

Grants.gov - Equity User Experience

Topline Memo

Updated: May 26, 2023

Overview

Since January 25, 2023, Huge has conducted in-depth one-on-one interviews with applicants and grantors to understand the end user experience of Grants.gov. With the aim of creating a more equitable Grants.gov, Huge explored key barriers for underserved and first-time applicants, and identified areas for improvement along the grantor and applicant user journeys. Focusing specifically on *Find* and *Apply* functions, Huge examined the role of Grants.gov in the broader grant opportunity ecosystem and examined specific pain points that hinder the grant seeking process for end users.

The results of these findings will be incorporated in the Phase II Vision presentation, which will feature user archetypes and a strategic vision for a more equitable Grants.gov. The purpose of this document is to serve as a topline preview of grantor and applicant insights as the Huge team continues to synthesize research findings and inform the overall vision.

Research Objectives

1. **Exploration of the role of Grants.gov in the broader ecosystem:** Examine existing user behaviors in the grant seeker's and grantor's journey, identifying where Grants.gov fits in their overall approach and what role it provides in relation to other systems.
2. **Evaluation of semi-structured Grants.gov experience:** Investigate participants' experience, including their organic user journeys based on their role, features of Grants.gov that stand out, and any challenges they have with the interaction along the way.
3. **Evaluation of specific task completion:** Observe participants' pain points and delights while they attempt to complete specific journeys related to their roles in posting, finding, and applying to grants, and their ability to complete related tasks.
4. **Exploration of opportunities for an equitable experience:** Identify key barriers to and areas of opportunity where grants.gov can help increase applications for underserved communities.

Methodology

- Method: Moderated in-depth interviews
- LOI: 60-75 minutes
- Platform: Google Meet
- Audience:

- n=12 Grantors
- n=38 Applicants (26% First Time Applicants, 39% Casual/Occasional Applicants, 34% Serial/Frequent Applicants)
- Field Dates - 1/25/2023 - 3/3/2023
- Extended Research - 4/15/2023 - 5/23/2023
 - n= 6 Applicants (2 HBCUs, 2 Disability Organizations, 2 LGBTQ+ Organizations)

Findings - Applicants

Hearing about an opportunity:

- **Applicants rely on interpersonal networks to identify funding opportunities, but those who are new to the field or lack dedicated staff are missing out.** Users are often forwarded funding opportunities from those in their professional networks, including colleagues, neighboring community organizations, previous funders/grant managers, and peer organizations. Applicants who are low on staffing at their organization, or have not yet established relationships with these types of connecting agents may be missing this key point of access.

“So you kind of build those relationships and friendships. It's easy to just say, ‘Hey, are you applying for this? Okay, We were looking at that.’ [...] We have a monthly call. There's five different entities in our community that are part of this. And we kind of all went in together and said, ‘We want to make sure we're not leaving money on the table.’”
- Occasional Applicant, Local Government

“Constantly people are like, ‘well, are you going for blankety-blank?’ And I had no idea it was there. When you're a smaller organization serving an underserved population, you do not have a grant writer. I run a 15 person organization, but I write our grants. We don't have someone pouring through things and systematically looking at all the potential different options for me.” Frequent Applicant, Small NPO

- **High turnover is a key barrier, particularly at nonprofit and tribal organizations.** Familiarity with the site, experience in grant application processes, and established working relationships with partner and grantmaking organizations support applicants' confidence and comfort throughout the process. High turnover at organizations means that Grants.gov knowledge may leave with the individual, dramatically inhibiting underserved organizations' ability to leverage this institutional knowledge.

