

Discretionary Program

Applies to:

All grants and cooperative agreements

Definition

A federal financial assistance program with an authorizing statute that allows the government to, via a competitive review process, exercise judgment in selecting the project, recipient, and/or the amount of the award. DOI bureaus comply with this requirement via established merit review processes during the [preaward phase](#).

Department Policy

505 DM 2.13 Competition for Federal Financial Assistance Awards.

"Competition in making awards through cooperative agreements is strongly encouraged and is expected in awarding discretionary grants, unless otherwise directed by Congress. In all cases, bureaus and offices are required to make awards based on the merits in accordance with the law."

DOI-AAAP-0009 Financial Assistance Application and Merit Review Process.

"Maximum competition in grant and cooperative agreement awards is strongly encouraged and is expected in awarding discretionary funds, unless otherwise directed by Congress. When grants and cooperative agreements are awarded competitively, the Department requires that the competitive process be fair and impartial, that all applicants be evaluated only on the criteria stated in the announcement, and that no applicant receive an unfair competitive advantage."

Service Policy

Issuing a New Financial Assistance Award Guidance (Sept 30, 2015).

"Discretionary programs, in accordance with their authorizing statute, must establish a competitive review process, including the merit and other review criteria that evaluators will use to judge applications. Discretionary programs must also determine how the review process will work, including who is responsible for evaluating applications, how evaluators are selected, the minimum number of evaluators required for a review, who will make the final project selections, how potential conflicts of interest will be avoided, and any other factors outside of the established merit and review criteria that might be used to make final project selections."

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Service requirements under discretionary programs?

Awards made under discretionary programs must:

- Develop and implement a merit review and selection process for applications.
- Announce funding opportunities on [Grants.gov](#) (with exceptions).
- Have staff reviewers, peer reviewers, evaluators, panel members, and advisors sign a conflict of interest prior to participating in any review or evaluation process for applications.
- Perform risk assessments (OMB-designated repositories and Service-designated) for all successful applications.

Related Pages

Resources

References