

FUNDED



A GRANTS OFFICE PUBLICATION

FACT

**FACT OR FICTION:
PROVIDING GUIDANCE ON
FEDERAL PROCUREMENT
STANDARDS**

MYTH

**AVOID THE FIREDRILL:
PREPARE FOR AFG**

GRANT SEEKING & THE APPLICATION PROCESS

PLUS SUMMARY INFO ON 4 UPCOMING GRANT OPPORTUNITIES!



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ON THE COVER

In this issue, we discuss the federal procurement standards and how you can avoid common pitfalls that many grant seekers and grant winners encounter along the way.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

As the autumn comes into full expression and the days begin to shorten, our minds turn to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. AFG has been around since the 70s, but its impact is still very much in evidence in fire departments and EMS agencies across the country. Of course, AFG is just one of four grants we profile in this month's issue of FUNDED. And there's something for everyone. In addition to AFG, we're also highlighting grant programs in education, policing, and healthcare.

In our regular Between the Lines column, Chris LaPage provides highlights of some of the procurement standards and norms that guide the administration of federal grants and provides tips for staying on the right side of the process. This information should be especially helpful if you or your organization are new to federal grants.

Lastly, Elizabeth Evans has prepared an infographic on grants development that I'm sure you'll find useful - for yourself or for helping anyone new to grants in your community get a handle on the process. Although there are a number of steps to be followed, grantseeking doesn't need to be an overwhelming challenge.

As always, if you have comments, feedback, corrections, or topics for future issues, feel free to drop me a line at: mpaddock@grantsoffice.com.

I hope you enjoy this issue of FUNDED as much as we've enjoyed bringing it to you!

Sincerely,

Michael Paddock
Editor and Publisher,
FUNDED



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FACT OR FICTION:

Providing Guidance on Federal Procurement Standards and their Impact on Securing and Protecting Federal Grant Dollars

There are many misconceptions and outright myths associated with the procurement procedures that govern the acceptance and use of federal grant funding. Such misinformation prevents many organizations from pursuing grants out of fear that misunderstanding the procedures related to receiving these grants could disqualify said organizations from consideration. For organizations that have received federal dollars, misunderstanding the procurement guidelines can even result in a disastrous situation in which they are actually forced to repay the federal government.

For the most part, the guidelines for procurement are straightforward and make sense once you understand the federal procurement standards. That said, many grant applicants' and recipients' questions related to procurement pertain to clarifying the relationship between vendors and these processes. What follows are 7 common beliefs - some fact, and some fiction - that many grantseekers have about the federal procurement guidelines. This discussion will provide a general understanding of the federal standards and will alleviate the concerns of potential applicants and current recipients.

#1 Grant applicants are not allowed to discuss their proposed project with vendors

Fiction!



In fact, applicants are encouraged to consult with potential vendors for several specified reasons. First and foremost, vendors are a source of price quotes and will be able to provide important cost information that is necessary for the budget component of a grant application. In addition, vendors can be consulted about the features of their products and the ability of their solutions to advance said project. However, applicants are discouraged from simply using a particular vendor's product specifications as a set of primary criteria for procurement. Potential recipients of grant funding must develop their own specifications, although these organizations could invite several vendors to provide input and consultation as the grant proposals are developed.

#2 Mentioning a specific manufacturer in your proposal will disqualify the entire application

Fiction!

Mentioning a specific manufacturer is not an item that would cause a grant application to be dismissed without review (a consequence known as **administrative denial**). Some funders, like the National Science Foundation require very specific line item budgets that typically include the product name, manufacturer and model number. The main goal of federal funders is to garner an idea of why the proposed products and services are necessary to complete the project and achieve the desired outcomes of the proposer. Your goal is ensure that you do not potentially create an unfair playing field with a subsequent procurement process. In cases where mentioning the manufacturer may be unavoidable, you can protect yourself by adding a statement such as, "... or an equal product".

#3 Requiring that a vendor be local violates federal procurement standards

Fact!

Many folks are under the misconception that state and local procurement procedures which require a vendor to be local (usually for economic development reasons) subsequently imply that proposing organizations can circumvent federal standards or should avoid federal funds entirely. The truth is that local standards are not a shield from federal guidelines, nor a hindrance to securing such funding. Per the United States Constitution and existing federal laws, when the standards are in conflict, the federal guidelines prevail. Utilizing geographic limitation as a procurement

criterion inherently limits competition and is considered an unreasonable demand according to federal guidelines. However, you can write the procurement specifications to include criteria around timeliness. In other words, it is perfectly reasonable to include language that requires vendors to provide products and services within a reasonable turnaround time.



