Grants Management Symposium
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the HHS Office of Grants

December 8, 2022

Office of Grants Overview

ASFR

- Office of Budget
- Office of Finance
- Office of Grants
- Office of Acquisition
- Immediate Office

The Office of Grants (OG) is one of five Offices under the Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources' organizational umbrella

OG supports the Department's financial assistance award and management infrastructure through policy development, technical assistance, training, and IT solutions

OG manages and operates two of the federal government's largest shared service grant systems

- Grants.gov, through which the public can find and apply for all federal grants opportunities
- GrantSolutions, a shared service for grants management processing, supporting 38 customers within HHS and across the federal government

OG's objectives are to build financial assistance capacity, both internally and with our recipients; and promote financial assistance accountability and performance

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Today's Discussion

- DEIA is an Administration priority.

- Enhancing the health and wellbeing of all Americans is core to the HHS mission.

- HHS is committed to addressing inequities and advancing equity through assessing and changing policies, programs, and processes across the Department.

- OG work in the DEIA space is one component of the broader HHS Equity Action Plan (https://www.hhs.gov/equity/index.html).

NOFO Review Approach

Reviewed a representative sample of NOFOs from across HHS awarding agencies, published in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016-2021, to identify possible barriers to equity within NOFOs.

Initial Key Findings

- Confirmed NOFOs are an area to continue to improve plain language.

- Identified inconsistencies and areas to improve standardization of NOFO components, HHS awarding agency requirements, and training and technical assistance resources provided.
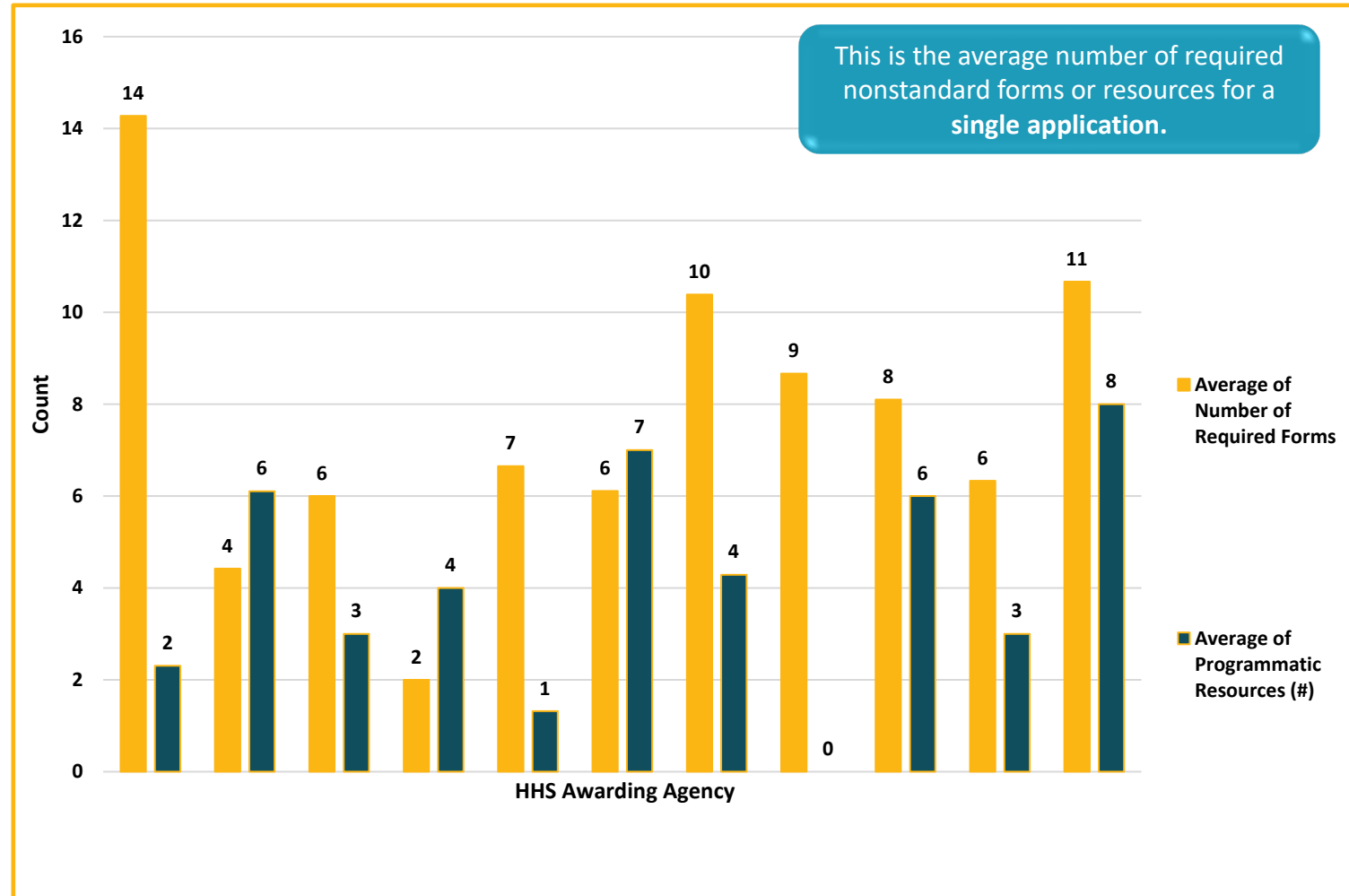
Collected qualitative data from HHS internal staff during discussion panels around potential inequities in the grantmaking process, including HHS grants systems.

