

GATU Grant Application Merit Based Review Illinois Uniform Policy

Merit-Based Review for competitive grants in Illinois including fully or partially funded Federal, Federal-Pass Through and State funded grants shall comply with GATA Legislation 30 ILCS 708 and 2 CFR 200 Uniform Requirements. Grants funded solely by private funds are not subject to GATA legislation and 2 CFR 200 requirements.

Merit Based Review, 2 CFR 200.204. For competitive grants unless prohibited by Federal statute, the Federal awarding agency must design and execute a merit review process for applications. This process must be described or incorporated by reference in the applicable funding opportunity (see Appendix I to this part, Full text of the Funding Opportunity.) See also Section 200.203 Notices of funding opportunities. An appeals process must be described and incorporated with the merit based review process.

- A. Receipt of Grant Application Proposals - A record shall be prepared that shall include the name of the grantor, title of the grant, each grant applicant and a notation of date and time of grant application receipt.
- B. State Agencies shall keep a file of the grant award process that includes the written determination of award, grant application and requirements. The Grant Award file shall be available to Federal and State audit organizations, the Office of the Auditor General, and the Executive Inspector General.
- C. Competitive Grant evaluation criteria must be tied to objectives or purpose of the federal or state grant program.
 - 1) Evaluation criteria must include at a minimum the following criteria categories:
 - a. Need
 - b. Capacity
 - c. Quality
 - 2) Definitions for the Merit-Based Review required evaluation criteria categories include:
 - a. Need: Identification of stakeholders, facts and evidence that demonstrate the proposal supports the grant program purpose.
 - b. Capacity: The ability of an entity to execute the grant project according to project requirements.
 - c. Quality: The totality of features and characteristics of a service, project or product that indicated its ability to satisfy the requirements of the grant program.

- 3) Other evaluation criteria for Merit-Based Review may be considered in addition to the required criteria. Examples of other potential criteria categories include:
 - a. Societal Impact
 - b. Economic Impact
 - c. Cost Effectiveness
 - d. Sustainability
 - e. Grant Specific Criteria
- D. Merit based review of the Competitive Grant Application shall be prepared in accordance with 2CFR Section 200.204 and include the evaluation process description, criteria and importance stated in the grant application. The evaluation process shall include:
- 1) A statement of evaluation criteria in the grant application. The grant application shall state all criteria and their relative importance, including: preferences, technical assistance options, and tie breakers for equivalent scores after evaluation.
 - 2) A statement in the grant application identifying if there are multiple phases of evaluation, which may include a description of the evaluation phases.
 - 3) Review based solely on criteria identified in the grant application. In the event of a required change to the evaluation criteria prior to submission the grant applicants shall be informed by publication of the change to the State grant making agency website at a minimum.
 - 4) Cost sharing when applicable. Cost sharing must be specifically defined as to how it will be considered, such as to assign a certain number of additional points to applicants who offer cost sharing or to break ties among applications with equivalent scores after evaluation of all other factors. Cost sharing as an evaluation factor must include any restrictions on the types of costs that are acceptable (e.g. in-kind contributions).
 - 5) Evaluation shall be conducted by a committee. Evaluation Committee members shall be determined by the State agency, tailored to the particular grant application, and include as appropriate technical or other personnel with expertise to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of applicants.
 - a. Evaluation Committee members must not have any conflicts of interest or apparent conflicts of interest.
 - b. Grant applicants are not allowed to be evaluation committee members for which the grantee has submitted an application or if they represent an entity which has submitted an application. Exceptions may be made when required by statute.
 - c. Evaluation Committee members must sign a Confidentiality Agreement and Conflict of Interest Disclosure to participate in the evaluation process.
 - d. Evaluation members shall be assigned a code for identification of their evaluation process. Evaluator names will be available only for audit or litigation requirements.
 - e. The Evaluation Committee members may be removed by the Agency Head or designee for due cause, such as failure to comply with directions of the grant application and/or evaluation process, or to ensure the integrity of the grant. The Agency Head or designee shall state in writing his or her reasons for removing a Committee member.

