

# CARES ACT GRANT MANAGEMENT



## THE PROGRAM MANAGER'S ROADMAP FOR SUCCESS

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) is the largest economic recovery package ever enacted by the United States federal government. With so many suffering from the repercussions of the pandemic, recovery depends on aid dollars reaching the economy as quickly as possible. This puts federal program managers like you under immense pressure. We put this guide together to help you navigate the challenges of the CARES Act and help you make a positive impact on the stakeholders that your programs serve.

### This guide will help you...

- Get the help you need to design your program quickly and effectively
- Create mechanisms for meaningful impact measurement from the very beginning
- Navigate the increased scrutiny of today's climate from your IG (Inspector General), GAO (Government Accountability Office), and/or Congress
- Avoid common pitfalls of grant management
- Award funds in a timely, efficient manner and start making a difference



## WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

### Successful Awards

- Fulfill project and program objectives
- Fund projects with impact
- Achieve the desired outcome for beneficiaries
- Engage with awardees ready to execute their projects
- Establish metrics that demonstrate progress toward program objectives

### Successful Programs

- Fulfill awards on time
- Develop review criteria that will implement your program objectives
- Reflect your success definition
- Meet all legislative and regulatory requirements
- Measure the impact of awards

**Success requires asking the right questions and answering them with data. Corner Alliance helps you streamline the entire grant management process.**

At Corner Alliance, our focus is helping grant managers design and execute programs that create the maximum demonstrable impact on the stakeholders that grant funds are intended to support. Under tight time constraints with limited staff resources, an experienced contractor partner like us can help you fill the gaps to set your program up for success.



# STEP 1

## INITIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH

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### **Common Mistake:**

*Unclear and insufficient timelines*

Almost every grant program starts with optimistic timelines. We all think we'll be successful when we start any project. But by locking in unrealistic expectations, program managers are left scrambling to complete phases or having to readjust timelines. As a result, they make mistakes in the Federal Opportunity Announcements and other key documents.

### **Solution:**

*Do Thorough Research and Planning*

Your agency has run grant programs before. Do the research into the timelines and steps required to establish and run those programs and similar ones at other agencies. Use that information as data to establish your timelines. It's easier to push back on unrealistic timelines with data and it is far less costly to do that up front than after the process has started.

### **Questions we help you ask and answer:**

1. Is this a new program or a "plus-up" for an existing program? If it's an existing program, what's changed due to CARES Act legislation?
2. What is the financial assistance authority?
  - Statutory authority for the program
  - Appropriations
  - Financial assistance (usually a delegation within the agency)
3. Who are your grantees?
  - Where are they? What do they do?
  - Review recent award announcements, reports or testimony to quickly gather data
  - Capture the story and the data to create an impactful narrative that will captivate interested parties on the Hill
4. What are your deadlines?
  - You can accomplish a lot by having structured conversations with attorneys, grants officers, and program specialists

# STEP 2

## PRE-AWARD PROGRAM SETUP

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**Common Mistake:**  
*Not setting the right criteria up front*

If you're rushing to get funding out for your program, it can be tempting to take shortcuts on defining award requirements and criteria...only to realize later that you need additional data from grantees. Due to Paperwork Reduction Act reviews, program managers cannot easily adjust requirements. This means that grantees and program managers will have insufficient data to run the program and demonstrate success, or will have to spend a lot of time, effort, and resources retrofitting data.

**Solution:**  
*Spend time establishing criteria and requirements in the beginning*

It's best to work closely with your stakeholder community of grantees and other interested parties to gather information, perspectives, and data from the beginning. Criteria established with input from stakeholders is far more complete and defensible in the long run. If stakeholder outreach isn't possible, there are multiple other methods for gathering existing data available.

Establishing the right program objectives will inform review criteria, award decisions, and the contents of financial assistance applications.

**Questions we help you ask and answer:**

1. What are the objectives of the funds?
2. Does the language specify recipients (e.g. states) or are competitive discretionary awards anticipated?
3. Who are the intended beneficiaries? Think beyond pass-through entities to the ultimate beneficiaries.

**TIP:**

*Gather program feedback from stakeholders that represent the ultimate beneficiaries of your program. Use conference calls to quickly gather input from agency officials, states, localities and other stakeholders.*

# STEP 3

## COMPLETE YOUR FUNDING PACKAGE

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### **Common Mistake:**

*Too many hands in the development and completion process*

The “development by committee” approach is often problematic, especially for lengthy documents that must be legally compliant and aligned with policy. Spending significant time “one-voicing” or resolving document formatting issues due to multiple authors can make this step feel overwhelming.

