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**Homeland Security Grants  
- Special Edition -**

*What's right, what's wrong and what you need to know  
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## **Homeland Security Grants**

*What's right, what's wrong and what you need to know*

More than two years and nearly \$9 billion in highly-publicized Homeland Security grants later, some local agencies are still wondering what happened to all that money.

They are not alone.

Seventy six percent of cities responding to a December 2003 survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors reported they had received no financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Larry Naake, executive director of the National Association of Counties told the Associated Press that an informal poll in 43 states showed that a third of counties nationwide still have not seen any federal funding for first responders.

DHS Secretary Tom Ridge backed up those comments and findings when on February 12 he testified to the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee that some grants "have not been distributed from '02," and, "We still have almost half from '03, if not more, let alone the '04 dollars."

"The logjam, I believe, is there's no single distribution mechanism between states and the local communities," Ridge added. "It varies from state to state. The federal government is ready to cut the checks. The logjam is between the states and the locals."



So what's wrong with the system and what can local agencies do about it? Before getting to that answer, it's necessary to first understand how - under normal conditions - the money is supposed to move.

### **Looking for the Logjam**

Like the vast majority of federal grants, the most widely-publicized DHS funding streams are first awarded to the states and are then sub-awarded by the states to local jurisdictions. Each state long ago established and debugged their own unique system of managing these "pass-through grants."

Then 9-11 happened.

With billions in homeland security grants suddenly packing the pipeline, states were - and some still are - understandingly overwhelmed.

Emergency coordinators, accustomed to dealing with nature-driven catastrophes and the occasional manmade disaster, overnight became battle coordinators, tasked with assessing and funding critical infrastructure, communications, responders and citizens.

Now add to the mix what some are calling conflicting DHS mandates to the states: Comprehensive threat assessments followed by near-immediate pass-through spending requirements with absolute restrictions on how, and on what, the money can be spent.

In an April 2003 letter to Senate leaders the National Governors Association



noted, "These two goals collide – one emphasizes a deliberate and careful process and the other emphasizes expedited procurement and urgent deployment of resources."

Conference of Mayors President, James A. Garner - now a candidate for U.S. Congress - isn't ready to let the states explain away the local cash vacuum so easily.

"As I always say, the money went to the states by Federal Express, but went to cities by Pony Express," said Garner.

The NGA bristles at the suggestion that states are sitting on piles of unspent money.

"Governors believe that this is about keeping Americans safer with a collective, thoughtful process," NGA spokesperson, Christine LaPaille, told the Associated Press. "It is not about how fast they can get the money out. But dollars are being obligated according to state plans that have substantial local input and have been approved by the Department of Homeland Security."

So who's right and who's wrong? That depends on where you live. Fact is, there's an enormous amount of confusion up and down the chain of command.

The good news is, once we break through the confusion and focus on developing a strategy for grant seekers, there's a very clear, three step action path ahead.

1. Read and learn. 2. Think bigger than self. 3. Be proactive.



## Read and Learn

As is the case with any grant program, the best place to start taking action is with the original grant documents: the requests for proposals.

In this case, we're looking for the RFP's that were issued by the Department of Homeland Security. Those documents spell out exactly how the states – and therefore local agencies - can use the money.

To download past and current homeland security grant RFP's, visit <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov> .

Once there, click on "Grants/Funding" then scroll down the resulting page for current year documents. At the bottom of the page click the "Archive" links to view previous years'.

Download the documents, then print and read them. Then read them again. You must understand the rules and spending limitations.

Now armed with the knowledge of what is and isn't possible, if there is not a readily apparent regional coordinator, contact your State Administrative Agency. SAA's are responsible for the receipt and distribution of DHS funding and you can find yours at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/state.htm> .

The purpose of the SAA call is not to ask for money. It's to determine what - if any - regional authority has been established. If no regional authority exists, then ask about future RFP's and past years' unspent allocations. Find out what





advises city and county officials, "Become part of the regional planning process. Don't wait to be invited."

Anderson went on to say, "You must know where the spending decisions are made. Local needs may very well be valid but unless they're presented in the context of a regional plan, they're not likely to attract money."

This regional approach is a definite trend. Florida adopted it and is now rapidly becoming the model that defines best practices. Arizona is also making a solid effort toward regionalization.

When and if you become part of a regional application team, by all means be a team player, but also stay on guard. Your needs must be advocated for. Don't confuse a collaboration with a merger.

## **Be Proactive**

Experienced grant writers and reviewers know that funding committee decisions are often anything but objective.

"Grant seekers should attend every grant committee meeting," said Anderson. "It's easy to reject a piece of paper, but it's harder to reject a proposal written by someone that's in the room with you."

"You don't necessarily need to be an aggressive advocator. Your presence is often enough," he said. "With so much subjectivity in the review process and so many people sitting on review boards that know little if anything about grants, a



proactive and respectful approach is almost a necessity for survival.”

But there’s no guarantee such an approach will be rewarded. A common complaint noted in the Mayors Conference report was that states had “re-prioritized” spending even after the regional committees held meetings and made recommendations.

It’s for that reason that grant seekers should take their proactive campaign one step further, from the regional to the state level.

Know the key players in the state and attend their open meetings, too.

### **Is it worth it?**

When faced with hours of reading, learning, planning, meetings, writing and potential denial, it’s only natural to ask, is it worth it?

The answer is, absolutely yes.

The Department of Homeland Security, the states and the local applicants are all evolving. Until we're all better at this, keep in mind that the money will flow so the question is, why give the money to you?

Pay attention, hang in there, advocate for your agency’s and your region’s needs and this will work.

It has too. America depends on it.



## **About the Author**

Rod Helm is Managing Partner and lead trainer at Grant Writing USA. He has raised millions of dollars in grants and is now the leading instructor of grant seeking public safety professionals in America.

A featured speaker at national conferences and workshops, Helm has personally trained more than 4,000 grant writers. He lives in Las Vegas with his wife and two daughters.

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