- 6) Evaluation shall be based on numerical rating, unless another scoring methodology is more appropriate based on the unique circumstances of the grant program, but must contain at a minimum:
 - a. Any scoring tool shall reflect the evaluation criteria and ranking set forth in the grant application and any subcriteria available at the opening.
 - b. Evaluation Committee members must have an individual score sheet which is completed independent of the whole committee.
 - c. A summary score sheet that shows the comparative scores and resulting finalist for award must be completed.
 - d. Any significant or substantial variance between evaluator scores shall be reviewed and documented, including revision of individual scores.

- 7) Merit Based Finalist requirements prior to receiving an award shall include:
 - a. Completion of the programmatic risk assessment. The Agency will ensure that all finalists have completed the programmatic risk assessment.
 - b. Notice of State Award Finalist form sent to Merit Based award finalists. The Agency will distribute the Notice of State Award Finalist form which identifies outstanding requirements that must be completed prior to grant award. These requirements include:
 - i. Grantee pre-qualification
 - ii. Conflict of Interest and Mandatory Disclosures
 - iii. Fiscal and Administrative Risk

E. Award

- 1) An award shall be made pursuant to a written determination based on the evaluation criteria set forth in the grant application and successful completion of finalist requirements.

- 2) A Notice of State Award (NOSA) will be issued to the Merit Based finalists that have successfully completed all grant award requirements. Based on the NOSA, the Merit Based finalist is positioned to make an informed decision to accept the grant award. The NOSA shall include:
 - a. The terms and conditions of the award.
 - b. Specific conditions assigned to the grantee based on the fiscal and administrative and programmatic risk assessments.

- 3) Upon acceptance of the grant award, announcement of the grant award shall be published by the awarding agency to Grants.Illinois.gov.

- 4) A written Notice of Denial shall be sent to the applicants not receiving awards.

F. Merit-Based Evaluation Appeal Process

- 1) Competitive grant appeals are limited to the evaluation process. Evaluation scores may not be protested. Only the evaluation process is subject to appeal.

- 2) Appeals Review Officer - The Agency Head or designee may appoint one or more Appeal Review Officers (ARO) to consider the grant-related appeals and make a recommendation to the Agency Head or designee for resolution.

- 3) Submission of Appeal
 - a. An appeal must be submitted in writing in accordance with the grant application document.
 - b. An appeal must be received within 14 calendar days after the date that the grant award notice has been published.
 - c. The written appeal shall include at a minimum the following:
 - i. the name and address of the appealing party
 - ii. identification of the grant
 - iii. a statement of reasons for the appeal

- 4) Response to Appeal
 - a. The State agency must acknowledge receipt of an appeal within fourteen (14) calendar days from the date the appeal was received.
 - b. The State agency should respond to the appeal within 60 days or supply a written explanation to the appealing party as to why additional time is required.
 - c. The appealing party must supply any additional information requested by the agency within the time period set in the request.

- 5) Stay of Grant Agreement/Contract Execution
 - a. When an appeal is received the execution of the grant agreement/contract shall be stayed until the appeal is resolved or;
 - b. The Agency head or designee determines the needs of the State require moving forward with the grant execution.
 - c. The state need determination and rationale shall be documented in writing

- 6) Resolution
 - a. The ARO shall make a recommendation to the Agency Head or designee as expeditiously as possible after receiving all relevant, requested information.
 - b. In determining the appropriate recommendation. The ARO shall consider the integrity of the competitive grant process and the impact of the recommendation on the State Agency.
 - c. The Agency will resolve the appeal by means of written determination.
 - d. The determination shall include, but not be limited to:
 - i. Review of the appeal
 - ii. Appeal determination
 - iii. Rationale for the determination

- 7) Effect of Judicial Proceedings. If an action concerning the appeal has commenced in a court or administrative body, the Agency Head or designee may defer resolution of the appeal pending the judicial or administrative determination.