“There's only 10 of us. So it took two of us [to apply]. Then we had experienced some turnover at the same time so I was just like, ‘Wow!’, so it's just a lot of hours to do it. And there's so much anxiety about, ‘Did we get everything that was asked for?’ Because

there's so many parts, and some of the parts apply to us, and some of them don't, and it's confusing." - Occasional Applicant, Tribal Organization

- **Alerts and subscription features are unclear to both new and repeat users.** New applicants want to be notified about new funding opportunities, but they are often unsure how to sign up for alerts or subscribe to change notifications for specific NOFOs on the site. Some crave a calendar view of opportunity posts and deadlines to support preparation. Repeat applicants report frustration with not being notified about Forecasts to apply again for an award they've received in the past and depend on, and having additional trouble finding it because of an Opportunity Title change.

"I didn't understand the [subscribe button]. I just thought it was like another listserv I was subscribing to, versus it was going to give me alerts about this particular grant." - First Time Applicant, Local Government

"We've run exactly one award for over fifteen years; it comes out in five year increments. So there's eight different organizations watching this award and we got a hold of our project officer this year and were like, 'We just wanted to check in to see if there was anything. Holding up the potential next announcement, we're checking that in advance just to make sure that there's not some massive interruption because it impacts our staff.' And the project officer got back to us and says, 'Oh, didn't you see the Forecast has already been out on Grants.gov for a month and a half.' And we're like, 'What? Where?'" Frequent Applicant, LGBTQ+ NPO

- **Nuances between multiple types of government funding cause confusion.** Users may end up on Grants.gov because they hear about general government funds, but eligibility, types of funds and the requirements needed to apply for grants are not immediately discoverable or clear.

"I can see that I'm eligible because I'm a government or because I'm a nonprofit or whatever. But I think like the actual requirements, I think the requirements would be more helpful. What they're actually looking for." - Frequent Applicant, State Government

Searching for an opportunity:

- **Most applicants don't know what to search for.** The most successful searches come from applicants who are able to input an exact title or opportunity number after hearing of a specific grant from agencies' promotional work, listservs, or word of mouth. Newer applicants are more likely to use and face challenges with the keyword search function, which can generate thousands of results and overwhelm the applicant to the point where they may abandon their task.

"What I've heard is, it's the wild Wild West out there for finding grants." - First Time Applicant, Local Government

"A lot of the time it's just a Google search, right? So it's like, 'Outdoor ed facilities grant,' which don't exist. But, you know, so you just start typing and looking for these things and that can be really difficult. My favorite way to find [grants] is automated emails from subscriptions that I've subscribed to, or when other organizations are like, 'Hey, we can't do anything with this grant right now, but you might be able to.'" I would say I don't spend that much time searching just blindly for grants." - Occasional Applicant, Small NPO

"For us to be on top of things, we [the deaf, blind, and hard of hearing applicants] would have to be very literate, on the computer all of the time, we would have to put more time into searching for opportunities all the time to try and make up for incidental knowledge that gets passed around us." - Frequent Applicant, DSI University

- For first-time applicants, lack of clarity about agency acronyms and insider terminology are key barriers to conducting a comprehensive, successful search.** Lesser-experienced applicants do not understand the purpose or meaning of a CFDA, Opportunity Number and most agency acronyms. Many find that Category filters do not accurately reflect their needs, which might lead to misguided or missed Opportunities. Additionally, most cannot tell the difference between "Forecasted" and "Posted," and many are confused by the differences between Funding Instrument Types. Applicants need guidance on site vocabulary through the search experience, and there is no support in languages other than English.

"So the agency—I mean, there's so many agencies, right? But if I go to Health and Human Services, these are really high level agencies. So NIH has what, a dozen sub institutes, so you can't sort by that. You can't even make these boxes any bigger. Yeah, I've never used these categories. I guess if you do that, it maybe narrows it down." - Frequent Applicant, Small Business

Sometimes I definitely hit a little point of frustration when I'm not finding things that are specific enough, or too specific. We have PIs that are doing very specific research, so they need those details, and then, some of our younger PIs have these big ideas and I feel like I have to narrow it down for them because the agencies are so specific on what you can do with the funding and where you can spend it and the aim of even the project you might have. - Frequent Applicant, HBCU

- Lack of geographic filters contributes to search result confusion.** US-based applicants express frustration when their result list is cluttered with irrelevant foreign aid grants. Eligibility may exclude certain states from applying and can only be found after reviewing the Synopsis.

