

2009 Innovations Awards Programs

Joint Application

Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance
and
The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency



2009 Innovations Awards Program

APPLICATION

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Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

States: **Joint Application by the states of Wisconsin and Pennsylvania**

Assign Program Category: **Government Operations**

Program Name: **Egrants – Comprehensive Grants Management System**

Administering Agencies: **WI Office of Justice Assistance (OJA) and Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)**

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Egrants – Comprehensive Grants Management System

“I am ready to submit our first Egrant application for ISC Training. The process is quite straight forward.”

*Adams County
Wisconsin
Emergency
Management
Director*

1. Description

The Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance (OJA) leveraged federal grant funds awarded to the state of Pennsylvania by implementing Egrants, a web-based grants management system developed using these funds by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). The project proves that interstate sharing of custom source code can be done successfully, netting significant savings to adopting agencies, stretching federal grant funds, and reducing implementation times and ongoing maintenance costs.

2. How Long Has Program Been Operational?

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) Egrants program went live during September 2004; the Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance implemented during March 2006.

3. Program Purpose and Issues Addressed

From the outset, the Egrants system was designed to improve access to information about grants, to make applying for and managing those grants easier and to free up staff time to focus less on paperwork and more on the needs of customers. Other goals included elimination of unnecessary procedures, improvement in the workflow of the grants process, reduce the need for paper and enhance funding tracking capabilities.

Prior to implementing Egrants, the grant process was slow and cumbersome.

- To announce funding opportunities, agencies mailed application materials to likely applicants and posted updates to program websites. Mailing the application kits was expensive (paper, postage, staff effort), was limited to agencies/organizations for which we had valid addresses, and had the potential to miss eligible applicants.
- Upon receipt of completed applications, a time-consuming process of data entry into aging and unstable disparate databases was required. This was followed by the preparation of document copies for review with additional manual processes to confirm eligibility, correct application errors, and obtain clarification when necessary. This paper-laden process resulted in extra handling time, misplaced documents on occasion, and costly document storage requirements.
- Customer service was limited to business hours and application timelines were largely driven by the U.S. Postal Service delivery schedule.
- Finally, the cumbersome process and lack of a single system database made tracking applications, running ad hoc queries, performing program analytics and satisfying federal reporting requirements very difficult and time-consuming.

Through Egrants, both PCCD and WI-OJA have succeeded in: 1) increasing transparency and accountability in how and to whom grants are awarded, 2) improving communication between granting agencies and potential applicants and grant recipients, 3) streamlining the grant process to make it easier for applicants to find grant opportunities and make application easier through a web-based system, 4) implementing more efficient business workflow through the elimination of multiple and redundant manual processes and error-prone data entry requirements, and 5) developing flexible and customizable ad hoc data reporting tools to satisfy state and federal oversight requirements.

“Having used the old OJA systems....I absolutely loved this new system...great job!”

*City of Madison,
Wisconsin
Police Dept.*

4. Specific Activities in Chronological Order

Initial steps by PCCD included a comprehensive assessment of existing grant processes and development of business requirements for a web-based system. Using federal Byrne/JAG grant funds, PCCD contracted with an IT firm to develop the system with the caveat that the source code could be shared with other government entities. The system was implemented in 2004. Because PCCD did not have technology resources in the agency, a local IT firm was contracted to perform ongoing system maintenance and program enhancements.

In early 2004, strategic planning at Wisconsin OJA resulted in the identification of a critical need for an electronic grants processing system. Existing databases were unstable and unable to perform analytic functions to satisfy emerging grant reporting requirements. In addition, WI-OJA became responsible for administering federal homeland security funds in addition to traditional criminal justice grants. The disparate databases limited OJA's ability to leverage these grant funds in more effective and creative ways.

A 2004 report by the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA) listed six grants management systems available for sharing between states. After extensive review of the systems available, WI-OJA determined that similarities between Pennsylvania's technical platform and grant administrative processes and those in Wisconsin made the PCCD Egrants system our best choice.

Wisconsin negotiations for use of the system and source code with PCCD and its IT vendor were completed. WI-OJA contracted with the PCCD IT vendor to make code modifications to satisfy state statutory requirements and customize the system to reflect the Wisconsin OJA brand.

5. Why is the Program a New and Creative Approach?

The idea of reusable technology or sharing existing IT strategies is underutilized in state governments. Rather than creating a new and expensive grants management system, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania worked collaboratively to leverage federal funds and local expertise to successfully share and manage a single web-based solution. Collaboration between the states included independent development of system enhancements and shared implementation within the source code, saving taxpayers money and accelerating improved system enhancements for Egrants users.