You may be used to "hand shake agreements" with your local vendors with whom you have built a long standing relationship, however, federal regulations require that vendor agreements are both more formalized, as well as being openly and competitively priced.

#4 Federal procurement guidelines require recipients to follow local procurement procedures

Fact... *As long as they meet or are more restrictive than federal standards!*

See previous discussion on geographic limitations. The federal government requires recipients to follow state and local/organizational procurement procedures as long as they are not less restrictive than federal standards. The federal standards can be distilled down to four core principles. Your procurement process must be in line with all four core principles, which include:

- Promote Fair Competition – The process must encourage full and open competition. This requires price

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quotes from at least two qualified sources. This guideline disallows sole source procurement, unless you can document a legitimate reason and gain prior approval from the federal funding agency.

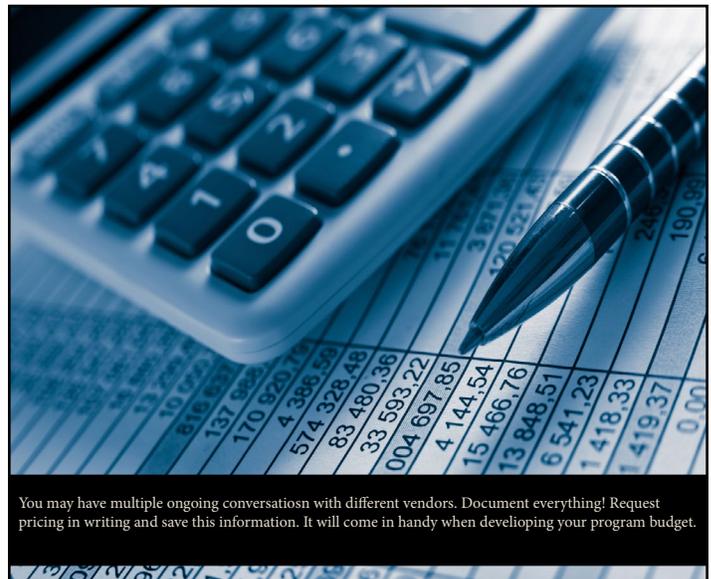
- Documentation - You must save and file copies of all documents and information related to the grant and any related purchases (e.g. procurement procedures, cost analyses, solicitations, price quotes, award documents, receipts, grant reports). The vendor selection process must be clearly documented and available upon request to prove the process was fair and open.
- Develop Clear Specifications - Specifications must be developed independently of vendors and written in a way that meets current technical standards.
- Conflict of Interest (COI) - COI exists if a person or organization has a private interest that appears to conflict with their public duties.

#5 Purchasing from a master contract (or pre-qualified vendor list) satisfies federal procurement procedures

Maybe!

A master contract, or pre-qualified list of vendors is compatible with federal guidelines as long as the original selection process follows the aforementioned core principles around fairness. It is not enough to simply point to the fact that you will be purchasing from (or have purchased from) a master contract as evidence that federal

standards have been met. You must meet all the standards and complete the aforementioned documentation process. All documents must be stored in a central location and available upon request for at least 3 years after the final close-out reports are submitted and approved.



#6 It is best to use price quotes obtained via the Internet to avoid any possible conflicts of interest with vendor procurement.

Fiction!

It is true that Internet shopping would help you meet federal guidelines as those guidelines relate to conflict of interest. However, simply locating price quotes via the Internet violates the federal core principle around **fair competition**. Online or automated systems price quotes fail to encourage competition by failing to give live-vendors an opportunity to compete for your grant dollars. It is essential that you do not give any one federal core principle more weight

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(e.g. COI over fairness) when considering your procurement process. You must meet all four principles.

#7 The Federal Government must prove a conflict of interest is present in order to withhold or demand repayment of grant funding

Fiction!

The standards are clearly written in a way that places the burden of proof on the recipient to avoid **the appearance** of a conflict of interest. In other words, an actual conflict of interest does

not need to take place as mere appearance is sufficient to put your federal grant dollars in jeopardy. Individuals and organizations engaging in any of the following activities must be excluded from bid competition (note: list not exhaustive):

- Working on the application
- Developing specifications or requirements
- Drafting statement of work or requests for proposals (RFPs)
- Participating in the procurement of any requested item in the grant.



