The Office of Management and Budget told agencies today to find another method for accepting grant applications for funds authorized under the economic stimulus law because the governmentwide grants portal of Grants.gov has been overwhelmed.

Agencies should immediately review their grant systems and make improvements to handle what is projected to be a 60 percent increase in grant applications from April to August, said OMB director Peter Orszag in a memo to the heads of departments and agencies.

Departments and agencies have until March 13 to analyze risks and submit solutions for grant system improvements to make sure stimulus law funds are not delayed because of inadequate computer systems, he said.

"We want to make sure that the systems are in place to handle what everyone expects will be an unprecedented number of grant applications," Orszag said, adding that the "funds must not be stuck in a bottleneck because of inadequate systems or overwhelmed network servers."

The central portal for people to find and apply for competitive grants, Grants.gov, has had a significant increase in volume in the past several months, he said.

"This load has far exceeded the throughput originally anticipated by the system and has at times resulted in noticeably degraded performance," Orszag said. When combined with the expected increase in applications for stimulus law funding, there is a "significant risk of failure," according to the memo.

As a result, OMB instructed the Health and Human Services Department, which operates Grants.gov, and the General Services Administration, which administers e-government applications, to work together to make immediate improvements to handle the expected volume increase.

In a blog entry posted March 10, Grants.gov program managers said the portal continued to be slow because of the high volume of users. At the time, the managers said more than 2,500 users were logged onto Grants.gov and more than 1,200 users were conducting searches.

Information technology systems are essential to agencies' ability to report financial and program activity and thereby meet the accountability and transparency provisions of the law, Orszag said in the memo.
Grant-making agencies should determine other means to accept applications during the peak period to reduce demand on the Grant.gov’s resources and minimize disruption to the application processes, Orszag said in the memo. To stem any potential risk with Grants.gov, HHS is adding significant storage capacity and making other modernization enhancements, he said.

Grants.gov is also a central storehouse for more than 1,000 grant programs.

About the Author

Mary Mosquera is a reporter for Federal Computer Week.