

Online Submission Systems: Beyond Grants.gov

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As more and more federal agencies use Grants.gov to post notices of funding availability and process submissions from applications, the site has become familiar territory for the grantseeking community. Indeed, fiscal year 2009 saw several landmarks for Grants.gov, including new records for site traffic and applications processed. Recovery Act funding opportunities placed a particularly heavy strain on the system's capacity, necessitating a series of upgrades to ensure the rising volume of online submissions doesn't result in backlogs or errors.

But despite the high profile of Grants.gov, many federal agencies operate their own online submission systems, which can create confusion for grantseekers unfamiliar with their unique processes and requirements. To add to the confusion, agencies that operate independent online submission systems routinely *post* their funding announcements on Grants.gov. Therefore, it's important to read each request for proposals carefully, and determine right away whether you'll be asked to work with Grants.gov or an agency-specific site. The answer will vary from agency to agency, and sometimes from program to program.

For instance, the Department of Housing and Urban Development generally posts notices of funding availability for each of its programs on Grants.gov, but not every HUD office will accept applications for every program through Grants.gov. Applicants submitting a HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) application, for example, must use the department's esnaps site, the grant portal created specifically to process this particular homeless

assistance program's grant applications. By contrast, the application for HUD's Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) requires applicants to submit their proposals through Grants.gov.

Another agency that relies on both Grants.gov and an in-house application portal is the Department of Justice. Again, DOJ grant announcements usually appear on Grants.gov, but some programs only accept applications through the agency's Grants Management System (GMS). And to add further confusion, some DOJ programs accept applications for *new* discretionary funding through Grants.gov, but require current grantees to apply for *continuation* funding through GMS.

Those are just two instances of alternative submission systems a grantseeker might encounter, depending on the program and the agency. Each system will vary slightly in format, supported file attachments and other technical specifications. But fortunately, virtually every agency that uses an in-house system offers comprehensive training and technical assistance for new users, including online tutorials and dedicated help desks. So don't be put off by an unfamiliar system if you're accustomed to Grants.gov. Just be sure to take advantage of the educational resources the grantor provides and budget a little extra time for the submission process.