

Trends in Federal Competitive Funding and Implications for Organizational Development

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Federal funding plays a significant role at the state and local level in three primary ways. First, federal funds represent a large percentage of state and local government revenues. Second, federal funding impacts the development of local and regional economies in positive and negative ways. Third, federal funding can be used politically to reward or to encourage behavior. Still, reporting requirements limit the research on competitive-only federal funding. This paper uses the Consolidated Federal Funds Report to analyze changes in federal funding over time, the types of programs that have experienced increases or decreases in funding over time, and the implications of these trends at the local level. As overall federal funding has increased, competitive funding has increased at a faster rate from 1983 to 2010. As community resources diminish and the direct federal role decreases, local communities increasingly depend on competitive funds for resources. This raises a number of implications for organizations, education, and research described in this section. First, organizations must develop and maintain the capacities necessary to successfully apply for, manage, and report on grants. Second, education for students of public policy and administration must focus on the unique challenges of a field increasingly dependent upon grants. Finally, future research will need to integrate the concept of competitive funding, to better understand its distribution and impact on local communities.

I. Introduction

Federal funding represents a vital resource for state and local governments and non-profit agencies. The amount of federal funds devoted to subnational grants, contracts, and direct aid has increased by \$3.2 trillion from 1983 to 2010 (in 2010 dollars). Federal funding plays significant fiscal, regional development, and political roles in local communities. First, federal funding accounts for about 20 percent of state and local government revenues (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Second, the totality and distribution of federal grants and contracts reveals de facto federal development priorities that have significantly shaped regional economies (Markusen, Hall, Campbell, & Deitrick, 1991).

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Third, the regional distribution of federal funds can provide political rewards for past activity or incentives for future behavior, with data on these funds often used to advance partisan views on federal expenditures. Despite the importance of federal funds for state and local governments and nonprofit organizations, research tends to focus only on the federal role in funding. Specifically, much of the public debate highlights politicized notions of “donor” and “recipient” states. This approach focuses on the federal decisions that result in some states receiving more funding than others (for example, see Chamberlain, 2006; Tierney, 2014). These predominant perspectives on federal funding yield an incomplete understanding that fails to account for the characteristics of competitive grants as distinct from other funding. The ability to apply for, obtain, and manage competitive grants depends in part upon community level capacity. This calls for careful attention to the local organization and administration of grant management at the local level. Communities that lack this capacity may have difficulty accessing important federal resources.

This paper seeks to further our understanding of the distinct role of competitive federal funding at the state and local level, through an analysis of the distribution of federal funding from 1983 to 2010. The paper proceeds in four main sections. The first section reviews the role of federal funding at the community level. The second section introduces a framework for identifying competitive grants using federal funding data. The third section examines changes in federal competitive funding since 1983. The fourth section discusses the implications of competitive funding trends for professional and organizational development needs at the state and local level.

II. Major Roles of Federal Funding at the State and Local Levels

Federal funding plays a dynamic role in both the development and political decision-making of local communities. Two primary examples illustrate common roles for federal funding. First, the distribution of federal funding can reveal federal development priorities and encourage growth in specific communities, whether by design, in effect, or both. Second, federal funding can be used as a political tool to reward particular political behaviors or incentivize future behavior. In addition to the impacts of these federal priorities, the capacity of local funding applicants also influences the distribution of federal funds throughout the country.

Federal funding serves as a regional development tool: the distribution of federal funding can shape community growth and development, even in the absence of an explicit federal regional development policy. For example, Forsyth (2002) discusses the federal role in the development of the planned community of Irvine, California. Irvine’s development was facilitated through funding from federal agencies, but this funding was not provided as part of a unified federal policy specifically targeting regional development. Due to this lack of a unified development-focused policy, the federal agencies that contributed funding frequently experienced coordination problems. This example shows that federal funding can play an activist role in regional development even when it is not part of a targeted regional development policy. Markusen (2003) argues that regional development research that ignores the impact of federal funding (notably some studies of Irvine’s growth) overlooks an important force behind regional growth and development in America. Indeed, a large portion of federal dollars, especially through formula grants, targets areas of poverty or other distress. Regional equity has increased where federal funding has targeted growth (Jung & Ho Eom, 2004). Federal funding can strongly affect regional development, even absent federal regional development policy priorities.

