant Reviewer

This article originally appeared in the Nov. 16, 2009, issue of Thompson Publishing Group's Local/State Funding Report. For more information, go to: www.thompson.com.

Ever wonder why some of your colleagues always seem to know what federal grant officials are looking for when they submit grant proposals? More likely than not, these colleagues have, at some point, volunteered as a grant reviewer.

Each year, dozens of federal agencies seek volunteers to help them review the tens of thousands of grant applications they receive. As a grantseeker, you can gain invaluable insight into the selection process by volunteering to review applications in a competition your organization is not involved in. That “insider’s perspective” can teach you about the selection process your own future applications will face and alert you to some of the common errors other applicants commit.

And in some cases, the rewards for volunteering as a reviewer go beyond the valuable knowledge you’ll be able to apply to future grant proposals. Some agencies will also compensate you for your time and effort, which only sweetens the deal.

For instance, the Bureau of Justice Assistance recently issued a call for peer reviewers to evaluate fiscal year 2010 BJA applications. Unlike many other agencies, BJA allows reviewers to work remotely, which can translate into considerable time and cost savings. Additionally, BJA reviewers will receive \$125 for each application they review. The agency said it expects each volunteer to review 10 to 20 applications over a two-week span, which works out to \$1,250 to \$2,500 in total compensation.

Of course, to qualify as a volunteer reviewer for BJA, you'll need the expertise to intelligently evaluate requests for funding. The agency is currently soliciting applications from prospective reviewers with backgrounds and experience in:

- law enforcement and gangs;
- crime prevention;
- adjudication;
- corrections, correctional facilities and prisoner reentry;
- tribal justice;
- education, mentoring, health care, mental health, alcohol and substance abuse, or other human and social services;
- information sharing and technology; or
- research and statistics.

In addition to the experience and supplemental income you can earn by becoming a volunteer grant reviewer, you will have a chance to develop a relationship with the agency's grant program specialists, which could make it easier to seek their advice in the future when you are preparing your own proposals.

Need More Information?

If you would like to apply to become a peer reviewer for BJA, e-mail your resume to Byrne.Discretionary@usdoj.gov with "Peer Reviewer Candidate Resume" in the subject line. To read the request for resumes, go to <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/funding/current-opp.html>.