

*AAU Association of American Universities*  
*COGR Council on Governmental Relations*

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March 17, 2009

Peter Orszag, Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
725 17th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

SUBJECT: Grants.gov

Dear Dr. Orszag:

We write to request an opportunity to meet with you along with a group of Senior Research Officers from our universities to discuss the need for short and long-term enhancements to the capacity of the Federal government's grants application portal, Grants.gov.

As you know, Grants.gov was developed as one of the key initiatives of the Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999, (PL 106-107) to streamline and simplify grant administrative procedures and reporting requirements. Since 2006, Grants.gov has served as the Federal government's principal repository for grant funding announcements and as the government-wide application portal. Unfortunately, our experience has been that Grants.gov fails to achieve its promise of streamlining and simplification because of key structural weaknesses in the management, funding and conceptualization of Grants.gov. In fact, the problems with Grants.gov at our campuses has gotten so bad that at their recent meeting, the AAU Senior Research Officers voted unanimously to convey to the appropriate government officials their sentiments that the Grants.gov system is broken and is in urgent need of immediate as well as longer-term repairs.

We appreciate your attention to the short-term challenges with using Grants.gov for the implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 research initiatives. The severe lack of resources currently committed to Grants.gov will undermine its ability to process the increase in applications to be generated by the Recovery Act. We are particularly concerned about the very near-term deadline for the National Institutes of Health's \$200 million Challenge Grant program. With an April 27<sup>th</sup> deadline and based on our experience with the February and March 2009 NIH deadlines, we know that Grants.gov cannot provide sufficient access for NIH and the other agencies. You urge agencies to look for alternatives. Unlike some other research agencies, NIH does not have an alternative electronic submission system.

Implementing alternative strategies for submission does not eliminate the need for an immediate investment in Grants.gov to enhance its capacity to handle the projected on-going volume. We understand the short-term need to seek alternatives from agencies and some will be in a position to use their various independent electronic systems to help handle the volume. This approach may resolve an immediate financial challenge but it is short-sighted as an alternative to a robust investment in Grants.gov at this critical juncture. Without an enhancement of capacity, those agencies that must rely on Grants.gov including the National Institutes of Health and Departments of Defense will be unable to quickly and efficiently disburse Recovery Act resources.

For the long-term, we would urge the development of a unified and government-wide web-based grants application and submission portal similar to the FastLane system currently used by the National Science Foundation. With modifications to accommodate the range of financial assistance

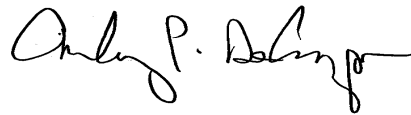
programs and enhancements to its capacity, the use of FastLane as a model is in keeping with the President's call for the use of innovative tools, methods, and systems for collaboration. To create such a system, it will be essential that Federal agencies work together and that adequate government support be provided to ensure that the new system can cope with the grant submission demands that will be placed upon it.

Our institutions have invested significant resources to partner with the Federal government's e-government initiatives. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the government to ensure that these efforts are successful and to discuss potential solutions to the current problems facing Grants.gov with you.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Berdahl  
President  
Association of American Universities



Anthony P. DeCrappeo  
President  
Council on Governmental Relations

cc: Shelia Conley, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Grants, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Howard Corcoran, Chair, Grants Executive Board, Environmental Protection Agency  
Thomas Cooley, Chair, Grants Policy Committee, National Science Foundation