Looking for additional information related to the federal standards for procurement, and stipulations for spending federal dollars? Check out the Grants Learning Center on grants.gov for helpful tips and tricks!
<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants.html>

RURAL HEALTH NETWORK DEVELOPMENT GRANT

SUMMARY: The purpose of this program is to support mature, integrated rural health care networks that have combined the functions of the entities participating in the network in order to address the health care needs of the targeted rural community. Awardees will combine the functions of the entities participating in the network to address the following statutory charges: (i) achieve efficiencies; (ii) expand access, coordinate, and improve the quality of essential health care services; and (iii) strengthen the rural health care system as a whole.

Focus areas to achieve the goals of better care, smarter spending and healthier people include:

- Incentives that focus on value-based payment systems;
- Integrated and coordinated care delivery that improves population health and promotes patient engagement in decisions; and
- Information that creates transparency about cost and quality while bringing electronic health information to the point of care for meaningful use of health information technology (Health IT).

NEXT DEADLINE: Applications are due by November 28, 2016. A similar deadline is anticipated annually.

ELIGIBILITY: The applicant organization must be a public or private non-profit entity located in a rural area or in a rural census tract of an urban county, and all services must be provided in a rural county or census tract. The applicant's EIN number should verify it is a rural entity. To ascertain rural eligibility, please refer to: <http://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov/tools/analyzers/geo/Rural.aspx>.

There are also various network requirements necessary to meet eligibility guidelines. At minimum, the network must be composed of at least three separately owned health care providers and be organized in a formal fashion. Formal networks require signed agreements, a network governing body and bylaws as well as a permanent network director.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: <http://www.hrsa.gov/ruralhealth/programopportunities/fundingopportunities/?id=af61cc0e-311e-4ea1-8ee4-fd660830869a>

Avoid the Fire Drill: Prepare for the Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program

It's that time of year to start preparing applications for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's **Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)**. For those who are not familiar with the program, AFG funds critically-needed equipment, protective gear, vehicles, training and other resources for fire departments, EMS agencies, and State Fire Training Academies. AFG is a large program: FEMA typically awards more than \$300,000,000 to nearly 2,500 applicants each year. With that said, AFG is a very competitive program, so it's best to start working on a strong application now.

There are three separate application categories for AFG:

Operations & Safety –

This category funds training, equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE), wellness & fitness, and modifications to fire stations/facilities.

Vehicle Acquisition –

This category funds the purchase of new, custom, or stock vehicles. Highest priority is given to pumpers, ambulances, aircraft, and non-transport community paramedic vehicles.

Regional Projects –

This category funds large-scale projects

that involve multiple first responder organizations. Highest priority is given to projects that improve the efficiency of each department while also being more cost-effective.

Can one agency submit an application for Operations & Safety AND Vehicle Acquisition? Yes! But be sure that, when added together, the two requests do not exceed your maximum award amount. Maximum award amounts are based on the population size of your First Due Response Area:

- Less than 100,000 residents – Departments may be awarded up to \$1,000,000
- 100,001 to 500,000 residents – Departments may be awarded up to \$2,000,000
- 500,001 to 1,000,000 residents – Departments may be awarded up to \$3,000,000
- More than 1,000,000 residents – Departments may be awarded up to \$3,450,000



AFG gives highest priority to equipment that has a direct effect on the first responders' health and safety.



Additional consideration is given to equipment that: (1) brings a department into compliance with national standards, (2) replaces obsolete technology or is a first-time purchase for the department, and/or (3) provides operational benefits to other jurisdictions.

Population of your First Due Response Area also plays a role in the amount a department is required to provide in match:

- Less than 20,000 residents - 5% cash match required.
- 20,000 to 1,000,000 residents - 10% cash match required.
- More than 1,000,000 residents - 15% cash match required.

It's always a good idea to outline your budget as soon as possible. Once that is complete, you can determine how much funding

your department must contribute to the project. You are not required to have this match at the time you submit the application, or even at the time it is awarded. During the review process, FEMA contacts all applicants to confirm if they have the cash match on hand or if they have a feasible plan to fulfill requirement within 12-months. Nonetheless, before you click submit, confirm with management that your organization will be able to meet this requirement, or face returning all of the award funds.