"Are there any? Geographical restrictions, you know. So while people think Virginia's Virginia is Virginia and Alexandria is Alexandria, Alexandria actually coexists in two

different jurisdictions. So you know, those types of things, I'm constantly looking at." - First Time Applicant, Local Government

- **Applicants need the ability to match and browse grants with the profile of their organization.** Applicants expressed a desire to reverse the search process, by inputting their organization's details and objectives in order for Grants.gov to match them with relevant grants. They crave more of a browsing experience, but the current site favors applicants who know exactly what they're looking for.

"I've never found a grant through Grants.gov because there are too many. It would be like you're looking for a job so you just walk around town hoping you find one. You have to be more strategic." - Frequent Applicant, Tribal Organization

- **There is a broad desire to see more useful information in search results.** Applicants want to see more detailed descriptions of funding opportunities in the search results, including program eligibility, funding match requirements, and other technical implementation considerations. Elevating this information to the search results page will allow applicants to quickly scan for eligibility, target populations and feasibility before selecting an opportunity to read the more in-depth description.

"[Search] is something that you literally have to go through, and then you may have to open it [the opportunity] up. And a lot of times I've seen a lot of these awards for Tribal Nations. [...] So now when I'm looking at it just makes me kind of crazy because I'm like, I can't go through all of these results." - First Time Applicant, Small NPO

Applying to an opportunity:

- **Applicants often feel inconclusive about eligibility after reading the Synopsis.** The "Additional Information on Eligibility" section can be confusing to applicants due to the amount of information that is crammed into a block text. Often, Disability Specific Institutions (DSI) are missing from the list of eligible or targeted University types. Additionally, applicants are looking to quickly find key details such as match requirements to decide if they should move forward with evaluating the Opportunity.

"Obviously I'm looking for keywords about violence prevention. But you know, how do we break it down even more to know that all the violence prevention ones that I'm looking at are going to be a viable option for us?" - First Time Applicant, Local Government

- **New applicants are unaware of the value of contacting a program officer.** Applicants who are familiar with the grantmaking process and have direct points of contact with grantmaking agencies, TA centers or program managers are often able to gain clarity for specific NOFO requirements through direct outreach to those grantors. This may put new applicants, or those without established grantor-grantee relationships

and institutional knowledge, at a disadvantage in the application process, resulting in inequitable distribution of information. Furthermore, the chain of communication when it comes to asking questions is unclear: new applicants are confused about which questions are best for a program officer or the grants.gov help desk.

“Often it looks like reaching out to the program manager and telling them about my work, and then having them tell me whether or not it's the right fit. Those people are super helpful—like no harm to them, but if there was a way to streamline that process, it would be good. I'm privileged in a number of ways. Some people just wouldn't feel comfortable reaching out to a federal grant program manager.” - First Time Applicant, University

- **Tabs on the View Opportunity page are confusing to applicants.** Applicants tend to skip over The Version History tab, which feels irrelevant, but when they do scan it, they are overwhelmed by the list of links and dates. Additionally, the difference between Related Documents and Package is unclear to applicants. When key Opportunity documents are buried in the third or fourth tab, it's easy for newer applicants to underestimate their importance.

“Version history—is that something that's really necessary? You know, when we have the synopsis, if it changes or this updates—I don't know if that's really necessary towards completing the application.” - Occasional Applicant, Small NPO

- **Applicants are overwhelmed by the Full Announcement and have difficulty navigating requirements.** Full Announcement documents are often upwards of 30 pages long, inundating applicants with information and placing an unfair burden of competence on the reader. Applicants report having difficulty comprehending and prioritizing requirements, and often give up before they're able to conclude if the opportunity is right for them. Some are heavily relying on Ctrl+F and Table of Contents to access what they need. Many expressed a desire for simple checklist format and visualization techniques to help them digest the Announcement information.