However, regional development activity does not always target areas of greatest need. Therefore it may exacerbate rather than mitigate levels of inequity (Joassart-Marcelli & Musso, 2001). For instance, in the Chicago metropolitan area in the 1990s, federal funding favored suburban areas over urban areas. This funding pattern led to sprawl and greater inequality between the urban

core and the suburban fringe (Persky & Kurban, 2003). These considerations highlight the potential of targeted federal funding to determine the winners and losers in opportunities for regional development.

Federal funding can also act as a political tool. For instance, some argue that federal funding can shape voting preferences. Kriner and Reeves (2012) found that, between 1988 and 2008, incumbent presidential candidates or parties who increased federal funding to a county in the year preceding a presidential election were likely receive more votes from that county in the following year. Voters even seem to prefer certain forms of federal funding over others. For example, voters in areas receiving disaster funding were more likely to reward incumbent presidential parties that had provided local response funding, rather than preparedness funding (Healy & Malhotra, 2009).

This correlation between voting and federal funding does not necessarily translate to a single causal sequence. In addition to incentivizing voter activity, federal funding can be used to reward citizens for certain behaviors, or to keep promises to citizens. Areas with higher voter turnout during a federal election generally receive more federal funding, suggesting that the funding is meant to reward citizen behavior rather than to reward or incentivize state and local politicians (Martin, 2003). In turn, areas where the popular vote for a winning presidential candidate was low often received more funding following the election, as presidents seek to improve their relationship with these areas through increased funding (Taylor 2008). Additionally, states that host early primaries or caucuses are more likely to receive federal funding following an election, because candidates tend to make more campaign promises earlier in the primary election cycle (Taylor, 2009).

Federal funding levels also positively correlate with the level of ideological agreement between those responsible for federal funding and those receiving funding. Bertelli and Grose (2009) found that funding allocations from the Department of Defense and the Department of Labor were highest in those congressional districts whose senators had higher ideological congruence with the agency heads. Congruence of party affiliation between legislators and the president is also correlated with increased funding to districts and counties (Berry, Burden, & Howell, 2010). Further, Nicholson-Crotty (2004) finds that states whose policy agendas better align with the federal government's agenda may attract increased federal grant funding. The likelihood that funding allocations are subject to political manipulation is uneven across funding sources. For instance, Lee (2003) found that members of the U.S. House of Representatives were especially likely to earmark funds to most directly benefit their congressional districts.

The discussion above focuses on the role of the federal government in the distribution of federal funds. Additionally, the institutional capacity of state and local governments and non-profits to successfully apply for and manage federal funding must be assessed. In Southern California cities, federal funding was found to be positively correlated with the local applicants' fiscal capacity and institutional strength (Joassart-Marcelli & Musso, 2001). Additionally, higher rates of federal funding flow towards metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs¹) with higher civic capacity and more advocacy activity (Lowe, Reckhow, & Gainsborough, 2015). This leads Lowe, Reckhow, and Gainsborough (2015) to conclude that the competitive process itself, not just the final allocation of resources, could contribute to regional disparities.

The capacity to successfully acquire federal funding does not depend on any single structural or institutional feature. The presence of strong targeted support can increase an applicant's grantsmanship capacity, as shown by the cases of Irvine or MSAs with high civic capacity (Forsyth, 2002; Lowe, Reckhow, & Gainsborough, 2015). However, organizations vary in the extent to which targeted support can increase their capacity to attain federal funding (Hall, 2008). The ability to

¹ Metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) are regions in the United States with high population densities at their cores and strong economic connectivity throughout. MSAs are designated by the Office of Management and Budget.

obtain federal funding depends upon having the knowledge and resources needed to apply for and continually manage grants. Further research is required to better understand the characteristics that make organizations successful in procuring federal grants.

III. Data and Methods

Given the significant impact that federal funding has at the local level, the remainder of this paper examines changes in federal funding over time. These changes are important to understand, as they may reveal unique pressures on administrators at the local level. In order to unravel some of the causes and effects of these changes, this paper addresses three research questions:

1. What types of programs have experienced funding increases versus decreases over time?
2. What is the pattern, if any, of when funding has increased or decreased over time?
3. What implications do these trends have for grant recipients at the local level?

