

Homeland Security Grant Program

Preparedness Directorate
Office of Grants and Training
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Peer Review Process

Involving State and Local Professionals in Scoring Grant Applications

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) engages State and local partners in evaluating and scoring all Fiscal Year 2006 (FY06) Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) applications. Stakeholder involvement helps to enhance the thoroughness of this process and makes the program more reflective of local needs.

The peer review scoring process was conducted to assess how effective the solutions proposed in the HSGP applications address the applicants' homeland security program needs. States and Urban Areas applying for HSGP funds must not only identify and prioritize their homeland security needs, but also demonstrate effectiveness of proposed solutions to reduce risk. Proposed solutions are described in detail in the applicant's Investment Justification. Each State and Urban Area was allowed to submit up to 15 Investments in their Investment Justifications.

*In Fiscal Year 2006, DHS' Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) will award approximately **\$1.7 billion** to States, Territories, and Urban Areas to enhance their ability to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies.*

In FY06, more than 100 peer reviewers, including incident managers, fire chiefs, law enforcement personnel, grant managers, and representatives from State and local emergency management agencies, participated in the peer review process. The peer review process took place at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland during the week of April 2, 2006. The resulting scores indicate the effectiveness of proposed solutions to addressing identified homeland security needs.

Ensuring Credibility in the Selection Process

The peer review selection process is designed to ensure a fair and equitable peer review. The DHS Office of Grants and Training, which oversees the HSGP, solicited potential peer review participants from each State and Territory, including the various Urban Areas, along with information on the nominees' background and experience. DHS then developed a preliminary list of the most qualified candidates based on the following criteria:

- Extensive subject-matter expertise across multiple homeland security disciplines
- Experience managing an integrated homeland security program or initiative
- Experience in the policy, operations, and programmatic arenas
- Familiarity with the HSGP

DHS submitted the names of potential reviewers to State Administrative Agencies responsible for homeland security in each State, to make a final determination of peer reviewers for the FY06 HSGP grant cycle. *State homeland security professionals made the final determination for FY06 HSGP Peer Review Panelists.*

Building Diversity into Panel Composition

To ensure that peer review panels were made up of reviewers from varied backgrounds and experience—and to avoid potential conflicts of interest—diversity was emphasized in forming the panels. Each panel was comprised of up to seven reviewers, which included up to three reviewers representing States and Territories, up to three representing Urban Areas, and up to one reviewer representing federal agencies.

The composition of each panel was balanced with representation from eastern, western, and central States, as well as States with large and small populations.

Investment Justifications from Urban Areas were grouped with corresponding State applications to enable reviewers to evaluate the coordination between both efforts. Reviewers were not, however, assigned to review Investment Justifications from their own States or (to the extent possible) those of neighboring States or Territories.

Scoring Process

Initially, peer reviewers worked independently to determine a preliminary score of applicants' proposed solutions to address identified needs. In the second phase, reviewers convened in panels to discuss the findings of their review, develop final scores, and comment on each Investment Justification. Each panel was responsible for scoring six Investment Justifications. Each reviewer was responsible for submitting a final score as consensus among panel members was not necessary.

The Investment Justifications were scored in two ways. First, an Individual Investment Score was based on 17 questions, each with detailed criteria, addressing issues such as:

- Relevance of the proposed solution
- Regionalization
- Anticipated impact
- Sustainability of the proposed Investment
- Implementation approach

Second, the Overall Investment Justification Score was based on these criteria:

- Relevance to the Interim National Preparedness Goal
- Connection to the spirit and scope of the Program and Capability Enhancement Plan
- Extent to which individual Investments related to each other
- Innovativeness in approaching identified needs
- Feasibility and reasonableness of the proposed Investments

The combination of the Individual Investment Score and Overall Investment Justification Score constitute the final Effectiveness score.

For additional information please contact the Centralized Scheduling and Information Desk at 1-800-368-6498 or askcsid@dhs.gov.