“Some NOFOs read like a magazine article - clean, clear. [...] For others, it's just like 'here you go.' Sometimes it's bold, sometimes it's not. There's something very important on the bottom of page five.” - Frequent Applicant, Tribal Organization

“It's 26 pages, so what I do sometimes is “Find Text” the document to see if they're talking about juveniles. I think some of this document is redundant...a lot of this doesn't even matter. They got some notes here about administratively how the federal government is doing their part. I'm sure they don't have to cover that here, you know? But because they're the federal government agency, they make sure they cover all bases.” - Frequent Applicant, State Government

- **Various registration, login, and role setting requirements stand as a key barrier for collaborative teams and rural organizations who lack reliable internet access.**

Applicants are missing the message that registering in SAM and having a UEI is different. SAM registration is difficult for new and occasional applicants, who have trouble finding a way to quickly validate if they're already registered for SAM.gov. Applicants wonder why the "Apply" button is gray and lack understanding that there is misalignment with their UEI number. Some applicants are deterred by the two-factor authentication required for Login.gov, and assume it is for government workers only. The two-factor process is a particular barrier for rural organizations, who may have to leave their workplace to get cellphone reception. Additionally, we know that partnerships are key to successful applications for many organizations/sectors. Rather than supporting this collaboration, Workspace often creates additional complications. Difficulty coordinating account access across multiple partners and the need for many new applicants to take on the role of managing a new system may unintentionally increase the level of effort required by first time applicants.

"Now it's going to tell me to send a code. So this is a big hassle for us because it goes to my cell phone. We don't have an office phone because it's 2023. So it goes to my cell phone, which means that if any of our remote employees want to get into work on an application, I have to be here with my phone and they have to get the code for me." - Frequent Applicant, Small Business

- **Rural and remote organizations who lack a physical address have experienced significant difficulty obtaining a UEI.** Organizations in rural areas or on tribal land may not have a recognizable USPS address and therefore have to rely on a PO Box. Due to pandemic-related shifts to remote working, many nonprofit organizations have closed their offices and are relying on a proxy address or PO Box as well. Organizations in these circumstances are simply unable to obtain a UEI number without a unique physical address. Applicants report that it took weeks to months to identify with Grants.gov and SAM.gov that this was the root of their problem.

"Our SAM registration was coming to expire, and about two months beforehand we started the process of renewal and we were absolutely foiled for so many months that it officially did expire. At that point we were paying a consultant weeks of their time and ended up hiring a company that makes you pay in advance to troubleshoot SAM registration. The company couldn't figure it out either. We would be on these endless phone calls, waiting for someone to answer with the feds. They would open a help ticket and then a day later, we would get news that it had been closed with no resolution, and then we were right back to ground zero. We were literally at the point of going to our Senator because we were technically out of compliance and at risk losing our current federal funding...It ended up being that we had closed our office and moved to a full virtual office. So we used a proxy address because we're all working from our houses and they don't allow that, but that was nowhere in their information." - Occasional Applicant, Small Nonprofit

- **There are efficiencies to be gained for reapplications by prepopulating with past information based on UEIs or previous applications.** Users who have previously submitted an application appreciate the ability to track and monitor active applications, as well as view those submitted in the past. However, the need to enter their organization information each time is a point of frustration for many applicants. Given that users have to be logged in to view, track, or access current and past applications, users expect their information to be pre-populated within the authenticated sections of the website. Pre-populated information may also be beneficial for sections of standard forms that are accessed from Grants.gov—including SF-424—which require information that may be matched to the authenticated user account and NOFO.

