

## HEARING FIVE

### Grant Programs

April 30, 2020

*The following summary is intended to provide an overview and highlights of the testimony and discussion during the hearings. For a full and detailed account of the hearings, please refer to the [Commission website](#) and the audio recordings and transcripts located there.*

#### **Grant Programs Panel, April 30, 2020**

**First Panelist:** *Ms. Jennifer Brinkman, Director of the Office of Criminal Justice Programs, Tennessee Department of Administration and Finance*

#### *Highlights:*

- The Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP) is Tennessee's state administering agency (SAA) for federal grant programs focused on crime reduction, victim services, criminal history records, and trauma and addiction treatment. The funds supplied by these grants are used to pilot new programs, and, if those programs are successful, to educate other practitioners on their successes.
- Applying for federal grants can be arduous and confusing, and the time required to oversee grant requirements can take away from direct public service.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Streamline the application and reporting process across federal agencies and grant programs. Eighty percent of law enforcement agencies in Tennessee have 25 or fewer officers—not enough staffing to take an officer out of the field to handle writing grants or submitting grant reports. This inhibits small agencies from applying for direct awards. Instead, they rely heavily on the SAA to access funds and administrative support, but competition for those funds is high. Streamlining requirements will allow smaller agencies to apply for more federal grants.
- Reduce grant program requirements where possible. SAAs and local agency staff spend a significant amount of time overseeing special conditions and uniform guidance requirements of grant programs. While it is necessary to ensure that grant recipients are good stewards of taxpayer funds, the increasing number of requirements makes grant compliance so arduous that some local agencies have chosen to terminate grant contracts rather than attempt it.
- Use the SAAs as partners to foster collaboration, strategic planning, and sustainability planning in local communities. SAAs are in a unique position to look for other resources to leverage when federal funding runs out. For example, Tennessee's Targeted Community Crime Reduction Program implemented a grant-funded pilot day reporting center in Johnson City; after the OCJP brought leaders from the Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC) to learn from the program's success, the department absorbed the pilot site and initiated six more centers across the state, all supported out of TDOC funds.
- Bring back conferences so that lessons learned and promising practices can be shared among agencies from different states. Extensive requirements have now been placed on federally funded conferences, making it difficult for local agencies from different states to learn from their peers about successful programs. Reducing or modifying these requirements would make it easier to share lessons learned and promising practices.

- Make it easier for SAAs to continue to coordinate federal, state, and local funds. Leveraging funds, and avoiding supplanting of federal funds, is the primary function of the SAA. Progress has been made on the sharing of information about federal discretionary grants awarded in each state, but details are not always readily available. The lack of information makes it difficult to oversee projects and resources and can lead to communities receiving awards for duplicative projects.

**Second Panelist: *Sheriff A.J. Louderback, Jackson County, Texas***

*Highlights:*

- The grant system is a lifeline for rural law enforcement, but it's necessary to simplify it. Many rural agencies don't have the skill level, experience, or knowledge to access federal grants.
- Rural agencies may even lack the necessary technology—scanners, internet access.

*Recommendations:*

- Make grant funding more timely—funding in eight months to a year does not meet needs that are urgent right now. This is especially true in emergency situations, like the current COVID-19 pandemic. There needs to be a way to supply funding in 30 to 90 days.
- Simplify the grant system. Its complexity—multiple websites, onerous reporting requirements, long applications—stymies agencies applying for funding.
- Allow rural agencies to use grant funding for equipment purchase. Without it, they will continue to use outdated, sometimes nonfunctional, equipment.
- Reestablish field visits. These can be critical for identifying and solving problems and providing agencies with the information for quick, fluid changes.

**Third Panelist: *Chief Keith Kauffman, Redondo Beach (California) Police Department***

*Highlights:*

- Grant writing pulls law enforcement officers away from their day-to-day duties. Larger agencies can employ dedicated grant writers and grant analysts, which gives them an edge in competing for funding. When grant writing is an ancillary duty given to a sergeant or assistant, they don't understand the process and the language they need.
- Even just the number of separate passwords and logins you need to get from opening grants.gov to completing an application is enough to make some people give up. The BJA and COPS Office grants have been simplified, and the employees provide excellent customer service, but the system is still too difficult to navigate.
- In the BJA realm, navigating one grant takes three systems: grants management, PMT, and the grant payment request system. Individually, they work well, but they don't work together.

