

## Grants.gov Integration: Social Security Administration's (SSA) Success Story

### OVERVIEW

#### CHALLENGE

SSA heard the call from the President's Management Agenda (PMA) — improve access to grant services via the Internet and address the complexities of the Federal grants environment. Yet with fewer than 300 grant awards a year and a finite applicant pool, creating a costly and complex grants system would not be the answer.

#### SOLUTION

Capitalizing on Grants.gov technology and front-end grant application processes, SSA focused on the integration of a back-end electronic grants library and training their grantees and staff to embrace the new electronic solution.

#### WHY GRANTS.GOV?

Grants.gov is a single Federal website where users can find and apply for over 900 grant programs awarding more than \$360 billion annually. Through a streamlined electronic process, Federal grant-making agencies can leverage a cross-government service model, while maintaining their autonomy and flexibility to efficiently manage their grant programs.

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### USER STORY

#### **Embracing Electronic Grants Management**

With no more room for paper applications and a strong desire for an improved customer experience, the SSA embraced the Federal government's mandate for an electronic grants system. The PMA meant that the way citizens find and apply for Federal grants would change to a more centralized and simplified manner.

The PMA includes guiding principles and objectives to increase the value of services provided to citizens while maximizing the efficiency of Federal agencies. The e-Grants initiative — now Grants.gov — aimed to improve access to grant services via the Internet and address the complexities of the Federal grants environment. Through these mandates, work groups developed simplified processes and data standards to be used in applying for and reporting on Federal grants. This work provided the unified front-end “face” to the Federal grant process. Grants.gov provided SSA the solution it needed to standardize data collection across its agency line offices, while making the grant process easier for its applicants.

#### **SSA Develops a Back-End Process to Grants Management**

As compared to other agencies, SSA has a relatively small number of grant programs and a finite number of grant applicant organizations, so an expensive investment in technology to create a complex back-end grants management system was not warranted.

“We investigated various off-the-shelf (i.e., COTS, GOTS) systems and just could not justify the expense,” said Gary Stammer, Social Security Administration, Office of Acquisition and Grants, Grants Management Team. “We spent a lot of time investigating existing Federal and other vendor products, but with fewer than 300 awards a year, the volume would just not support the purchase and management of a grants system.”

Enter Grants.gov and the SSA Electronic Library. With the development of the front-end grants management system, Grants.gov, SSA was able to receive their application' files in PDF format. And by using digital scanners, other documents, including signature pages, could easily become electronic. The PDFs and other files were filtered into logical groups (including Applications, Award Data, Budget Analysis, Close Out, and Post Award reporting), which are administrated through storage and naming conventions, and controlled access to the files. Files are now easily extracted and shared throughout the entire Agency.

As a result, SSA developed a low-cost methodology for its electronic evolution by integrating Grants.gov as its front-end capture method and not investing in a major back-end system.

#### **A Commitment to the Electronic Application Process**

A key to the success of SSA's new system was their commitment to the Electronic Application Process. SSA established mandates requiring the use of Grants.gov and the Electronic Library.

At the same time, SSA worked diligently with their grantees and the Grants.gov Program Management Office (PMO) to ensure that everyone involved was familiar with the new electronic process and the Grants.gov website.

With this commitment to the Electronic Application Process, SSA has become a model for other agencies. SSA is exceeding all Grants.gov targets and goals by large numbers. Despite a target of 50 grant application packages available on Grants.gov, SSA currently has received more than 270 grant application packages submitted via Grants.gov — that equates to 9% of all submitted grant application packages, third only behind the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Commerce.

### **What are Grants Online and Electronic Grants Processing Delivering?**

The implementation of the grants Electronic Library and the mandates to use electronic grants applications via Grants.gov has already paid off for SSA.

“Document redundancy is greatly reduced and we have noticeable processing efficiencies,” said Stammer. “Now we all have access to the same files in real-time. Bottom line — it’s just a better experience for everyone involved.”

Users also appreciate the Federal government-wide consistencies and the ease of application submission. SSA’s attention to their grant community and the electronic process has provided other results.

“SSA has worked with the Grants.gov PMO and their grantees to walk them through the registration process,” said Peter Brunner of the Grants.gov PMO. “As a result, Help Desk incidents for SSA grantees have declined dramatically.”

SSA’s commitment to their electronic grants solution has proved to be a solution that complements Grants.gov and provides time and cost-saving efficiencies to SSA and their grantees. For a nominal investment, SSA has proven that an agency can still achieve real benefits by capturing, storing, and distributing information electronically.

**One Agency + One Website = Grants Success.**

#### **Grants.gov Features:**

*Advanced Search Options* – Search a wider selection of grants, from a broad search to searches for more specific subject areas

*Downloadable Applications* – Applications can be completed offline when and where convenient for users. Applications are easily distributed via email as an attachment and submitted electronically at Grants.gov upon completion

*Content-Sensitive Help* – Customized help and solutions based on the page being viewed so users do not have to hunt and peck for the right help or lose their place on the site

*Online Tools* – Enhanced FAQs, quick reference guides and online demonstrations guide users through the application process, along with lots of resources to learn more about Grants.gov. Applicant Support Center with helpful links and grant-writing resources to prepare planned and concisely packaged applications

*Personalized Support* – Complementing the online help and support features, Grants.gov also provides users with a dedicated Customer Support center providing accessible via email or phone

#### **About Grants.gov**

Grants.gov is the single website unifying Federal grants. Through Grants.gov, state, local, and tribal governments, colleges and universities, non-profits, research institutions, and other organizations can access, find, and apply for grants from more than 900 grant programs representing over \$360 billion in annual grant funds offered by the 26 Federal grant-making agencies.

*Grants.gov, one of 24 E-government initiatives, is a collaborative effort led by 26 Federal grant-making agencies and 11 commissions, including: Agency for International Development, U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, the Environmental Protection Agency, Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation, Small Business Administration, Social Security Administration, Corporation for National and Community Service, African Development Foundation, Appalachian Regional Commission, Barry Goldwater Scholarship Foundation, Christopher Columbus Foundation, Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation, Inter-American Foundation, James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation, Japan-U.S. Friendship Foundation, and the Morris K. Udall Foundation.*