Initial Key Findings

- Pre award processes – NOFO structure, guidance/programmatic resources, requirements, and submission methods – are highly inconsistent across Divisions.

- Communication and outreach efforts are inconsistent across HHS and insufficiently targeted to underrepresented communities.
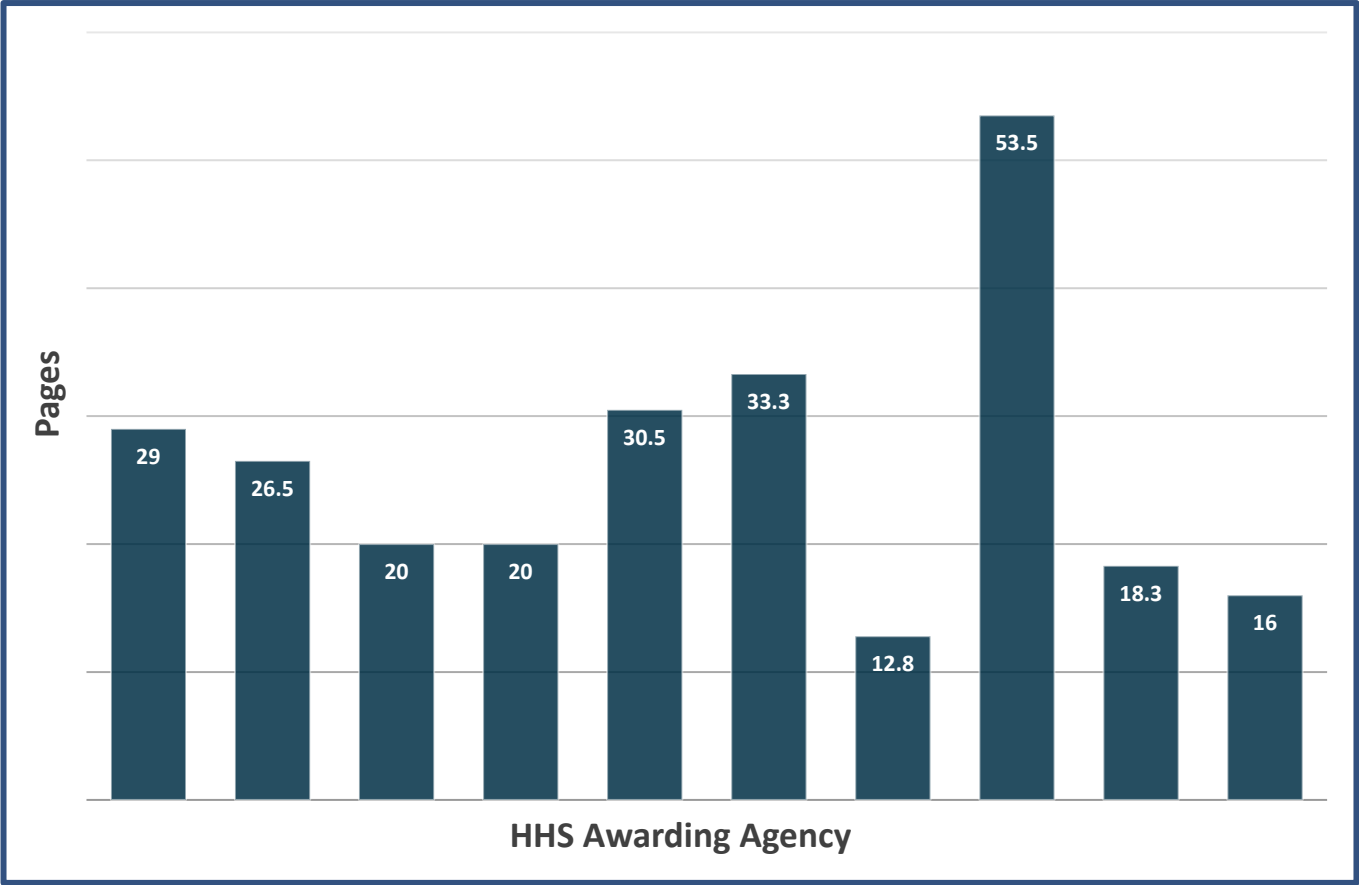
NOFO Review Finding Example
Average Number of Required Forms Compared to Resources Provided by HHS Awarding Agency