*Recommendations:*

- Standardize and streamline the federal grant-making process and systems. Some of the larger pass-through grants are so convoluted that by the time funds come to fruition. Chief Kaufmann sits on the Homeland Security Grant Board for the L.A. County Chiefs of Police and writes 22 separate grants for the individual agencies, because those agencies can't all navigate the system on their own. They have yet to receive a grant they applied for in 2017 for portable radios.
- Create a system to work with states, counties, and cities to expedite grant funding. Remove the delays that make some of these grants obsolete by the time they're disbursed.

- Create a new system grants management system that is intuitive and trains users as they go. Training people on the systems is a good idea, but it takes time and money, and the more complex the systems get, the more training they require.
- Backing up Sheriff Louderback's recommendation about timely funding. When the COVID-19 crisis hit, Kauffman turned to a foundation for grant funding for COVID and antibody testing to keep officers on the road: he filled out a two-page application, had a Zoom call with the nine-member committee the next day, and the following day was given access to the funds. Maybe the federal government can't move that fast, but if agencies each had profiles in a user-friendly system, we might be able to cut down on time to reimbursement, especially in emergencies.
- Examine funding models and improve accessibility by removing the need for matching funds or extended reimbursement time. Agencies should be able to have grants sent to them that fit their needs, rather than having to search for them.

### **Question-and-Answer Session, April 30, 2020**

**Q:** For the Commissioners' information, OJP is developing a new database system that is going live later in 2020, which should take care of a lot of the issues that have been testified to.

**Q:** For all three panelists: If state grants are not being utilized or getting out as effectively as they should, what should they be doing? The idea is to get money to states, and let them decide where to allocate it, but there are complaints about that system—rural communities especially may not be served well by block or formula grants.

**A:** [Director Brinkman:] What each state does is going to be different. In Tennessee, the SAA is appointed but not in the Governor's Office: the SAA is embedded, not politically motivated but motivated by what the state needs and what locals need. That's a lot of grants under \$10,000, a lot of equipment grants for things local county governments can't supply—patrol cars, bulletproof vests, guns. If that money is given to direct grants, it's going to hurt those small agencies, because they won't be able to write those grants. The SAA administers those funds; they do the PMPs because the agencies can't get into the necessary system. The Federal Government could give SAAs more education and guidance on what they should do.

**A:** [Sheriff Louderback]: Block grants have a role and a purpose and do it well, but some percentage of dollars needs to be set aside for direct access. Rural agencies have real needs—in Texas, 190 of 254 counties have populations below 50,000.

**A:** [Chief Kauffmann]: California has one of the most complicated systems. For example, Homeland Security Grants that pass through the state go to California OES, then to the counties, then to the city, and each of those entities has its own set of rules, and each new set of rules adds a delay. In addition, the county requires police chiefs to submit grant funding requests based on the previous years' funding model and submit them to the county for submission to the state—and the whole process may be finished before the previous year's federal funds are released.

**Q:** We also see challenges from federal grants that don't go through the state. With some of these federal grants, the contacts agencies work with change frequently—and the rules they are given also change as the new contacts learn their roles, or interpret the rules and the focus of the grant differently. This lack of consistency makes reporting even more convoluted.

**A:** [Director Brinkman]: Turnover at the federal level does cause issues. There are internal federal processes around training and onboarding, but there's not a lot of outreach to the grantees. There would be some benefit to reaching out and getting more information on how they're affected. If SAAs had more continuity in their federal contacts, they would have less frustration and less fear that they're doing

something wrong when they disburse funds to local agencies. A few weeks ago, Brinkman asked all her federal fund sources a question about COVID-19 small business loans and got three different answers based on the same uniform guidance.

**A:** [Chief Kauffmann:] Another problem isn't with the Federal Government but with the applying agencies. An officer gets tasked with writing a grant, realizes how time-consuming and burdensome it is, and changes assignments the minute they can. And the next grant writer comes in and needs new training and new usernames and passwords. Agencies always lose their grant writing expertise. One solution is to stop relying on the individual user and create a durable profile for the agency. Let whoever is writing the grant log in as Redondo Beach PD, and enter in everything that pertains to the agency itself—demographics, number of officers, crime rate, etc.—and vet the city or the agency as the applicant instead of the user. And the security measures could be better than relying on individual users to answer security questions.