“The extent to which we can make sure that as much data is pre-populating in those forms as possible so that people don’t have to reenter things because so much is tied to their UEI and their accounts. We know who they are as an organization, we probably know their address... so if there are ways to sort of pre-populate more forms, but then also walk people through how to use the forms, especially the budget one, would be super helpful for our applicants.” - Grantor, NEH

- **Most applicants are unaware of what Workspace is and use their own software and tools to draft and collaborate on grants due to challenges with collaboration and training.** Permission issues and system instability are a key barrier to Workspace engagement, so many applicants still rely on programs like Google Drive and Microsoft Drive/Teams to draft the bulk of their applications. Applicants report having issues with approvals and accidentally submitting in Workspace. Applicants are overwhelmed by the amount of Workspace training information and find it to be too time consuming to engage with. The Basic, Intermediate and Advanced Workspace approach modules confuse applicants and the structure suggests that they may have to pay for the service.

“I had to look through all the videos, “Workspace this and that” and the CEO had to give me permission. There are a lot of permissions I have to go through for me to actually be the person who was working on the grant. We have to go through her executive assistant who knows computer work more than my CEO does. So it took about two weeks to figure out the whole application.” - Nurse, Tribal Organization

- **Applicants who have applied for more than one grant mention that they attend webinars to truly understand the scope of the NOFO.** Beyond the synopsis and the application package, applicants find that listening to grantors in webinars helps clarify the actual scope of work and qualifications in layman’s terms. However, some applicants find that webinars are not enough because they don’t allow for actual dialogue, and sometimes feel like a “PowerPoint” of the full announcement. Underserved organizations crave new applicant orientations, and periodical Grants.gov training in order to feel more confident and comfortable with the site.

"The webinars seem to me like they're just somebody reading out loud. The notice of funding opportunities, only with a PowerPoint. There is no information in the webinars that's not also in the writing, and they don't take questions." - Occasional Applicant, Tribal Organization

"I think it would be beneficial to new users to maybe have an orientation required in order to provide guidance that you are going to need to know in the future. If there's an orientation that you should put the new grant administrators, grant writers, grant managers through so that they're not having to search around for things on their own. - New Applicant, HBCU

- **Newer applicants are often unaware of the amount of preparation required for applications and need guidance to meet deadlines and expectations.** Underserved applicants report a lack of time and resources to prepare, often resulting in a stressful last-minute submission. Tribal Organizations report that the need for Tribal Council to review and sign off for applicants is a barrier to meeting timeline requirements. Many feel like the opportunity announcement does a poor job clearly warning them of the workload necessary for application requirements. Additionally, applicants are unaware of the work required *if* they are awarded the grant - and may not have the capacity to manage it.

"It says it should only take you an hour. Yes, maybe to fill out the form—but I spent four months straight writing this application. Don't insult me with 'this takes an hour.'" - Frequent Applicant, Small Business

- **Applicants are seeking clearer information from Grants.gov to understand if they have the capacity to manage an award if they win one.** The stakes are higher for new and under-resourced applicants, who need adequate warning about the organizational capacity necessary to receive and manage an award. Burdensome reporting requirements can hamper an organization's grant performance, which many fear will damage their reputation in the federal funding space.

"I think that very often when new opportunities arise, it's like, 'Is it funding something that we're already doing? Or is this adding new work? Are the grant requirements so onerous that it makes the application process just not even worth it for us?' Which has definitely been true in the past." - Frequent Applicant, Small LGBTQ+ NPO

- **Applicants are confused by the duplicative efforts for application required by certain agencies.** Inexperienced applicants do not see platforms like Grant Solutions or JustGrants as separate systems, and report having to duplicate their efforts in order to apply for the same grant.

"This is step one. You have to go to Grants.gov. And then step two, I guess a week later, you go to JustGrants. I've been on calls for some – some other grantees have missed a deadline because of the confusion with the dates." - Frequent Applicant, State Government

Findings - Grantor

Planning an opportunity:

- **Agencies with inconsistent appropriations and priorities report having trouble with Forecasting.** Grantors are hesitant to publish Forecasts due to continually changing mandates and a fear of overpromising or misleading candidates. Grantors expressed a desire to disclose which details in their Forecasts are "likely" or "under review" for a more accurate published projection. Additionally, review chains for NOFOs can be lengthy, which may shorten the forecasting window.

