

to specify any legitimate circumstances in which submissions received after a published deadline date would be accepted because of technical problems. The commenter also recommended that we require agencies to have back-up systems for their electronic systems.

Response: No change. Section IV.3 already deals with the effect of missing a deadline and whether it varies based on the means of submission. The portion of the comment dealing with back-up systems is an electronic business process issue that is beyond the scope of the announcement format.

Comment: Two commenters recommended that Section V.2 address whether and how an applicant can receive a copy of the reviews of its application, especially when its application was not successful.

Response: As noted in a response to a previous comment, the announcement format is an interim product that we plan to update in the future to incorporate results of continued interagency deliberations on a number of pre-award issues. Feedback to unsuccessful applicants is one of the policy issues we will review for possible inclusion in future issuances of the format. In light of the comment, however, we added language in Section V.3 indicating that the section appropriately could include information about anticipated dates for notifying unsuccessful, as well as successful, applicants.

Comment: One commenter suggested that we move the discussion of "other" selection criteria from Section V.2 to Section V.1 and further revise Section V.2 to state whether reviews will be blind or double blind, if applicable.

Response: No change. "Other" selection criteria are appropriately included in Section V.2, which addresses selection criteria (Section V.1 addresses evaluation criteria, which are not the same thing). Section V.2 lets agency program officials describe the nature of the review.

Comment: Three commenters suggested that we require agencies to provide the information in Section V.3 on anticipated announcement and award dates.

Response: No change. Agency business practices vary widely and some current practices do not always permit the agency to provide this information at the time it issues a funding opportunity announcement. With the guidance in Section V.3, we believe that agencies will provide this information when they can do so.

Comment: One commenter suggested replacing "should" with "must" in the first sentence of Section VI.1, which

says that the agency should identify in that section what a successful applicant can expect to receive following selection (e.g., a notification letter prior to the official award document that authorizes the recipient to begin performance).

Response: We made the suggested change.

Comment: Two commenters suggested we add to Section VI on award administration language addressing any special requirements on intellectual property, data sharing, or security requirements (e.g., access to research information, materials, or facilities).

Response: We added these items as examples in the discussion of special award terms and conditions in Section VI.2.

Comment: Two commenters suggested that Section VI.3 on post-award reporting should be required, rather than optional.

Response: We agree and revised the section accordingly.

Dated: June 17, 2003.

Linda M. Springer,
Controller.

To the Heads of Executive Departments and Establishments

Subject: Format for Financial Assistance Program Announcements

1. *Purpose.* This policy letter establishes a government-wide funding opportunity announcement format for Executive Branch departments and agencies to use in programs that make discretionary awards of grants or cooperative agreements. Program announcements include all paper and electronic issuances that Federal departments and agencies use to announce funding opportunities, whether they are called "program announcements," "notices of funding availability," "broad agency announcements," "research announcements," "solicitations," or something else.

2. *Authority.* This policy letter is issued to implement the Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-107).

3. *Background.* The Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999 required the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to direct, coordinate, and assist Executive Branch departments and agencies in establishing an interagency process to streamline and simplify Federal financial assistance procedures for non-Federal entities. It also required each Executive agency to develop, submit to the Congress, and implement a plan for that streamlining and simplification.

Twenty-six Executive Branch agencies jointly submitted a plan to the Congress in May 2001, as the Act required. The plan described the interagency process through which the agencies would review current policies and practices and seek to streamline and simplify them. The process involved interagency work groups under the auspices of the Grants Management Committee of the

Chief Financial Officers Council. The plan also identified substantive areas in which the interagency work groups had begun their review.

One of the substantive areas that the agencies identified in the plan was the form and content of program funding announcements. The agencies stated in the May 2001 plan that their preliminary analysis suggested a potential for developing a more consistent announcement format across the many Federal agencies and programs. A standard announcement format with information content organized in a consistent way lets applicants quickly and efficiently find the information they need, in order to decide whether a particular funding opportunity is of interest and to prepare an application. An interagency work group developed the format attached to this policy letter and recommended that the OMB's Office of Federal Financial Management issue it as the standard for all programs that use discretionary grants or cooperative agreements.

4. Policy.

a. The format attached to this policy letter is the government-wide standard format to be used by agencies when publishing announcements for funding opportunities under programs that make discretionary awards of grants or cooperative agreements, with the exception of:

(1) funding opportunities under which domestic entities are not eligible recipients; and

(2) programs that do not issue separate announcements apart from the program description in the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (CFDA). For those excepted programs, the format will continue to conform to the guidance in OMB Circular A-89 for program information in the CFDA.

b. An agency, at its discretion, may extend the use of the attached format to programs that use forms of financial assistance other than grants and cooperative agreements.

5. *Responsibilities.* Executive Branch departments and agencies must:

a. Issue any needed direction to offices that award grants or cooperative agreements under discretionary programs, in order to establish the attached format as the standard for those programs' announcements. All announcements must include information elements that are marked "required" in the format, in the sequence provided. An announcement for a given program may use elements that are marked "optional," as appropriate for the program. Whether or not the announcement includes any "optional" elements, the information that is included must be organized to conform with the standard format.

b. Post on the Internet all announcements of funding opportunities under which domestic entities are eligible recipients (note that publication in the **Federal Register** meets this requirement, since it is available on the Internet).

c. Request exceptions from this OFFM policy letter for any program announcement(s) with information organized in a way that deviates from the standard format.