Data for this effort draws from reports of federal funding catalogued in the Consolidated Federal Fund Report (CFFR). Data is reported as individual allocations or de-allocations of federal funds. In the available time period covering 1983-2010, there were 10.4 million individual funding transactions. The variables included in the original federal report include Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) code to the place level,² program code, objective code, sign (positive for allocations and negative for de-allocations), amount (in dollars of year allocated), and year. In addition, funding from 1993-2010 includes information on the code of the funding agency. Table 1 provides a detailed list of variables.

This data does not indicate the type of grant management capacity. Practically, there are two primary groups of grants: formula grants, wherein the funding amount is determined through a mathematical formula, usually based on need and population, and project grants, also known as competitive grants, wherein funding is allocated based on a competitive application process. Both formula grants and project grants involve an application process, but formula grants generally provide funding to all applicants, while project grants are only awarded to a portion of the applicants.

² The Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) code is used to locate specific states, counties, or places. Because not all CFFR data includes FIPS codes to the place level, analysis is conducted at the state level.

Variable	Description
Program	6-digit program code. There are 3,640 unique program codes.
Objective	2-digit objective code. See list below for 9 options. DR – Direct payments for individuals (retirement and disability only) DO – Direct payments for individuals (other than retirement and disability) DX – direct payments other than for individuals GG – Grants (block, grants, formula grants, project grants, and cooperative agreements) PC – Procurement Contracts SW – Salaries and Wages DL – Direct Loans GL – Guaranteed/Insured Loans II – Insurance
Sign	Positive for funds allocated or negative for funds de-allocated.
Amount*	Uses the original amounts with the addition of sign value for those that are negative.
FIPState	2-digit state Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) code.
FIPSCounty	3-digit county FIPS code.
FIPSPlace	5-digit place FIPS code.
Agency	4-digit funding agency code for years 1993-2010. There are 631 unique agency codes.
Year	Year of funding award. 1983-2010.
FundAmount _2010*	Calculated funding amount using the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator.
FIPS*	5 digit code. Concatenated State and County FIPS code.

Table 1. Variables in Consolidated Federal Funds Report Data.

Data Source: Consolidated Federal Funds Report, 1983-2010

*Calculated from original

While the CFFR does distinguish between competitive and formula grants, the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) gives some insight. The CFDA provides data on federal funding programs, including a short description of the program, and the type of assistance (e.g. competitive grant, formula grant, or loan). By cross-referencing each program code found in the CFFR from 1983 to 2010 with the corresponding CFDA program listing, the type of assistance of most CFFR entries could be determined. For example, the CFDA entry for program code 10.555 (The National School Lunch Program) indicates that it is a formula grant program. Eligibility is limited to states, territories, and non-profits. Funding use is limited to providing eligible children with lunches that meet federal nutrition requirements. The CFDA defines several types of assistance, which are summarized in Table 2.³

³ The CFDA details seven types of non-monetary assistance. For the purposes of this paper, I combine all non-monetary assistance programs into one funding type.

Type of Assistance	Description	Total Number of Programs
Formula Grants	Allocation of funding based on formula for continuing activities.	309
Project Grants	Grants for specific projects of specific time periods.	1,960
Direct Payment for Specified Use	Financial assistance to individuals or firms	200
Direct Payment for Unspecified Use	Direct payments for individuals (retirement and disability)	69
Direct Loans	Loans for a specific time period	36
Insured Loans	Loan with specified responsible lender	78
Insurance	Financial assistance to ensure reimbursement for losses under specific conditions	10
Non-Monetary	Technical assistance and other types of non-monetary support.	74
Unsure	Unable to identify.	646
Total Single Code		3,382
Total Multiple Code	More than one of the above.	258
Total Program ID		3,640

Table 2. Total Number of Programs by Type of Assistance (1983-2010).

Data source: Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

The list of current CFDA programs provided information on the type of assistance for 48 percent of programs (1,732 out of 3,640 total programs). For archived programs or programs with catalog numbers that had changed over time, alternative methods were used to identify assistance type. A search was conducted using Google for each of the remaining CFDA program numbers and titles, to gather available information on the funding source. This information was collected from the National Archives, Federal Register, CFDA archives, Fedspending.org, state funding reports, and other sites. For the vast majority of these programs, the assistance type was identified using descriptive program narratives on non-CFDA sites. Occasionally, the type of assistance was determined through the identification of keywords and concepts. Examples of this include references to a funding formula (indicating a formula grant), a competitive selection process (indicating a projects grant), or loan requirements (indicating insured or direct loans). These methods brought the total number of programs for which a primary type of assistance code could not be determined down to 646 programs, or 18 percent of the CFDA listings.

