



GRC

at

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By Richard Wellons

In 2017, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Grants Resource Center (GRC) will mark its 50th year of providing vital information and expertise on external funding to its member colleges and universities. Half a century is a long time for any organization to last, which speaks to the continuing (and growing) relevance of GRC's mission, despite a major evolution within the field of grantmaking over time, and despite the often dramatic shifts in tone and emphasis of federal activity as different presidential administrations have come and gone from power. There have been lean years for federal grants and even threats to dismantle major grantmaking agencies (as during the administration of President Ronald Reagan, who **called** for the abolishment of the U.S. Department of Education—a call recently **echoed** by the current president.) Through it all, GRC has closely followed developments in Washington, D.C., and their effects on federal and private funding. As AASCU institutions prepare for the Trump administration, understanding the new tone and priorities of the federal government will be crucial for state colleges and universities when they are looking for the resources and partnerships needed to fulfill their role as stewards of place within their communities.

GRC began in 1967, not too long after AASCU itself was formed in 1961. Originally known as the Office of Federal Programs (OFP), GRC was created as a service of AASCU (under AASCU President Allan Ostar) to help its member campuses become competitive for the growing opportunities presented by federal grants. By this time, some of the larger research-oriented universities had already set up Washington, D.C., offices and begun to seriously orient their activities

toward federal dollars. Many AASCU members were still in the process of transitioning from teacher training institutions into comprehensive universities. OFP gave these institutions their own Washington office, and thus provided easier access to funding announcements and guidelines as they became available. It also helped them gain the expertise to compete against some of the larger research universities.

When OFP was first formed, there were only a handful of major federal agencies that colleges and universities looked to for federal funding. A key problem was not so much the amount of information but getting access to it. Grant announcements and guidelines were issued on paper. Without a Washington office, it was difficult for many AASCU institutions to get hold of application guidelines and learn about funding opportunities with enough time to act on them. As OFP, GRC maintained an actual library of grant opportunities and had a full-time librarian on staff in charge of maintaining a physical collection of grant announcements, guidelines and samples of funded proposals, and other resources. Guidelines and potential funding opportunities were mailed to campuses (and later, faxed). A card catalogue indexing program deadlines by month was maintained; staff members drew from it to produce the GRC publication *Deadlines*, letting members know what deadlines were coming a few months out. Then as now, GRC staff developed relationships with federal program officers to get an idea of potential programs and guideline changes, even before they were officially announced. Members were kept abreast of new grant competitions through a publication called *Bulletin*. Grant news and trends were mailed to members through GRC's *GrantWeek* publication.

Grants.gov currently **lists** 26 major current federal



From left: AASCU President Allan Ostar with President Lyndon Johnson; OFP Director Jerry Roschwalb with OFP staff; GRC staff circa 2009. Right: GRC staff at 50th anniversary reception, February 2017.

grantmaking agencies, along with over a dozen smaller grantmaking units. And this number does not include major subagencies, such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Institutes of Health and other health stakeholders, through 24 of its 27 institutes. Nowadays, the federal government releases funding opportunities daily at a dizzying rate (even on weekends!) through its three main announcement websites. With grant announcements and guidelines now online, access to funding opportunities and changes in procedures is nearly instantaneous. However, while accessibility increased, so has the amount of information released. The ability to get correct and relevant information to the right person quickly is more important than ever.

The publications developed in the days of OFP are still being sent out today. Their form is different, but the information is still vitally important to GRC member campuses. Each day, GRC staff sort through federal funding announcements, summarizing those that members will want or need to see—saving them from spending valuable hours sifting through federal opportunities to send to their faculty. Twice a week, GRC continues to send out *Bulletin*, with its curated summaries of notable federal funding competitions, changes in guidelines, and meeting announcements. Only now, it arrives instantly on the GRC website and in GRC members' email boxes.

The GRC database of grant opportunities left the shoebox long ago and is now available online to all of GRC members as GrantSearch, allowing members to conduct their own funding searches. The database has also been expanded over the years to include numerous funding opportunities offered by private foundations. Colleges increasingly need to look beyond the federal government for external funding, and this change in scope and evolution in grantmaking was reflected in the renaming of OFP in 1999 as the Grants Resource Center. Members still receive *Deadlines*, with staff checking each entry for accuracy before it goes out, but now individual faculty can also sign up to receive targeted versions of the publication, specifically geared to their research interests, through GRC's Faculty Alert System. Though the physical library is gone, it lives on as the recently updated [GRC website](#), which houses GRC's GrantSearch database, new and archived editions of

GRC publications, sample funded proposals, sample research office policies and regulations, and archived webinars and conference sessions. Now, the entire library of resources and publications is searchable by members and tagged by keywords and subjects.

Through the years, GRC membership has expanded to include private colleges and universities facing many of the same external funding needs as AASCU members. Since its founding, though, the mission has remained the same: to provide funding information and expertise. While the format and accessibility of the information has changed, the funding information is still as important, if not more, than it was 50 years ago. The same goes for the second part of GRC's mission—providing members with guidance and expertise to help them become more competitive in winning grants. GRC continues to visit member campuses to conduct grants workshops and funding overviews with faculty and administrators. It still conducts funding searches for members to find the resources needed for faculty research and campus initiatives.

GRC also attends federal meetings in person (and now, virtually) to get the latest funding information and ask questions on behalf of members. Accordingly, when member campus groups come to Washington, D.C., GRC arranges face-to-face meetings with federal representatives. Staff continue to reach out to federal and foundation program officers to get the latest on funding announcements and guidelines. GRC conferences, organized for members in Washington, D.C., since the office's earliest days, still provide the best opportunity for members to hear directly from federal agencies and foundations, and to meet one-on-one with program officers. An advisory board drawn from membership continues to guide GRC activities and ensures that member needs are being met. In short, after 50 years, GRC is still its members' "Washington office."

For information on how your institution can become a member of GRC, contact Interim Executive Director Erika Thompson at thompsons@aaascu.org or (202) 478-4713. **P**

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