

Grant Writing

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Agencies should be familiar with the types of federal grant opportunities available and how to apply for grant funding.

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Recently, administrators in the West Virginia State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigations (BCI) had a problem they needed money to overcome. BCI wanted to form a task force with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) to combat drug and firearm trafficking in the eastern panhandle of the state. So, BCI sent ATF a concept paper describing a grant proposal for a joint task force. Because ATF could not fund the project, it sent the concept paper, with a recommendation, to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), one of the primary law enforcement fund granting agencies in the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). BJA realized the merits of the plan and decided to fund the project with a discretionary grant.

Meanwhile, BCI had been working with the Governor's Office of Criminal Justice and Highway Safety, the state Byrne formula grant office, to obtain equipment needed for the task force: vehicles, laptop computers, and two-way radios. When the two grants were awarded, BCI and ATF were able to proceed with a highly successful joint task force.

How did this happen? Not by accident. All law enforcement agencies, both small and large, can obtain grant money to support new and innovative efforts in police operations. But grants rarely seek out a department. Rather, agencies must stay abreast of what is available from the various sources and investigate the best ways to secure funding for their proposals.

This article explains the basic types of grant opportunities available to state and local law enforcement agencies. It discusses ways that agencies can learn about grant opportunities and then suggests methods departments can follow to prepare a quality proposal.

TYPES OF GRANTS

Formula Grants

Formula, or block, grants are awarded by the federal government to the states. In turn, the states make subawards to state and local government entities. They are called formula grants because they are appropriated to the states based on certain established formulas, which may take into account such factors as population and crime rates. This is the type of grant that funded the equipment needs for the joint BCI-ATF task force.

Discretionary Grants

Discretionary grants, by contrast, are awarded at the discretion of the awarding agency. Generally, a law enforcement agency applies directly to the appropriate federal office to be considered for discretionary funding. This is the type of grant awarded directly to BCI by the Bureau of Justice Assistance for the joint task force.

FEDERAL GRANT MONEY

Federal money to support law enforcement programs is disbursed both directly from offices within the federal government and through offices at the state level. The lead federal funding agency for law enforcement programs is DOJ's Office of Justice Programs (OJP). Eight offices within OJP make grants available to law enforcement agencies. To win grants from these offices, agencies should tailor their proposals to meet one of the following program areas.

Bureau of Justice Assistance

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) is the primary grant funding arm for law enforcement agencies. BJA makes formula grants to the states from the Byrne Memorial Fund and also makes discretionary grants to individual agencies.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) also provides significant funding to law enforcement agencies. As the name implies, OJJDP focuses on operational programs and research explicitly designed to prevent and control crime committed by juveniles.

Bureau of Justice Statistics

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) collects, analyzes, and disseminates statistics for the entire criminal justice system. This office can serve as an invaluable source of information for departments requiring specific data to include in a grant proposal. BJS also makes discretionary grants to state governments to encourage states to develop systems designed to collect, analyze, and disseminate statistical information related to criminal justice issues.

Office for Victims of Crime

The Office for Victims of Crime provides both formula and discretionary funding to states to support victim compensation and assistance programs. These funds may be used for a multitude of victim assistance activities, such as maintaining victim coordinator positions in U.S. attorneys' offices and other federal law enforcement agencies. This office also grants funds for training victim/witness coordinators, parole and probation officers, and other federal law enforcement personnel who provide services to victims. In addition, funding can be obtained to prepare, publish, and disseminate handbooks for use by victim/witness coordinators, DEA agents and other federal law enforcement agency employees, and pay for medical examinations of victims of sexual assault occurring on federal property to obtain evidence of a crime.

National Institute of Justice

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsors research and evaluation projects devoted to new approaches and technologies for combating crime. NIJ focuses on research-oriented, rather than operational, projects.

Drug Courts

Drug Courts, an office within OJP, provide funding to components of state and local governments and to tribal courts that offer specialized services, treatment, and continuing judicial supervision for nonviolent offenders with the potential for rehabilitation. Drug Courts support these efforts throughout the country by making discretionary awards to state and local agencies.