Of the approximately 3,000 programs for which a funding type was identified, seven percent included multiple types of assistance and therefore could not be categorized according to a single type of assistance. Therefore, in this analysis, these programs were considered in calculations relating to aggregate funding, but were not considered as part of the individual award types.

This data represents federal funding to state or local governments, local NGOs, private companies, and individuals. Funding allocations to the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, or funding without a geographic designation were excluded. Of the original 10.4 million allocations of

funding, 10,289,800 occurred in one of the 50 U.S. states. These 10.3 million allocations became the data of interest. Longitudinal changes in funding were analyzed using aggregate and per capita measures. Per capita measures were based on the most recent preceding decennial census (1980, 1990, 2000, or 2010). All the funding types outlined in Table 2 were used to generate the aggregate and per capita measures of federal expenditures by state.

IV. Federal Funding: Growth of Grant Funding over Time

From 1983 to 2010, federal funding dollars increased by 173 percent, from \$1.8 trillion to \$5 trillion.⁴ Grant funding levels, particularly formula and project grant dollars, increased at an even greater rate than federal funding overall: formula grants increased by 253 percent, from \$112 billion to \$394 billion, and project grants increased by 350 percent, from \$26 billion to \$118 billion. This difference in the growth of grants versus overall federal funding means that the proportion of federal funding provided by grants grew from 7.5 percent in 1983 to 10.3 percent in 2010.

In general, grants are made to governmental organizations or non-profits, rather than individuals. Additionally, only 28 percent of federal funding is allocated in the form of direct payments to individuals (such as retirement and disability). Therefore, as the proportion of federal funding represented by grants increases, organizations experience a greater increase in allocations than do individuals.

Type of Assistance	Funding in 1983 (2010 Dollars)	Funding in 2010 (2010 Dollars)
Formula Grants	\$111,739,668,302	\$394,419,366,421
Project Grants	\$26,229,293,226	\$117,971,510,908
Direct Payment for Specified Use	\$207,425,602,392	\$672,453,288,608
Direct Payment for Unspecified Use	\$519,931,448,963	\$721,873,387,836
Direct Loans	\$1,020,766,218	\$75,302,633,710
Insured Loans	\$83,164,576,426	\$411,110,272,233
Insurance	\$233,895,921,999	\$1,334,358,800,199
Non-Monetary	\$117,794,575	\$266,959,875
Total Single Code	\$1,183,525,072,101	\$3,727,756,219,790
Total Multiple Code	\$647,182,870,958	\$1,267,330,375,921
Total	\$1,830,707,943,059	\$4,995,086,595,711

Table 3. Total Funding in 1983 and 2010 by Type of Assistance, 2010 Dollars.

Data source: Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

V. Changes to Competitive Funding at the State Level

Organizations and agencies that are dependent on federal funds must dedicate significant time and resources to the processes of grant application, management, documentation and reporting. These duties are particularly intensive among entities that depend on *competitive* funding, as this type of funding is not guaranteed from one year to the next. As explained in the section above, competitive grants have increased at a faster rate than formula grants. The distribution of competitive grant money has produced differential impacts across states. As shown in Table 4,

⁴ All funding amounts listed in this paragraph have been adjusted to 2010 dollars, using the Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

Alaska, Massachusetts, and Maryland ranked as the top three recipients of per capita competitive funding in both the 1980s and the 2000s. Other states, like Louisiana and North Dakota, have shown recent increases, which may be due to changing demographics and needs in these locations. In the 1980s, Louisiana was among the bottom ten states for average annual federal competitive funding per capita. After Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, Louisiana experienced a large increase in federal funding allocations (Plyer, 2015). In North Dakota, booming economic conditions associated with shale oil extraction from the Bakken Formation have resulted in significant development pressures and concerns about adverse environmental and social impacts, which may have garnered the attention of federal funding sources.