The application for AFG is quite straightforward. It starts with a fill-in chart for basic demographics and statistics about

FEATURE

your organization and service area, including: population size, call volume, current training programs, and annual expenses among other things. A second fill-in chart is provided for the budget.

Last, but certainly not least, is the narrative section. While this part may be intimidating to some, we view it as an opportunity to tell your department's story. What are the special needs of your community? Why is this request important? How will it benefit the first responders? How will it benefit the community? Why can't your organization fund this project without grant support?

The best narratives use strong evidence and local statistics to support the request. They use consistent terms throughout and avoid overly "flowery" text. If you have time, have a person outside of your organization read over your responses. They can check for spelling errors, confusing phrases, and unclear information. They can also give you their overall impression of the project; those closely involved in the minor

particulars of the narrative can often overlook large details.

Completed applications must be submitted to FEMA's E-grant Application Portal. You'll need to make an account for the Portal. It will also ask for your organization's DUNS number and System for Award Management (SAM) account. If you don't have these identification numbers, they can easily be requested online. Do be aware that registration can take up to 2 weeks to set up and activate, so don't wait until the last moment! Take care of this detail as soon as possible.

AFG applications are due November 18, 2016. Avoid the fire drill and put your organization in the best position possible to receive funding by starting now! Firm up your project scope, gather data, formulate a budget, and craft a strong, well-written narrative. In the meantime, we also recommend reading up on some of the great materials provided by the AFG Program Office: <http://www.fema.gov/assistance-firefighters-grant>.

AFG equipment requests can also include:

- *Extended Warranties and Service Agreements*
- *Shipping and Taxes*
- *Assembly*
- *Installation*
- *Staff Training on New Equipment*



The deadline for AFG is just around the corner, are you ready to apply?

ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANT

SUMMARY: The purpose of the AFG Program is to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters with respect to fire and fire-related hazards by providing direct financial assistance for critically needed resources to equip and train emergency personnel to recognized standards, enhance operational efficiencies, foster interoperability, and support community resilience.

The AFG Program supports the basic mission of Strengthening National Preparedness and Resilience, including Fire Management and Suppression; Environmental Response/Health and Safety; Threats and Hazards Identification; Public Health, Healthcare, and Emergency Medical Services; Operational Coordination; Operational Communications; Mass Search and Rescue Operations; Community Resilience; and Long-term Vulnerability Reduction.

There are three types of AFG applications:

- Operations and Safety - The five fundable activities included in this program are: (a) firefighter training, (b) firefighter equipment, (c) firefighter personal protective equipment (PPE), (d) firefighter wellness and fitness, (e) modifications to fire stations and facilities.
- Vehicle Acquisition - New, custom, or stock AFG Program-compliant Vehicles are eligible for funding
- Regional Projects - Any eligible entity may act as a host applicant and apply for large-scale projects on behalf of itself and any number of other local AFG eligible organizations that will be participating partners in the award. Joint/Regional projects should achieve greater cost effectiveness and regional efficiency and resilience.

NEXT DEADLINE: Applications are due by November 18, 2016. Similar deadlines are anticipated annually.

ELIGIBILITY: Fire Departments, EMS organizations not affiliated with a hospital, and State Fire Training Academies (SFTA).

FOR MORE INFORMATION: <http://www.fema.gov/assistance-firefighters-grant>

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS PROGRAM GRANT

SUMMARY: The Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) provides grants to eligible institutions of higher education (IHEs) to help them become self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the institution's academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability.

The Competitive Preference Priority for this program is "Supporting Strategies for which there is Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness" -- Projects that propose a process, product, strategy, or practice supported by moderate evidence of effectiveness. To qualify as moderate evidence of effectiveness, among other things, a study's evaluation design must meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Evidence Standards. Applicants seeking to address this competitive preference priority should identify a minimum of one up to a maximum of two studies that support their proposed project and meet the definition of "moderate evidence of effectiveness."

Funds may be used for planning, faculty development, and establishing endowment funds. Administrative management, and the development and improvement of academic programs also are supported. Other projects include joint use of instructional facilities, construction and maintenance, and student service programs designed to improve academic success, including innovative, customized, instruction courses designed to help retain students and move the students rapidly into core courses and through program completion, which may include remedial education and English language instruction.