Violence Against Women

This program office within OJP administers funding to state and tribal governments to help develop and strengthen effective law enforcement and prosecution strategies that address violent crimes against women. The office makes both formula and discretionary awards to further these causes.

Corrections Program Office

Another OJP office, the Corrections Program administers state grants for traditional and alternative correctional facilities, including boot camps, by making formula and discretionary awards available. OJP directs these funds primarily to state correctional facilities.

COPS Office

The Office of Community-oriented Policing Services (COPS) is a relatively new office within the Department of Justice that exists separately from OJP. The COPS office makes grants primarily to help agencies hire and deploy new officers.

For More Information

To receive more information about programs funded by these offices, agency administrators can contact the DOJ Response Center.² Before deciding on a particular grant to pursue, however, agencies should obtain a copy of the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance. This catalog not only includes detailed information about DOJ grant programs but also discusses nearly 1,400 federal grant opportunities.³ Law enforcement administrators can find reference copies of the catalog at their local libraries. The catalog also is available on CD-ROM and diskettes, as well as a computerized bulletin board and database maintained by the General Services Administration that permits automated searches of various types. For example, agencies could search the database (known as the Federal Assistance Program Retrieval System, or FAPRS) for a list of all federal agencies that make awards on such subjects as combating gangs or hiring police officers.⁴ Agencies should contact the DOJ Response Center for information on grant opportunities available through the COPS office.

STATE GRANT MONEY

At the state level, the office of the governor generally houses contact points for law enforcement-related grants. At a minimum, each state has a contact point for the Byrne formula grants. Byrne grants represent the single largest source of law enforcement-related funding Congress makes available to states by a set formula. Byrne formula funding is awarded to the states primarily through the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Some state offices that administer Byrne grants are referred to as state planning agencies, a name held over from the era of Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) grant funding. During the 1970s, state planning agencies served as the conduits for LEAA funding to the states. Today, however, these agencies may be known by different names in different states. In West Virginia, for example, the Governor's Criminal Justice and Highway Safety Office administers Byrne funding grants.

Whatever their names, the state offices represent good places for agency administrators to begin to familiarize themselves with grant language and procedures. To start the process, administrators should contact the appropriate state funding office and ask to speak with a law enforcement representative.

PREPARING A GRANT PROPOSAL

Agency administrators can improve their chances of success by following certain guidelines when preparing a grant proposal. While following these suggestions will not guarantee the approval of a funding request, it should give an agency an added advantage when applying for funding.

The first step for administrators pursuing a specific funding grant is to read the solicitation carefully and follow the instructions exactly. Administrators should call the grant agency's contact person if they do not understand certain points or areas on the solicitation forms.

Administrators should complete all of the forms, fill in all of the blanks, and allow enough time to get all of the required departmental signatures. (Using blue ink for the signatures will more readily identify the original application.) If at all possible, administrators should plan to submit their proposal before the due date to reduce the risks that a minor bureaucratic delay will scuttle the entire grant request.

Administrators should carefully follow the format specified in the solicitation for the organization and narrative content of the proposal. Responses should be double-spaced and typed in a reasonably sized font.

Where applicable, graphs and charts should be included to help communicate ideas and present data. Administrators should write in clear and understandable English, not jargon. Acronyms and technical terms should be used sparingly and explained within the text. When writing the narrative, administrators should use short, active sentences. The narrative should clearly

- state the problem
- outline what the agency proposes to do
- explain why and how the proposal will help to solve the problem
- describe how the agency will evaluate the program's effectiveness, and
- document all facts and figures cited in the proposal.

Administrators should request sufficient funds to fully administer the program. However, they should be careful to request funds only for expenses resulting from the project they are proposing, not for any normal organizational costs of the agency. Administrators should use the budget forms supplied in the solicitation and make sure that the budget items are reasonable, necessary, allowable, and that the numbers all add up correctly.

Finally, administrators should forward the completed proposal to two or three readers for suggestions and comments before sending it in. Again, because this process takes time, administrators should strive to complete the draft well before the stated deadline.

Administrators interested in submitting a proposal for a project that lies somewhat outside of the granting organization's program plan should submit an 8-10 page concept paper before completing a formal application. Granting organizations are very proficient at spotting applications that do not fit the parameters of their program plans.

