



Grants Management Maturity Index (GMMI)TM

Grants Management: A much-needed Maturity Index

By Danny A. Harris, PhD

The US Government currently spends over \$700 Billion annually on various grant programs. These include everything from one-year grants, block grants, discretionary grants, and non-discretionary grants. Over a ten-year period, this represents over \$7 trillion dollars of taxes payer's money or over 20% of the Federal budget. In fact, grant-making is such a mission critical line of business that some entities have developed a certification program for grant professionals. It tends to reason that if the government spends large sums of money on a specific line of business that there should be professionals uniquely qualified to manage and administer these programs. In reality, it is no different than the CPA to the accounting world or the Contract Specialist to the Acquisitions community. Some federal agencies, such as the US Department of Education (DOED), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and portions of Health and Human Services (HHS) list it as part of their mission.

While professionals in this line of business are beginning to receive more attention, in terms of their skill sets and qualifications, the systems and processes they oversee continue to lag far behind. A superficial look around the federal government would find that most agencies, big and small, suffer from antiquated systems that are way beyond their useful life. These systems are either manual or reside on both hardware and software platforms that are underperforming and expensive to maintain. This results in wasted taxpayer dollars. A larger concern may be the poor cyber security controls that often reside in legacy systems of this nature.

The environment in which the federal government operates is rapidly changing. The effects of limited resources, downsizing and delayering are placing greater demands on government services. Grants management is not an exception.

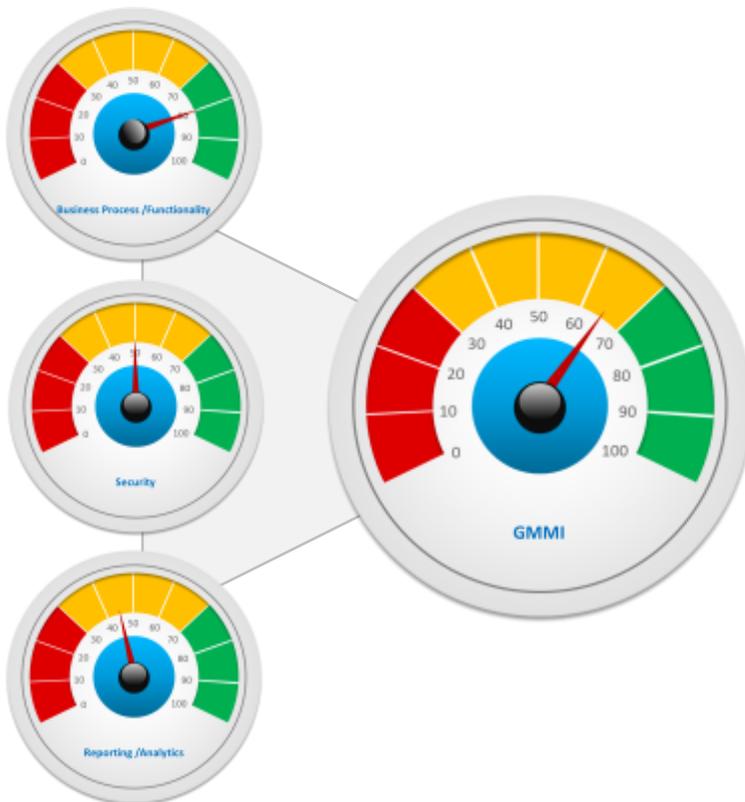
How do we solve this problem?

The solution to this problem is obvious. Legacy grants management systems need to be upgraded. The challenge, however, is where to start. In most industries, there is a concept referred to as "The Gold Standard." For example, JD Power regularly measures the automotive industry to determine who ranks highest in metrics such as build quality and customer satisfaction. Similarly, Gartner constructs a Magic Quadrant that pits technology products against a set of meaningful metrics. As a consumer, one has the ability to compare similar products against each other. More importantly, as a manufacturer or service provider, one has the ability to enhance your products by improving on metrics that it is currently deficient in. Some federal lines of business capture data that is used to construct a dashboard with which to rate agencies on how well they map to an ideal operation. Grants Management does not have the benefit of such a dashboard.

"Grants Management Maturity Index (GMMI)TM allows agencies to assess how they stack up in terms of the overall health of their grant system /Line of Business"

What is Grants Management Maturity Index (GMMI)™?

I recommend this as a great starting point for significantly improving the grants management line of business. What makes a great grant system? Not to be confused, the word system here refers to the hardware, software, people, and processes as opposed to just the application. The Zenius Corporation of Leesburg, Virginia has developed a Grants Management Maturity Index (GMMI) that allows agencies to assess how they stack up in terms of the overall health of their grant system /Line of Business. The real value of the GMMI™ is that by completing the Health Check tool developed by Zenius, not only will an organization uncover its deficiencies, weaknesses, and risks, it will end up with a Roadmap with actionable items illustrating areas of opportunities and a plan on how to execute them.



At a very high level, the GMMI is broken into various sections, such as Functionality/Business Processes, Security, Operations, Hardware Platform, Software Platform, and others. Desirable and undesirable characteristic in each area is weighted. A low GMMI score would obviously indicate that there is work to be done. But more specifically, the GMMI highlights specific areas requiring upgrade or attention. This could include everything from the systems, the security posture, business processes, or even workforce recommendations. The overall GMMI score is not as important as how agency maps to the idea on specific sections. For example, while an organization may score low on its overall GMMI score, it may score very high on Cyber Security. It may employ 2-factor authentication methods as well as a Single Sign-On platform. This data would allow senior management to look in other places in terms of where to spend its future IT Investment funding.

A sample score for specific areas of Business

Process /Functionality, Reporting /Analysis, and Security with corresponding Overall GMMI is shown in the Figure above.

Benefits of GMMI

GMMI is an indicator of the sustainability of your organization's grants processes. This is crucial if you are seeking to transform your organization – and robustly prepare for a change in these challenging times. GMMI provides the following benefits:

- A quick health check of your current grants systems (hardware, software, people, processes, and data)
- A heat map of your grants systems highlighting specific areas that require attention
- A Grants Management Maturity Index score indicating how you stack up in terms of the overall

health of Federal grant system/Line of Business

- A roadmap with actionable items that aligns with your investment priorities

Conclusion

How one stacks up against other organizations is not as important as how closely one comes to a robust Line of Business on critical characteristics. This is what the GMMI delivers. With consulting support from companies that have intimate knowledge of federal grants management, this could be one of the best investments and organization could make.

For more information on the Zenius GMMI and Grants Management Health Check, please contact Zenius Corporation.

Danny Harris has served as the Chief Information Officer at the U.S Department of Education, and is now a strategic advisor providing counsel to Zenius Corporation.

About Zenius:

Zenius represents over 20 years of expertise developing and providing Grants Management systems and solutions, IT Assessment and Optimization systems and services, Financial Management systems and consulting, and Higher Education domain support and expertise. Our consultants design and manage complex information technology programs, award-winning grants management systems, and tailored e-Business solutions to reduce service costs and lower operating expenses while maximizing system efficiency. Zenius Corporation is a Virginia-based HUBZone-certified, Minority-Owned Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) firm, whose mission is to discover, develop, demonstrate, and deliver top value to our customers. For more information go to www.zeniuscorp.com