

Op-Ed: Just Dreaming--Homeland Security Grants A New Way

By Eric Holdeman, Director, King County Office of Emergency Management

I had a dream. Is it possible that we could change the homeland security (HLS) grant process to make it one that breaks down barriers between disciplines, jurisdictions and regions? It has certainly been an interesting journey that we've all experienced. From going from virtually nothing, to a level of funding that we've never previously seen in emergency management or many other disciplines. Are we safer? Are all the funds being spent wisely with little or no duplication? And, the duplication that does exist, is it for redundancy, or ...so that I can have control and not have to share it (whatever "it" is)?

If you are reading this then you are "in the business of HLS grants. Let's tally them all up. There is SHSP, UASI, Citizen Corps, Transportation, Port Security, CDC, HRSA, EMPG, Fire, LETPP, RTII—did I miss any? Sure, there are SARA grants, but come on, \$2-5K is in today's terms is chicken feed.

I'm pleased to see that there is a new focus from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on regional collaboration. But, I think we won't really obtain the level of cooperation and collaboration that is envisioned by the National Preparedness Goal, National Response Plan and National Incident Management System (NIMS) and expected of us by the American people until we fix how funds are distributed and grants are managed.

Hold on to your hats—what I'm going to say is not what you want to hear. It has the same chance of success as an ice cube on a global warming type of day in Phoenix. My dream, may be your nightmare.

What if congress and the administration would provide "Block Grants" to states to administer? What if states were then required to provide further distribution of "Block Grants" to established regions within their state? Yes, all the pots of money listed above put into one kettle for us to distribute and share. Oh boy, wouldn't that be fun!

Imagine the dialog (some might say fights) that would need to occur. We'd have to set priorities. Would we decide that every discipline has to get "something" or would we say, let's solve "this" once and for all. Maybe putting all the funds into fixing communications interoperability—statewide!

I believe that well intentioned "public" servants can find ways to work together. We are not perfect at divvying up scarce resources in Region 6/King County, but I can tell you we are better off for the regional collaboration that we have been able to achieve with the imperfect system that we have.

Don't feel threaten by this dream of mine to have block grants. Like I said earlier, it's not going to happen. Our federal system is wedded to the status quo and how it has worked (or not worked) in our imperfect democracy. There are too many sacred cow funding streams that exist and "our" special interest's and associations will rally to make sure that it doesn't ever happen on their watch.

Just before I woke up from my dream, I remember someone saying, "The grant guidance for these block grants requires us to take an "All-hazards" approach.

Now I know I'm dreaming!

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