"We've heard from local governments, and smaller organizations, that they would really love to know when the opportunities are coming, and to know a little bit of information about them so that they can start preparing...EPA does not participate in forecasting for a couple of reasons...EPA is a highly politicized agency, so we don't have a lot of control sometimes over what the priorities are going to be. My concern as a competition advocate is a program saying 'Hey in six months, we think we're gonna put out the solicitation, Here's some basic information. It's going to focus on x, y and z', and then applicants start to form partnerships to try to figure out a plan. And then we are told our priorities have to change and when the funding opportunities come out it's completely different. I don't want applicants to be spending valuable resources preparing for something that is not actually right." - Acting Senior Associate Director for Grants Competition, EPA

- **Borrowing language is key to drafting a NOFO; grantors often use Search as a historical repository.** Grantors use Search to browse and repurpose language from other opportunities within and outside of their agency. This may contribute to the proliferation of results for applicants' keyword searches.

"I'll do a search if I'm curious what other agencies are doing, like, 'Oh I know this program at some other agency is similar in some ways to something we're doing. How did they describe this?'" - Chief Funding Opportunity Officer, NEH

Announcing an opportunity:

- **Grantors want to make sure language is consistent and links are maintained between systems, but encounter content limitations and formatting issues with NOFO posts on Grants.gov.** Grantors express frustration with the limitations of NOFO

Synopsis form fields, which don't fully capture or align with their agency's agenda, and end up backloading critical information in the Full Announcement document, which can be easily missed by applicants. Many grantors don't find the prepopulated Eligibility options to be precise enough, so they resort to including more detail in the Additional Information on Eligibility section, which can result in visual acuity barriers for applicants. Some grantors create fillable PDF forms for their applicants, but Grants.gov sometimes collapses information from the table.

"For every single opportunity posted on Grants.gov, we select 'Other' for eligible applicants because the options we have, do not clearly track with what our statute allows and...we don't want to give misinformation." - Acting Senior Associate Director for Grants Competition, EPA

"All we have is the Synopsis, these are the form fields that we're able to fill out, and we're not able to really put any helpful information in here, so we gotta go to the PDF... There's a requirement to have an award ceiling and an award floor, and sometimes that's tricky for us, and really not applicable, especially when within the NOFO, we're funding multiple kinds of things that each have different awards, ceilings and award floors. So this has always actually been a challenge, because sometimes we just have to make it up... we just pick one of the programs within the NOFO, and we use that highest award ceiling, but an applicant that doesn't actually read, which is many of them unfortunately, they will see this, and they'll say, okay, I'm going to ask for \$6 million, but they really can't get \$6 million, because that's not the program they applied for. But we have no way of documenting that." Team Lead, RNTA, EDA

- **Grantors are afraid of updating/modifying opportunities in fear of triggering a system error that cannot be undone.** Grantors are reluctant to make changes to opportunities because the stakes feel too high - they are afraid of causing errors that will fire across systems. In general, Grantors lack clarity about overrides and versioning, and don't necessarily trust the system to implement changes without negative consequences.

"I would like a simple inquire function because I don't want to hit modify every time, it makes me nervous." - Grantor, Department of Education

Supporting applicants:

- **Due to Grants.gov's barriers, agencies are developing workarounds.** Grants.gov makes it so prohibitive for applicants with connectivity or language barriers to apply, that agencies, such as USAID, have resorted to allowing applicants to apply via email and the EDA is working on releasing its own applicant portal to circumvent Grants.gov.