6. What Were the Program's Start-Up Costs?

PCCD contributed \$534,000 of state funds for a contract firm to conduct a needs assessment and develop business requirements. Approximately \$3.9 million of federal Byrne Memorial Funds received from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) dollars was used for system development and implementation.

WI-OJA start-up cost was \$196,055. OJA contracted with the same contract IT firm that was managing PCCD's source code and performing system maintenance and enhancements. The contractor served as middle agent between WI-OJA and PCCD, providing both agencies with updates to source code. The contractor also provided training to OJA staff and project management assistance including data table population and build-out of a new module specifically for Wisconsin Homeland Security subgrantees.

In 2008, Wisconsin obtained the source code from the third-party vendor and contracted with a local IT firm to decrease maintenance costs and focus more on enhancements

desired by Wisconsin users. Active communication between Egrants states continues on a regular basis and source code on system enhancements is still freely exchanged.

7. What are the Program's Annual Operational Costs?

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Annual Costs</u>	<u>Positions</u>
PCCD	\$250,000	1.5 FTE
OJA	\$117,000	1.0 (IT contractor) + .25 FTE for help desk, user manual update, contacts mgmt

8. How is the Program Funded?

PCCD uses Byrne/JAG funds. OJA ongoing costs are shared across funds from the federal programs administered.

9. Legislation, Executive Order or Regulations Required?

No.

10. What Equipment, Technology and Software are Used to Operate And Administer this Program?

Egrants is a web based application requiring only an internet browser for user access. It runs on a Microsoft server using ASP.NET and Visual Basic.net. The database is Microsoft SQL Server. Vendor information is pulled in from other state systems. New development is done with MS Visual Studio and SQL Server enterprise manager. WI-OJA uses MS SQL Reporting Services and PCCD uses Crystal Reports.

11. Did This Program Originate In Your State?

Yes. The Egrants system originated at the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Wisconsin became a secondary user and added enhancements that were then shared with Pennsylvania and others currently using the system. In compliance with its Byrne/JAG funding agreement with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, PCCD has freely shared the software and its expertise with Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey and the District of Columbia. Additional states such as Colorado, Indiana, Maine, Minnesota and Rhode Island have inquired about the system and may decide to implement the system.

12. Aware of Similar Programs In Other States?

No. Egrants is a comprehensive grants management system providing a cradle to grave solution for announcing, tracking, processing, and reporting grant activity. At the time PCCD began developing its business requirements, no other state had a similar solution. Since the development of Egrants, other states have developed web-based systems but we believe no others are as comprehensive.

13. Has the Program Been Fully Implemented?

Yes. PCCD went live with the system during September 2004 and WI-OJA during March 2006. While both states continue to add enhanced features and streamline the grants process, the essential program is now stable.

“Your grant process gets easier each time I do it.”

*Chippewa Falls,
Wisconsin
Police Dept.*

“Each time we got into the grant it got easier to find things.”

*Exec. Director
St Martin Center
Erie, PA.*

In Wisconsin, the Egrants system is currently being evaluated as an enterprise-wide grants management solution. The state's Department of Commerce has already adopted the system and that installation went live on March 25, 2009. The Wisconsin Department of Administration is considering the use of Egrants to manage federal funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and comply with the related transparency and accountability requirements.

14. Evaluate Program Effectiveness Addressing Defined Problems

a. Increased transparency and accountability with the use of flexible data collection and reporting tools

- Egrants allows for improved monitoring and reporting capabilities. It provides notifications of delinquent and submitted reports, thus requiring staff to no longer manually track reporting requirements.
- Egrants contains libraries of performance measures that are easily selected as criteria for subgrantees to report on. At the time the funding announcement is set up the reporting requirements and reporting frequency are established. The libraries contain list of items that can be selected as measures for a programs success. Targets can be set when the application is completed and reported against as progress throughout the project period.
- The Egrants inventory tool tracks every piece of equipment that is awarded out for the Homeland Security Grant Program. We collect the location of the equipment, the discipline, acquisition date, cost, description and serial numbers.
- The system offers the ability to generate commonly used documents and reports. This data has allows the response to data requests to be filled in minimal time.

b. Improve communication between granting agencies and potential applicants and grant recipients.

- Egrants sends a friendly reminder e-mail to grantees two weeks before their program or fiscal reports are due and again when these reports are past due. When reviewing an application, if content clarification is needed, the questionable piece of the application can be sent back to the applicant through Egrants for modification. The system tracks key dates and information related to the process.
- If a subgrantee would like to modify their existing grant/contract they can do this within the system by requesting a "modification". This modification comes into Egrants like an application and goes through the same approval process. Prior to Egrants there were opportunities for communication errors. Frequently a modification request came into one staff that approved the subgrantee request but forgot to tell others, therefore, a formal contract change was not done.
- Subgrantees are able to see the status of their submitted application identifying whether it is under review, awarded or returned. They can also look in the system to see program and fiscal reports that have been submitted along with fiscal balances and payments made. Equipment grants require an inventory report upon closeout. This inventory report is available for future use by the awarding agency and by the subgrantees through the system.