Top 10 States Funding Per Capita 1983-1989		Top 10 States Funding Per Capita 2000-2009	
State	Average Annual Funding Per Capita	State	Average Annual Funding Per Capita
Alaska	\$468	Alaska	\$1,494
Massachusetts	\$299	Massachusetts	\$678
Maryland	\$238	Maryland	\$525
Vermont	\$203	Montana	\$440
Rhode Island	\$171	North Dakota	\$422
New York	\$170	South Dakota	\$422
Utah	\$158	Hawaii	\$413
New Hampshire	\$157	Vermont	\$380
Washington	\$153	Louisiana	\$379
Colorado	\$149	New Mexico	\$364

Table 4. Top 10 States by Average Annual Competitive Funding Per Capita: 1983-1989; 2000-2009 in 2010 Dollars.

Other states have consistently struggled to obtain competitive federal funding. As shown in Table 5, six states ranked among the bottom ten recipients during the 1980s and 2000s: Arkansas, Kentucky, Florida, Indiana, Georgia, and South Carolina. While the total amount of competitive federal funding going to these states has increased, per capita competitive funding continues to lag. Four of these states are southern states, indicating a potential regional difference in funding. While Louisiana’s recent increase in funding may improve the southern average, the consistently low per capita funding levels of many other southern states suggests a pattern of regional disparity.

Bottom 10 States Funding Per Capita 1983-1989		Bottom 10 States Funding Per Capita 2000-2009	
State	Average Annual Funding Per Capita	State	Average Annual Funding Per Capita
Arkansas	\$57	Florida	\$130
Kentucky	\$61	New Jersey	\$130
Louisiana	\$61	Indiana	\$135
Florida	\$63	Ohio	\$159
Indiana	\$70	Georgia	\$160
Nebraska	\$72	Kentucky	\$165
Kansas	\$74	Arkansas	\$169
Georgia	\$74	Michigan	\$172
South Carolina	\$75	South Carolina	\$173
Texas	\$77	Illinois	\$179

Table 5. Bottom 10 States by Average Annual Competitive Funding Per Capita: 1983-1989; 2000-2009 in 2010 Dollars.

VI. Implications and Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated the major roles of federal funding, and the ways in which these roles have become more significant since the 1980s. In the 28 years included in this analysis, overall federal funding at the local level increased by 170 percent, while competitive grant funding increased by 350 percent. In addition to these increases, federal competitive funding is also playing an increasing role at the community level not only because of the increase in funding dollars, but also because of tightening state and local budgets, and the decline of direct federal intervention in local communities.

This trend raises a number of considerations for grantees, educators, and researchers. First, grantees must develop and maintain the organizational capacities needed to apply for, manage, and report on grants. Second, education for students of public policy and administration must focus on the unique challenges of a field increasingly dependent upon grants. Finally, future research will need to employ a more fine-grained typology of grants in order to better understand the distribution and impact of competitive funding on local communities. Current reporting practices, such as that employed by the CFFR, limit but do not preclude the potential for future research in this area.

The increased amount of federal funding at the community level has at least three significant implications for the practice of public administration. First, practitioners must learn to navigate the complex federal funding process. The grant life cycle outlined in Figure 1 places large responsibilities on individual agencies. Before beginning an application, an organization must have the capacity to identify funding opportunities that apply to their programs. While this seems conceptually simple, there are often more than 2,000 grant opportunities listed on the federal grant website Grants.gov.⁵ Once opportunities are identified, most funding applications have a short time period, meaning that potential applicants must be ready to submit applications quickly. In addition, organizations must prove that they have the capacity to effectively carry out the award. Subject matter expertise is often necessary, but potential grantees must also demonstrate that they possess the fiscal capacity to document and manage funding use. Those with a history of successful grant management are looked upon more favorably by reviewers. The complexity of the federal grant process requires applicants to have a well-developed organizational skill set.

⁵ On December 23, 2015, there were 2,008 open funding opportunities.