### **Solution:**

*Assign an owner*

Determine who owns the finished product and stick to it. That person determines what goes in the package and what doesn't, resolves any issues prior to submission, and determines who has access to the document and for what reason. If others are contributing, provide them with clear formatting, style, and definition of terms guidance to reduce the number of fixes required later. When needed, facilitate meetings to review documents and make joint changes to eliminate “in the moment” decision making that may be inconsistent with policy guidance or legal standards.

### **What to do:**

1. Secure the funding commitment from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OFCO)
2. Write the funding announcement
  - The grants office, grants policy office, and attorney are key to this step
3. Spell out the sources for the funding announcement
  - CARES Act
  - Underlying program statutes amended by the CARES Act
  - 2 CFR 200.203 and 2 CFR 200 Appendix I
  - Agency regulations and policies
4. Implement your objectives and definitions of award and project success
  - Make the review criteria correspond to your definition of success and required elements
  - Make the application requirements correspond to and support the review criteria, agency regulations, and 2 CFR 200, Appendix I

### **GOAL:**

*A well-crafted funding announcement that implements the CARES Act, complies with sound grant management practice, and informs applicants and the public about eligibility, timelines, and required application elements.*

# STEP 4

## DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT AND OVERSIGHT

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**Common Mistake:**  
*Underestimating the level of effort required to execute*

Many program managers believe that internal grant functions and existing staff can handle their grant program. In certain cases this can be true, but in our experience working with multiple agencies, we have found that sufficient internal resourcing is rare. In the beginning, the effort seems easy. As programs are implemented, program managers find that their internal resources are busy with other projects and that agency grant functions are slow and focused on only specific parts of the process. In the end, the work ends up falling back on the program manager.

**Solution:**  
*Hire a team*

While it might seem self-serving for us to say this, we're here because agencies and program managers need support from organizations like us. The decision to hire a contractor can give program managers increased flexibility to handle any unforeseen hurdles encountered during program planning and implementation...and can mean the difference between success and failure for the program.

We can help you decide on a staffing plan to navigate the next steps of application processing and collect metrics during every step to assist with data call responses, reporting, and oversight...all within tight CARES Act timelines:

- Application intake
- Application review
- Award decision
- Award negotiation
- Award announcement
- Post-award
- Administer awards
- Close out

# STEP 5

## DEMONSTRATE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

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### **Common Mistake:**

*Lack of outreach about results*

Perception is reality in most cases. Many programs fail to share their results in compelling ways. Simply issuing a report isn't enough to convince anyone of success. Stakeholders need frequent, compelling, and visual proof.

### **Solution:**

*Develop an outreach plan*

Think through a process to share regular results including easily digestible visual assets like infographics. Virtual conferences and webinars are great ways to actively engage stakeholders. These efforts can pay huge dividends for the program.

**We help programs demonstrate their effectiveness to stakeholders and oversight entities through Impact Measurement.**

Programs receiving CARES Act funding are under increased scrutiny, which means you must be able to quantitatively and qualitatively demonstrate your program's value. Corner Alliance uses a proven framework that measures leading indicators and demonstrates true value to stakeholders. We've helped mobilize programs for response and recovery for national crises including 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the Ebola outbreak.

## **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT THROUGH FEDERAL PROGRAM OPTIMIZATION**

At Corner Alliance, we have decades of experience serving federal agencies such as DHS, FEMA, NIH, NIST, NTIA, and FirstNet Authority. Our proven approaches to management processes, performance management, and business strategy are all driven by visible data analytics—resulting in organizational performance and mission success.

# SUCCESS SNAPSHOT:

## R&D IN PUBLIC SAFETY INNOVATION

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Corner Alliance provided program management services for a seven-year, \$300 million federal financial award initiative focused on funding research and development of public safety communication technologies.

### Key Accomplishments to Date

- Successful launch of 7 award competitions
- \$50 million awarded for public safety technology R&D
- Tracked spending and technical documentation for 49+ awards (and counting)
- Created a handbook, training materials, SOPs, forms, and guidance documents for Federal Program Officers (FPOs)
- Prepared our client for and guided them through successful GAO and OIG audits

# LET'S WORK TOGETHER

**TO MAKE YOUR PROGRAM  
A CATALYST FOR IMPACT.**

Contact Corner Alliance today to learn more about making your CARES Act program a success.

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