ACCESSING THE GRAPEVINE

Agency administrators can use a number of methods to keep track of the often-bewildering array of grant opportunities that exists at any given time. Agency administrators who already have a concrete proposal in mind should contact the state and federal grant offices that cover the applicable program area and ask for a copy of their current program plan. This plan provides a current list of topics and projects for which proposals are being solicited, as well as specific instructions and forms to use in applying for a grant. To locate the appropriate office at the federal level, administrators can contact the DOJ Response Center.

Once administrators locate the appropriate office, they should identify the person responsible for programs in their state or region. They should call and discuss their proposal and explain why their agency requires outside funds to implement it. Administrators also should talk with the representative about any plans for future grant solicitations and new programs. If a granting office is receptive to an

agency's idea, the idea may appear in a future plan or solicitation.

In the West Virginia example cited earlier, the state police did not call a granting agency and ask them what kinds of projects they were funding; rather, state police investigators had an idea for a particular project and inquired whether that particular project could be funded. Most often, this is the desired approach.

Agency administrators also may ask their state funding agency whether any departments in their vicinity currently receive funding from state or federal sources. Administrators should talk to these departments about how the grant process has worked for them.

Likewise, administrators should stay in touch with their counterparts in other agencies throughout the community. OJP offices encourage proposals that involve more than one law enforcement agency or include a law enforcement agency working with related community agencies, such as the local prosecutor's office, the courts, or social service agencies.

In addition, a number of private, state, regional, and federal-level newsletters provide information about law enforcement grants. Although these newsletters draw much of their information from public sources, they can help streamline information-gathering for busy administrators interested in keeping up on grant developments.

Law enforcement officers attending the FBI's National Academy program at Quantico, Virginia, now can take a non-credit course about grants, offered jointly by the FBI and the Office of Justice Programs. The course serves as an introduction to the program development and budgetary issues of grant writing. Since the OJP staff members teaching the course are involved closely with the grant process, the course provides students a unique opportunity to network with individuals directly responsible for grant disbursement, as well as with other students who will be writing their own grant requests.

The National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) is another valuable source of information for funding available at the federal level. Specifically, an agency can request that NCJRS put it on the mailing list for proposal solicitations and other information, and the agency will thereafter receive all solicitations disseminated by OJP and the COPS office. Administrators can access the NCJRS Website at <http://www.ncjrs.org> or contact NCJRS via electronic mail at askncjrs@ncjrs.org. They also can direct-dial the NCJRS electronic bulletin board at 301-738-8895.4

Agencies may find that when they receive grant solicitations from NCJRS or other sources, they have a limited time before the deadline to draft and submit a proposal. Administrators can take various steps to help ensure that their agencies receive advance notice of the types of solicitations becoming available. The most effective method is to keep in contact with those "in the know," namely the state and federal officials who announce projects for which the agency may be interested in applying in the future.

Administrators also can obtain the Federal Register, which publishes, for comment, grant solicitations before they are finalized by federal grant offices. Because reading through this massive document can be an enormous undertaking, administrators may find it preferable to review on a regular basis the Federal Assistance Program Retrieval System database, which contains a section featuring abstracts pertaining to upcoming grant solicitations from recent issues of the Federal Register.

CONCLUSION

In an era of reduced public funding and heightened public demand for services, law enforcement

agencies have been forced to explore ways, as the now familiar expression goes, to do more with less. But, in their drive to reduce costs, administrators may be ignoring a viable way to fund needed projects without adding to departmental fiscal concerns.

For many years the federal government has been awarding grants for worthwhile projects designed to combat crime at the local and regional levels. Today, numerous offices both at the federal and state level administer grant programs that can assist law enforcement agencies to fund necessary projects.

To take full advantage of the funding opportunities that exist, law enforcement administrators should become familiar with the offices and programs that make funding available. Once the mystery is removed and the process seems less intimidating, administrators should consider responding to a solicitation, developing a proposal and submitting it. They have little to lose, while their agencies and communities may have much to gain.