NEXT DEADLINE: This program has a two step application process. Institutions must first apply to eligible for Title III or V funding of the Higher Education Act. This occurs annually in December. Pending approval, institutions may then apply to SIP program later in the year, usually in the spring.

ELIGIBILITY: Institutions of Higher Education who meet the following criteria-

- Are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association
- Are legally authorized by the State to be a junior college or provide an educational program for which it awards a bachelor's degree
- Have at least 50% of its degree students who receive need-based assistance or a substantial number of enrolled students who receive Pell Grants
- Have low educational expenditures

FOR MORE INFORMATION: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/iduestitle3a/index.html>
and <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/ides/eligibility.html#el-inst>

GRANT SEEKING & THE APPLICATION PROCESS:

New to Grants and Not Sure How to Get Started? Maybe This Will Help!

Identify an Opportunity

- Research Grant opportunities.
- Select best fit opportunity based on project interests, funding amount, etc.
- Verify eligibility of grant you wish to move forward with.
- Develop a questionnaire/ outline based on the required information the funder will be looking for in your grant proposal.
- Set up any accounts or registrations that will be needed for eventual submission.

Project Development

- Assemble your grants team, make sure you have support from leadership.
- Brain storm with your team project ideas and responses to each prompt from your outline.
- Gather internal data about your organization (mission, population served, annual budget, etc.).
- Seek out journal articles or reference documents that can be used as justification for your proposed project.
- If offered, attend the technical assistance workshop/webinar for the grant.

Proposal Submission

- Review your proposal one final time for grammar and spelling.
- Enter your proposal documents into the funder's application portal.
- Double check all required information or attachments are included.
- Click Submit!

Proposal Development

- Write a first draft of your proposal narrative based on the responses to your outline.
- Draft a budget based on vendor quotes/ following your procurement guidelines. Then draft a budget justification.
- Have someone from outside the grants team/ organization offer critical content review of your draft proposal based on what the funder will be looking for.
- Update your proposal draft, then seek additional content edits. Repeat as often as necessary, or time allows.

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

GRANTS TO REDUCE SEXUAL ASSULT, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, DATING VIOLENCE, AND STALKING ON CAMPUS

SUMMARY: The Grants to Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking on Campus Program funds comprehensive responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Campuses are encouraged to create or revitalize large-scale efforts that treat such actions as serious offenses by adopting effective policies and protocols, developing victim services and programs that prioritize victim safety, ensuring offender accountability, and implementing effective prevention approaches. Colleges and universities should demonstrate to every student that these crimes will not be tolerated, that perpetrators will face serious consequences, and that holistic services are available for victims.

Campus Program grantees must:

- Provide prevention programs for all incoming students
- Train and equip campus law enforcement/security staff
- Educate campus judicial or disciplinary boards on the unique dynamics of these crimes
- Create a coordinated community response to enhance victim assistance and safety while holding offenders accountable.

NEXT DEADLINE: Letters of registration are strongly encouraged and should be submitted in February 2017. Full applications are anticipated to be due in March.

ELIGIBILITY: Institutions of Higher Education.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault>

Check out this great opportunity for campus safety initiatives! Funding can be used to equip campus law enforcement, provide training for increased apprehension, investigation, and resolution, as well as make physical modifications to buildings, including the installation of blue emergency lights, building access systems, and security cameras.



UPCOMING GRANTSCAST EVENTS

- **Leveraging 21st Century Community Learning Centers Funding to Expand Your Educaiton Technology Offerings** - Sponsored by PCMG

Nov 15, 2016 at 2:00 pm EST

Register: <http://bit.ly/2dozZVU>

- **Best Practices for Planning, Funding, and Implementing your Technology Initiative Using the U.S. Communities GPA** - Sponsored by NetApp

Nov 17, 2016 at 2:00 pm EST

Register: <http://bit.ly/2fdKEb3>

RECENT GRANTSCAST RECORDINGS

- **Best Practices for Planning, Funding, and Implementing a Body-worn Camera Initiative for Public Safety** - Sponsored by Pivot Technology Solutions
- **Grants to Expand your Technology-based Student Literacy Initiatives** - Sponsored by PCMG
- **Preparing a WINNING NSF Campus CyberInfrastructure Proposal** - Sponsored by NetApp

Replay these and more at: <http://www.grantsoffice.info/webcasts.aspx>

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