



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Floor Statement As Prepared For Delivery
“Improving the Federal Grant Solicitation Process”
July 7, 2011

Mr./Madam Speaker:

Each year, 26 federal agencies award over half a trillion dollars in grant funding. Earlier this year, Congress significantly changed the manner in which the federal government allocates funding. In the past, state and local governments and non-profit organizations spent a great deal of time trying to persuade individual Members of Congress to “earmark” funds to support local projects. Members of Congress and their staffs, in turn, labored to assess and submit those requests to the Appropriations Committees. While debate will no doubt continue on the value of congressionally-directed spending, the reality is that—at least for the time being—the days of earmarks are over. With a ban on earmarks, a greater emphasis will now be placed on competitive grants, whereby applicants from across the nation compete for funding made available for different purposes.

In theory, a larger role for competitive grants in the federal appropriations process holds promise. Under a well-administered grant competition, an application is judged strictly on its merits—that is, on how much it will benefit the community in question.

In practice, however, an increased emphasis on competitive grants will only improve the overall process if the federal government announces and publicizes grant opportunities in a clear and organized manner. Grant-seeking will not be a true meritocracy if the process of identifying, applying for, and obtaining federal grants is clouded in mystery and confusion, and understood only by paid experts.

In recent years, much improvement has been made to the federal grant solicitation process. For example, in 1999, Congress passed the Federal Financial Assistance Management Act, which resulted in the establishment of a website—Grants.gov—which allows applicants to search and apply for grants online.

However, much more needs to be done to make the grant solicitation process as transparent and user-friendly as possible. Many of my constituents have expressed frustration with the manner

in which the federal government makes grant opportunities known. Often, a potential grantee will seek to apply for needed funding only to learn that the deadline for the most relevant grant passed days or weeks earlier. In other instances, prospective applicants will search Grants.gov but become frustrated upon finding that they need to scroll through pages and pages of grant listings, some of which are out-dated or have not been funded by Congress.

To address these problems, I recently introduced H.R. 2393, the Federal Grant Solicitations Improvement Act. This bipartisan legislation would make two important changes to the federal grant solicitation process. First, my bill would require each federal agency, within two months of the start of a new fiscal year, to submit a forecast of all grant solicitations that the agency expects to issue for that fiscal year. Such a forecast would allow prospective applicants to determine in advance which grant opportunities they wish to apply for. Currently, several agencies do not make available any type of forecast, leaving would-be grantees with little advance notice of available grant funding, and Grants.gov does not provide a forecast at the beginning of the fiscal year.

The second improvement my bill would make is to require each grant solicitation forecast or listing to be organized by detailed subject area. Grants.gov currently organizes grant opportunities by agency and by very broad subject areas, like “energy” or “housing.” As a result, for example, if an applicant seeks to search for a health-related grant, he or she must scroll through over 30 pages of grant listings. My bill would require Grants.gov—as well as each federal agency—to organize grant opportunities by specific subject areas, so that an applicant can more easily identify those grants that are most likely to address its needs.

These are just two ideas to reform the grant solicitation process. I am sure other members have additional ideas to improve the process. I also know that the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, led by Congressman Darrell Issa, is taking a close look at all aspects of the grant-making process.

As a Congress, our goal should be to identify the best practices that exist within the federal grant-making process and to replicate those practices across the entire government. I am eager to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to achieve that result, which will help our constituents and our country.

Thank you. I yield back the balance of my time.