Endnotes 1 The Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local

Law Enforcement Assistance Program, created by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, provides funds to improve the functioning of the criminal justice system at the state and local levels.

2 The DOJ Response Center can be contacted by dialing 800-421-6770.

3 The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance can be ordered by writing to the Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954, or charged by telephone by dialing 202-512-1800. 4 More information about FAPRS may be obtained by writing to the General Services Administration/MVS, Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog Staff, Reporters Building, Room 101, 300 7th St, SW Washington, DC 20407, or by calling 202-708-5126.

5 Modem should be at least 9600 baud and set at 8-N-1.

State Contacts for Byrne Formula Grants

Alabama

Department of Economic & Community Affairs, 334-242-5100

Alaska

State Troopers, 907-269-5082

Arizona

Criminal Justice Commission, 602-542-1928

Arkansas

Department of Finance and Administration, 501-682-1074

California

Office of Criminal Justice Planning, 916-324-9166

Colorado

Division of Criminal Justice, 303-239-4442

Connecticut

Office of Policy and Management, 860-418-6210

Delaware

Criminal Justice Council, 302-577-3466

District of Columbia

Office of Grants Management & Development, 202-727-6554

Florida
Bureau of Community Assistance, 850-488-8016

Georgia
Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 404-559-4949

Hawaii
Office of the Attorney General, 808-586-1151

Idaho
Department of Law Enforcement, 208-884-7040

Illinois
Criminal Justice Information Authority, 312-793-8550

Indiana
Criminal Justice Institute, 317-232-2561

Iowa
Governor's Alliance on Substance Abuse, 515-281-3788

Kansas
Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, 913-296-0926

Kentucky
Justice Cabinet, 502-564-7554

Louisiana
Commission on Law Enforcement, 504-925-3513

Maine
Department of Public Safety, 207-877-8016

Maryland
Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention, 410-321-3521

Massachusetts
Committee on Criminal Justice, 617-727-6300

Michigan
Office of Drug Control Policy, 517-373-2952

Minnesota
Office of Drug Policy & Violence Prevention, 612-296-0922

Mississippi
Department of Public Safety, 601-359-7880

Missouri
Department of Public Safety, 573-751-4905

Montana
Board of Crime Control, 406-444-3604

Nebraska

Commission on Law Enforcement & Criminal Justice, 402-471-3416

Nevada

Office of Criminal Justice Assistance, 702-687-5282

New Mexico

Department of Public Safety, 505-827-3420

New Hampshire

Office of the Attorney General, 603-271-1297

New Jersey

Department of Law and Public Safety, 609-292-5939

New York

Division of Criminal Justice Services, 518-457-8462

North Carolina

Governor's Crime Commission, 919-571-4736

North Dakota

Office of the Attorney General, 701-328-5500

Ohio

Governor's Office of Criminal Justice Services, 614-466-7782

Oklahoma

District Attorneys Training & Coordinating Council, 405-557-6707

Oregon

Department of State Police, 503-378-3720

Pennsylvania

Commission on Crime and Delinquency, 717-787-8559

Puerto Rico

Department of Justice, 809-725-0335

Rhode Island

Governor's Justice Commission, 401-277-2620

South Carolina

Office of Safety and Grants, 803-896-8708

South Dakota

Governor's Office of Operations, 605-773-6313

Tennessee

Office of Criminal Justice Programs, 615-741-3784

Texas

Office of the Governor, 512-463-1806

Utah

Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, 801-835-1031

Vermont

Department of Public Safety, 802-244-8781

Virginia

Department of Criminal Justice Services, 804-786-1577

Virgin Islands

Law Enforcement Planning Commission, 809-774-6400

Washington

Department of Community, Trade & Economic Development, 360-586-0665

West Virginia

Office of Criminal Justice & Highway Safety, 304-558-8814

Wisconsin

Office of Justice Assistance, 608-266-7282

Wyoming

Division of Criminal Investigation, 307-777-7181

American Samoa

Department of Legal Affairs, 011-684-633-4163

Commonwealth Northern Mariana Islands

Criminal Justice Planning Agency, 011-670-664-4550

Guam

Governor's Office, 011-671-472-8931