“I found the Egrants system to be extremely user-friendly... provides greater structure in preparing our thoughts/outline for the grant project.”

*Director of
Community Prevention
Services,
Family Service
Montgomery County,
Eagleville, PA*

- The Work Manager capabilities allow the awarding agency staff to instantly alert external users that a new task/alert needs their review, minimizing phone calls and allowing for prompt responses to issues. Also, all information is located in one place and all staff that need access to this information can access it.
- c. Streamlined the grant process to make it easier for applicants to find grant opportunities and make application easier through a web-based system.
- Applicants are keying their application right into Egrants creating a single point of data entry. Prior to Egrants was receiving paper applications and information was manually keyed into other systems.
 - Having program reports submitted electronically allows for data extractions. Prior to Egrants Program Reports came in paper format through the mail. The information could not be extracted unless keyed into a database. The paper reports were retained in the subgrant file. Staff manually went through paper records when data was needed. Egrants provides staff with the ability to research program effectiveness with an automated report that extracts all of this information in seconds.
 - Prior to Egrants OJA had a fiscal database used only by fiscal staff and the remainder of items in the subgrantee file. Our agency benefits from having so much information available for everyone in the agency. No longer do you have to approach fiscal staff to find out information such as program balances or subgrantee activity.
 - Egrants offers several benefits to grant recipients including instant access to current grant information. Egrants provides subgrantees the ability to check on the status of their grant application and payment information at anytime from any web accessible location, removing the previous need to contact a member of staff during normal office hours.
 - Egrants offers simplification of the grant process, including paper reduction. Prior to Egrants, the applicants provided multiple copies of the documents for submission. Information is now stored electronically, eliminating the multiple copies requirement. It allows for cost savings, one-time data entry and error checking. Information about the user, contacts, and the agency is entered only once and is retained for future applications.

“The Egrants experience was not too complicated and there was help if I had questions. The printed material was also a great help.”

*Exec. Director,
Community
Prevention
Partnership of
Berks County,
Reading, PA*

d. Enhance business process workflow

- Payments to grant recipients via Egrants are processed in real time through an interface with the Commonwealth’s accounting system (SAP), allowing grant recipients to received funding in a timelier manner. OJA interface to the Wismart Accounting System is a future enhancement and will also remove duplication of data entry and faster payment processing as well as decrease the likelihood of data entry errors.
- The system has allowed a consistent process to be put in place across all program areas for soliciting grant applications. Egrants now is the central records retention tool for details about each funding round. It has an on-line staff analysis which keeps record of staff application review notes and approval or denial and key dates.

“For the record, I Love this Egrants System.”

*Bray Center
Racine,
Wisconsin*

- All contact lists are managed within the system, kept up to date, and available for all to use at any time for e-mail addresses or mailing labels. Previously this process was decentralized creating duplicate effort.
- Egrants allows copying a prior year’s funding announcement with only minor changes for key dates and dollar amounts when the same funding announcement is used each year.
- Egrants includes a work manager that moves a document through the office to points where actions are needed. The person responsible for the action receives a task notice in their work manager for functions like reviewing an application or approving a program report and there it will sit until they do the function and mark it complete.
- Within Egrants there is a location for issues and comments to be entered that is a communication tool for comments to be entered throughout the agency regarding a subgrantee.
- Subgrantees have the ability to enter their financial report information directly into Egrants to request reimbursement for expenditures. OJA will convert to this functionality away from paper financial reports in the near future.
- Within Egrants are controls that prevent overspending of grants, enforcement of due dates and separation of duties through designated system roles. When an application is submitted the system assigns sequential number to it so that we are always aware of what applications are in process. Prior to Egrants there were no system entries for applications until the decision was made to fund the application. This process allowed errors to be made when determining available program balances.

15. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The base functionality has remained the same with minor enhancements to make the process more user friendly to our external customers. We have put in place help desk staff and a process to respond to customers. Time has been spent creating manuals for applicants and internal staff. On-line help features for our system users have been populated. Egrants has forced a standard grants management process that works for all programs that use the system.

16. Limitations/Obstacles for Adopting?

System operations and trouble-shooting does require some level of IT support. Transitioning to a web-based/electronic system from a primarily paper-based process was a challenge for some long-term employees. Younger employees with more computer experience and comfort using web-based applications easily transitioned and embraced the new method. Customers required some initial training and we did establish a help desk using existing staff resources and a simple over-the-counter help desk software program.