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Tracking Federal Awards in States and Congressional Districts Using USAspending.gov

Overview

USAspending.gov is a government source for data on federal awards by state, congressional district (CD), zip code, city, and county. The awards data in USAspending.gov are provided by federal agencies and represents grants, contracts, and other financial assistance. Grant awards include money the federal government commits for projects in states, local jurisdictions, regions, territories, and tribal reservations, as well as payments for eligible needs to help individuals and families. Contract awards refer to bids and agreements the federal government makes for specific goods and services. Award funding data include both obligations (money committed to be spent) and outlays (money actually paid out).

The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred multiple pieces of legislation providing relief to individuals and families, state and local governments, businesses, and health care providers. USAspending.gov provides access to data on COVID-19 funding through visual displays and specific search filters. See CRS Report R46491, *Resources for Tracking Federal COVID-19 Spending*, by Jennifer Teefy and Maria Kreiser, for more information.

Additional search filters to enable tracking awards made through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58) have also been added to USAspending.gov.

Using USAspending.gov to locate and compile accurate data on federal awards presents challenges, in part, because of continued data quality issues that have been identified by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). Researchers need to be aware that search results may be incomplete or contain inaccuracies.

USAspending.gov's award-tracking function includes the following features:

- **Award Search** provides multiple filters for identifying prime and first-tier subawards (i.e., subawards awarded directly by the prime recipient) back to FY2008. Filters are arranged under the following categories:
 - **Location.** In general, search by "Place of Performance" to capture where the work is being performed and the money is being spent. Searching by "Recipient Location" may be useful in identifying awards that were awarded directly by the federal government to recipients in local areas.
 - **Time period.** Searching by date (fiscal year or date range) captures grant awards that have had transactions during that time period, regardless of the period of performance start

date. Users can opt to limit searches to new awards only.

- **Characteristics** enables searching for details such as award description; award type (i.e., contracts and financial assistance, which includes grants, direct payments and loans); assistance listing, which is the program through which a financial assistance award is made; and contract characteristics, including product and service code and North American Industry Classification (NAICS) code.
- **Sources** includes a filter for awarding agency.

The search results list displayed can be downloaded at either the award or transaction level, along with additional details about each award, into a spreadsheet. Details on an individual award, including transaction history and subawards, can be viewed by clicking on the *Award ID*. Interactive displays below the search results allow users to view aggregated award transactions data from different perspectives. The award search is continually being developed and improved, so new features may have become available since the publication of this report.

- **Profiles of Agencies and Federal Accounts** feature data on each agency's budgetary resources, dollar amounts that have been obligated and outlaid against those budgetary resources, and amounts the agency has obligated for awards. Users can also browse a list of more than 2,000 federal accounts and track spending obligations and outlays, including awards, within each. The data in this section are presented visually through interactive charts.
- **Profiles of States and Territories** provides tables, interactive maps, and graphs showing a breakdown of a total awarded amount to each state and territory back to FY2008. Breakdowns include totals by award type, county, and CD. Profiles also include top five rankings in various categories, such as awarding agencies and recipients.
- **Profiles of Recipients** contains information on entities that have received federal awards in the form of contracts, grants, loans, or other financial assistance back to FY2008. Recipient profiles include data on award trends over time and top five rankings in various categories.
- **Data Download** allows bulk exporting of large award datasets by agency, award type, and fiscal year going back to FY2008 through the *Award Data Archive*. The *Custom Award Data* page also allows downloading of

large datasets but provides additional filtering options and covers data going back to FY2001.

Key Challenges in Tracking Awards

Key challenges may be usefully considered in two general categories: (1) reporting issues and (2) pass-through issues. In addition, tracking awards in CDs presents several specific issues that are addressed separately below.

Reporting Issues

Federal agencies are required to submit reports on awards transactions within 30 days after they are implemented. There may be a longer lag-time with data from the Department of Defense, generally 90 days. Although this reporting requirement is in place, issues still remain involving of the data's completeness, consistency, and accuracy (see "Background on USAspending.gov").

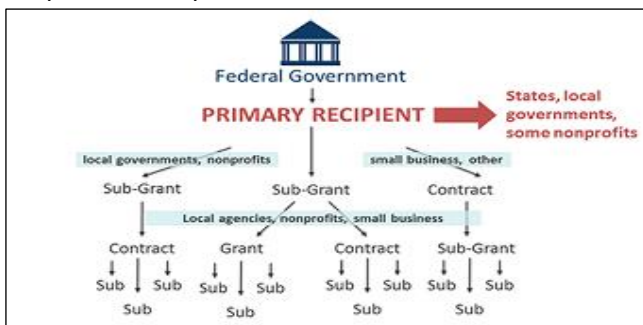
Pass-Through Issues

Most federal grants funding is awarded to states, which then pass through funds to eligible recipients elsewhere in the state. Funds may then be further subawarded or subcontracted (see **Figure 1**). This sublevel location may be a project's place of performance as opposed to the initial recipient location. Consider the following pass-through scenarios:

- A grant award may pass through different jurisdictions in a state (located in different CDs) before reaching the final place of performance.
- Federal grant monies may first go to the state (an agency or agencies in the state capital in one or more CDs), then be distributed to a city or county government (in one or more additional CDs), which then may subaward funds to an organization that spends the money in other CDs.
- Procurement awards may be given to a corporation headquartered in one state (and one CD). The company may spend the money manufacturing the purchased product at one or more of its manufacturing facilities in one or more additional states (and CDs).

Figure 1. Examples of Federal Spending Streams

Recipients at Multiple Levels



Source: Jerry Brito, George Washington Univ., 2009; and CRS, 2016.

Specific Challenges in Tracking Awards by Congressional District

When searching for CD data, note the following:

- CD borders can change significantly with decennial redistricting. There are options to search for awards within either "original" (pre-2023) CD boundaries or "current" (2023-onward) CD boundaries. Searching current CD boundaries will enable capturing historical award data within current district borders.
- CDs that include state capitals may sometimes appear to receive more federal awards because state administering agencies (SAAs) pass through funds for projects throughout the state.
- Federal grant or procurement funds may pass through various administrative levels (e.g., to states via block grants, then to local jurisdictions, including different CDs) before they are actually spent. Therefore, searching on *Place of Performance* rather than *Recipient Location* will yield results that more accurately reflect ultimate award destinations.

Background on USAspending.gov

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (FFATA; P.L. 109-282) required the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to create a public database to enable tracking of federal funds awarded at the final recipient level. Under requirements of P.L. 113-101, the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act), responsibility for the database passed to the Department of the Treasury. The act required Treasury and OMB to set uniform data standards to be used across all federal agencies and provide additional guidance to agencies for posting data on USAspending.gov.

Tracking federal funding to final recipients can be challenging because funding that is awarded to states or contractors may then be passed through or subawarded to local entities or subcontractors (see **Figure 1**).

Additionally, because of continuing data quality issues in USAspending.gov, information in the database may still be incomplete and inaccurate (e.g., see Government Accountability Office report GAO-24-106214 on data quality, available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106214>).

For more information on USAspending.gov, see the website's *About* page at <https://www.usaspending.gov/data-sources>. For instructional videos on using the site, see <https://www.usaspending.gov/training-videos>.

Related CRS Products

CRS Report R44027, *Tracking Federal Awards: USAspending.gov and Other Data Sources*, by Jennifer Teefy.

CRS In Focus IF12925, *Tracking Federal Grant Awards: A Brief Overview*, by Jennifer Teefy.

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