

Grant application periods: a simple analysis

As of December 26, 2014, federal agencies are encouraged to give organizations at least 60 calendar days—but no fewer than 30 days—to submit grant applications in response to notices of funding opportunities.¹

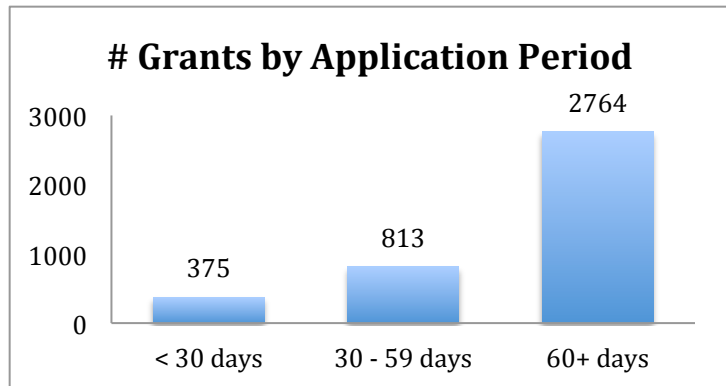
HOW ARE THEY DOING?

All Grants (December 26, 2014 – September 30, 2016)

Number of discretionary (competitive) grants posted between 12/26/14 and 9/30/16 ²	3,952 ³
Average application period	229 days
Median application period	74 days
Mode application period	60 days
Number of grants open less than required minimum 30 days	375
Number of grants open less than recommended 60 days	1,188
Number of grants exceeding recommended 60 days	2,764
Shortest application period	1 day
Longest application period	1,975 days
Number of grants open 1,000 days or more	405

At first glance, it appears that federal departments are giving applicants a reasonable amount of time to respond to funding opportunities. An average application period of 229 days (approximately 7.5 months) is extremely generous. The only problem: **it's completely unrealistic.**

The 229-day average is skewed due to the large number of grants with lengthy application periods (e.g., exceeding 120 days [1,221 grants]). The Department of Health and Human Services, the National Science Foundation and the Department of Defense are the top three departments contributing to the high average application period; their research grants have long lead times to accommodate applicants' considerable advance work and preparation. Looking at the median and mode application periods gives us a better idea how closely federal agencies are adhering to the regulation.



¹ 2 CFR §200.203(b)

² Source: grants.gov accessed on October 25, 2016

³ Total number of grants does not include: (a) 21 sole source grants made to organizations without competition; (b) cooperative agreements; or (c) contracts.

Application Periods by Department (12/26/2014 – 9/30/2016)

Department	# Grants	Application Period (Days)		
		Average	Median	Mode
Corporation for National and Community Service	16	64	56	56
Consumer Product Safety Commission	1	117	117	117
Department of Homeland Security	67	49	44	30
Department of Commerce	67	103	74	60
Department of Defense	318	154	125	147
Department of Energy	28	86	58	31
Department of the Interior	486	72	15	14
Department of Labor	37	52	48	50
Department of State	339	60	50	60
Department of Transportation	83	60	45	91
Department of Education	144	65	60	60
Environmental Protection Agency	46	55	58	45
Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service	2	113	113	N/A
Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council	3	563	585	N/A
Department of Health and Human Services	1351	484	156	75
Department of Housing and Urban Development	40	73	61	63
Institute of Museum and Library Services	12	95	84	84
Millennium Challenge Corporation	1	4	4	4
National Archives and Records Administration	13	177	134	126
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	151	107	86	43
National Endowment for the Arts	15	90	83	126
National Endowment for the Humanities	59	93	71	62
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	6	46	41	41
National Science Foundation	145	305	271	112
Office of National Drug Control Policy	3	44	46	N/A
Office of Science	39	89	72	51
Social Security Administration	1	44	44	44
U.S. Agency for International Development	44	151	72	365
U.S. Department of Agriculture	207	60	53	32
U.S. Department of Justice	176	61	58	56
U.S. Department of Treasury	41	77	86	85
Veterans Administration	11	106	54	N/A
Total	3,952	229	74	60

Of the departments making over 100 grants in the timeframe we reviewed, the departments of Education, State and Justice most closely follow the recommended 60-day application period.

The Department of Agriculture receives an honorable mention. USDA's average and median application periods are reasonable; however, 22% of its 207 grants were open 32 days or fewer—that's significant.

Departments with Application Periods of Less than 30 Days (12/26/2014 – 9/30/2016)

Department	# Grants	% of Department Grants
Corporation for National and Community Service	2	13%
Department of Homeland Security - FEMA	2	3%
Department of Defense	7	2%
Department of Energy	2	7%
Department of the Interior	263	54%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureau of Indian Affairs (3) • Bureau of Reclamation (85) • Fish and Wildlife Service (148) • National Park Service (22) • Geological Survey (4) • No office specified (1) 		
Department of Labor	3	8%
Department of State	28	8%
Department of Transportation	30	36%
Department of Education	2	1%
Department of Health and Human Services	6	< 1%
Millennium Challenge Corporation	1	100%
NASA Headquarters	1	< 1%
Office of National Drug Control Policy	1	33%
Office of Science	1	3%
Agency for International Development	6	14%
Department of Agriculture	16	8%
Department of Justice	3	2%
Veterans Administration	1	9%
Total	375	9.5%

The regulation at 2 CFR §200.203(b) suggests that departments give organizations at least 60 calendar days to submit grant applications but “no funding opportunity should be available for less than 30 calendar days *unless exigent circumstances require as determined by the Federal awarding agency head or delegate.*” (Emphasis added)

What the heck is going on at the Department of the Interior? Interior had 486 grant opportunities between December 26, 2014 and September 30, 2016; fifty-four percent (263) of Interior’s grants were open less than the required 30-day minimum. One of our first projects in 2017 will be to examine Interior’s grants and attempt to determine why it has such a high frequency of short application periods. Are there really that many “exigent circumstances?” If so, what are they?

Thoughts? What is your experience responding to federal grant opportunities? Share it!
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