This is the average number of required nonstandard forms or resources for a **single application.**

■ Average of Number of Required Forms

■ Average of Programmatic Resources (#)

NOFO Review Finding Example
Narrative Page Limits

NOFO Review Emergent Themes

Simplification and Consistency

- **Simplifying NOFO language** would reduce barriers for applicants with lower reading proficiencies or those who speak English as a second language.

- **Standardizing application processes and materials** (e.g., structure, submission methods) can make a difference in the number of diverse applications received.

- The scope of **application requirements and experience requirements** written into NOFOs limit diverse applicants with less experience from applying.

Improved Access to and Types of Technical Assistance and Resources

- Current **communication methods and outreach efforts need to be improved** to reach "less experienced, newer, and smaller" organizations.

- **Inconsistent programmatic technical resources can** inadvertently limit access for newer applicants.

- **Registration requirements across multiple systems** create unexpected delays and/or deterrents for many smaller organizations.

NOFOs Written with Equity in Focus

- Engage a wide range of qualified applicants and present an appealing opportunity to make a difference.

- Provide the most critical information – including eligibility, core program requirements, how to apply, and how applications will be scored – so applicants can decide whether to apply.

- Elicit critical information in a way that application reviewer can process.

- Remain concise and straightforward enough that an applicant organization can successfully apply for and receive an award using existing organizational resources, without the need to hire a grant writer or other external support.

Considerations and Strategies

- Conduct "deep dive" NOFO reviews with specific programs targeted and underrepresented communities

- Identify policy barriers at the federal and agency level and remove them without impacting the integrity of the process

- Make sure that barrier removal is supported and facilitated by systems and process. Examples include just in time review to reduce applicant upfront investment

- Leverage technology such as plain language software and real time virtual AI assistants to support applicants to promote easier access

- Continue to involve program and grants officials in streamlining NOFOs and the application process to meet program objectives

- Use applicant insight and experiences to highlight areas of improvement and drive policy, process, and system changes

- The challenge – we need both standardization and flexibility in achieving equity in our financial assistance lifecycle

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Enhancing Capacity. Removing Barriers.