"We will still post our NOFOs on Grants.gov because that's a Federal requirement. But the actual applications won't go through Grants.gov. ...we'll have a "go here to apply

kind of thing"...and we did that because it was not really feasible to create an interface that was gonna work well for our needs. So it was just easier to have people apply directly through an applicant portal that was set up by Salesforce. What is that applicant portal going to be called is EDGE." - Team Lead, RNTA, EDA

"[Our applicants] don't have great Internet because they're located in an area that just doesn't have great service...And then when they have issues with Login.gov, they get a lot of blanket statements back, but they're in English and that's not their primary language. So it's not really helping them get through the barrier...The addition of SAM.gov being required added another layer of complexity for our grant seekers, so we have users simply upload documents and send to a dummy email address for that specific opportunity. That's how we get around it." - Office of Acquisition and Assistance, USAID

- Consultants are on the rise, submitting applications for multiple organizations within the same grant cycle, resulting in conflicts of interest.** Grantors are noticing that hired grant writers and consultants, who have strong proficiency with Grants.gov, are perpetuating inequity, as low capacity organizations lack access to them. A single consultant may be responsible for multiple applications in one competition. While strong grant writing is valued, grantors must also develop their own criteria to consider who has resources and who doesn't, and how that impacts the quality of an application.

"I think they [new applicants] just don't know what is out there to try and figure out what they'd be interested in. And it's overwhelming. That's why a lot of applicants are hiring consultants to do this stuff for them. But these are the applicants that can afford to do that, which is probably not the types of applicants you're looking to make things easier for, but that's what we're seeing: more and more consultants, and grant writers." - Acting Senior Associate Director for Grants Competition, EPA

- Users find the available educational resources lacking, and grantors are often left with the burden to support.** Grantors find that applicants need significant support with Workspace and navigating Grants.gov, and must spend some of their own time (versus the help desk) assisting users. Common issues include less-experienced applicants downloading forms from elsewhere and trying to upload to Workspace. While most grantors view webinars as effective ways to guide and train applicants, some agencies go the extra mile by emailing applicants Grants.gov instructions or offering 1:1 tutorial calls. They wish that Grants.gov would provide more training support on the site itself to alleviate this work.

"I've had a few folks call me and say, 'You know, I've submitted applications in the past, but it won't let me do that now', and they find out that their access has changed or their roles assigned have changed and it could be, it's just been so long that they've done one since Workspace was put in place and there were new roles and new assignments that are needed in other cases." - Deputy Director, IHS

"I think there's a lot of those things that are truly technical systems features where the help desk either maybe genuinely doesn't know because they haven't been trained or, they're too busy to figure it out. So they will sort of ship people back over to us, and oftentimes we are not in a position to assist them. We have to say 'No, this is a technical question about the submission process. Not a programmatic question about your application itself.' And I can imagine that is really frustrating for an applicant who's already experiencing a problem of getting bounced around. - Chief Funding Opportunity Officer, NEH

- **Workspace audits are valuable in tracking applicant progress, errors, casenotes, and timelines, as well as preparing resources for the review process.** By scanning Workspace audits, grantors are able to anticipate application errors and troubleshoot without having to go through the Grants.gov team. Workspace Reports for open Opportunities allow program teams to forecast what resources and personnel are needed to review the number of applications.

"I'm able to download this application on my Workspace and see, 'well, yeah, this is there. That's there'...So we can quash their concerns and say, 'Hey, look.' We can't disclose any information until the opportunity closes, but we can tell them if there are any items missing." - Grantor, HUD

- **Grantors struggle to support the majority of applicants who submit their application in the last 24 hours with unsupported file types or sizes; added work is created for the grantor who must help troubleshoot and judge if the deadline should be waived for applicants.** Grantors must work with rural communities who face issues with broadband access to make sure their application is counted. Applicants are not warned by Grants.gov when they upload a document in an unsupported format or with an incorrect file name or order, which can disqualify the application after the deadline. Additionally, applicants aren't given an explanation for errors.

"People struggle with submitting the application, especially at the last minute. There's a requirement that you're only supposed to upload two files other than the forms, but Grants.gov allows them to do three, four, as many files as they want. It works against them if they're not paying attention to the specific details. And then as soon as they come in the door, we wind up either disqualifying them or only reviewing a portion of their proposal." - Division Director, ACF, HHS