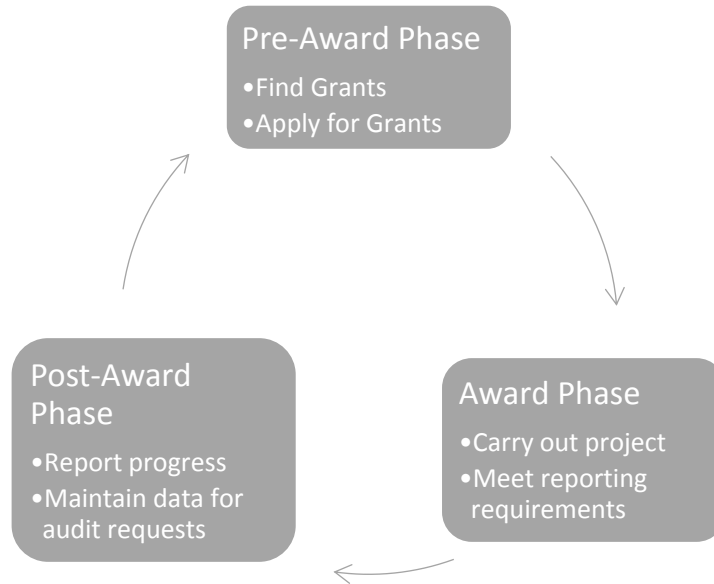


Figure 1. Life Cycle of a Grant – Applicant responsibilities

Adapted from Grants.gov Grant Lifecycle Timeline <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/learn-grants/grants-101/grant-lifecycle.html>

If selected to receive a federal grant, an organization must then implement the program as it was described in the grant application. Organizations must be prepared to act quickly to meet project deadlines while devoting significant resources to the preparation of detailed documentation. These demands require a robust organization with strong financial and programmatic reporting capacity.

In the final stage of the grant life cycle, grant recipients must demonstrate that their funding was used effectively. This includes financial and programmatic reporting. Recipients must also maintain data for auditing purposes. Misuse of funds may result in the grant recipient having to pay back federal funds or being charged with fraud. For this reason, documentation is vital to the grant process. The post-award phase may also involve an evaluation of the funded project or program.

In order to address these challenges, a number of organizations, such as university research offices, have developed divisions devoted to grant management. However, while grantsmanship capacity is important for all funding applicants, not all applicants can feasibly create such grant management units. In many cases, this level of focus on grant management would reduce the amount of attention that a local government or NGO could devote to its provision of services. The primacy of competitive grants requires organizations to develop grants management capacities in addition to their operational responsibilities.

The grant life cycle has additional implications for organizations seeking to maintain competitiveness for federal funding. An organization’s ability to successfully apply for a grant depends on its existing grant management systems. Therefore, organizations must maintain some capacity to manage grants, even when they are not actively seeking them. To successfully manage a grant, an organization must maintain relationships with key stakeholders, expertise or experience relating to the grant opportunity, and strong accounting systems. In addition, organizations must constantly explore new project ideas due to the brevity of many grant application cycles. Organizations that already have well-developed project idea when a grant opportunity is announced will be at an advantage. Thus, maintaining grant management capacity requires an ongoing

organizational process of building and maintaining resources, institutional capacity, and programmatic ideas.

In addition to these organizational implications, public administration and public policy education must also adjust its curricula to reflect increased grant-dependence. For master's-level students preparing for careers in public service, there must be a stronger emphasis on the grant writing and management process. As local-level dependence on federal grant funding increases, administrators must be prepared to manage grants. Grant management is one of the skills needed "to lead and manage in public governance", which is a core competency of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA, 2014, p. 7). Doctoral students must also be actively engaged in the process of writing and managing grants during their studies. This experience will help them to obtain and manage grant funding in their career, and will help them to better instruct future public administrators.

Future research must use this understanding of competitive capacity to evaluate the impact of federal funding. Where federal funding is targeted specifically at increasing local capacity for grant management, analysis should be conducted to better understand if this goal has been achieved. Additionally, research should examine the grant management capacities that are specific to *competitive* grants. The model of analysis explained in this paper can provide a way to assess the efficacy of efforts to increase grantsmanship capacity. For example, research could compare regional variation in the procurement of federal grants, and explore whether this variation correlates with past capacity-building grant funding.

This paper used CFFR data to examine federal funding. However, because federal funding reporting changed in 2010, future research can draw from the new reporting site, USASpending.gov, to investigate trends in federal competitive funding in more recent years. USASpending.gov provides greater detail on grantees and sub-grantees, but does not identify whether funding opportunities are competitive, despite the significance of competitive grants in comparison to other federal funding. More comprehensive data on the federal funding process can help researchers better understand the implications of the federal government's increasing use of competitive grant funding.

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