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## Federal Economic Development Funding in Ohio: Survey Findings

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In partnership with:  
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February 2008



**FEDERAL  
ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
FUNDING IN  
OHIO:  
SURVEY  
FINDINGS**

**Center for  
Economic  
Development**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The objective of the survey on federal funding for economic development was to assess some of the challenges facing county governments in the state of Ohio as they attempt to access federal funding for economic development purposes. Federal funding is important to local governments because it is a significant resource to communities that are able to secure such grants. Competition for federal grants is usually very strong due to limited funds and counties have to be well equipped if they are to be successful in receiving grants. Local governments should know about the availability of funds and should have access to resources needed to efficiently apply for federal grants. This study investigates sources of information county governments have on funding opportunities, reasons for successful applications, and barriers to obtaining federal funding for economic development.

The results from the survey showed successful practices in getting funding, reasons for failure to get grants, and how to reduce barriers to successful federal grant applications. The survey results also revealed the type of help needed by county governments and the best way to get federal funding information to local economic development professionals.

The survey was mailed to all 88 counties in Ohio and was answered by thirty counties. Respondents to the survey were evenly distributed across the state.

In the analysis, respondents were categorized by metropolitan status (metro and non-metro) and by size of county population. Metropolitan status of counties was based on the rural-urban continuum codes developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Economic Research Service (USDA-ERS). Counties with a 2006 population of more than 100,000 were classified as big while those with less than 100,000 population were classified as small counties.

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

The survey showed that for a majority of counties, the most pressing economic development needs were business retention, expansion, and attraction; infrastructure development; financing mechanisms; and labor force development. These needs were supported by the fact that proposals submitted for federal funding were mainly in these same areas of greatest need.

The results revealed that professional networks were important sources of information on federal funding for economic development for more than half of the counties. Other sources of information on federal funding opportunities were request for proposals (RFPs), newsletters, and the Federal Register. These sources were used to a relatively small extent compared to professional networks. The results also showed that some counties had no reliable source of information on funding opportunities from federal agencies. The results suggest that for counties to be more successful in applying for federal grants, they need a reliable and consistent source of information on federal grant opportunities. A majority of respondents indicated that they would like to receive federal funding information through email, followed to a lesser extent by a website or newsletter.



The survey results showed that more than half of the sample had submitted proposals to fund economic development projects in the past five years. Also, about one-third of the sample reported that the county planned to increase applications for federal funding in the future. A lack of adequate strategic planning could be the reason why a third of the sample said they didn't know if the county had a goal to increase the number of applications for federal funding for economic development activities.

The survey revealed very critical information on why 37 percent of counties did not submit proposals in the last five years. The results showed that most of these counties had no knowledge about the availability of federal funding for economic development. Other important reasons why counties did not submit proposals were the lack of staff to devote to the process and lack of knowledge on the federal grant writing process. Past failures in receiving grants did not act as a major deterrent for counties.

Counties that submitted federal grant applications but failed to receive grants attributed their lack of success to not having staff with the required expertise in receiving grants, time constraints, and having no information on where to go for assistance in the grant application process. Some counties mentioned that they did not have projects that were eligible for funding hence their failure to get federal grants.

The survey showed that 17 counties were successful in getting federal grants for economic development over the past five years. Major reasons for successful applications were having staff familiar with applications to federal agencies and receiving assistance from other organizations such as consultants and Economic Development Districts. Other important reasons why counties succeeded in the federal grant application process were getting previous awards from the same agency, having professional grant writers, and having professional relationships with staff in awarding federal agencies.

Almost two-thirds of respondents stated the need for more information about the availability of federal funding from several federal agencies. About a third stated that training in federal grant writing and access to people with experience in receiving federal funds were key forms of assistance needed.

Specific grants received by counties that succeeded in getting federal funding showed that most counties received the entire amounts they requested in the proposals submitted. Also, most of the applications were sent to agencies with which the county had a prior history. Only a third of applications were made to a particular federal agency for the first time.

Although a majority of counties were involved in regional (multi-county) economic development initiatives, very few of these initiatives resulted in successful federal grant applications. It is most likely that collaborative efforts by counties focused on issues other than getting federal economic development funding.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

The survey results indicate that in order to make Ohio counties more successful in the federal grant application process, they need to be provided with information about federal funding opportunities, trained in the federal grant writing process, and provided access to professionals who can help them navigate through the application process. Other assistance needed by

counties is help in identifying good (fundable) projects. This will help increase the number of high quality federal grant applications submitted.

The reasons why some counties have been successful can act as a roadmap for other counties to follow. Also, opportunities should be created at seminars, for example, to help counties form professional networks that will help provide them with funding information and assistance in the federal grant writing process.

The results from this survey have already started to shape policy initiatives. For instance, the office of Senator Brown has organized several seminars across the state to help address the issue of access to federal funding. Providing counties with these resources will help counties submit competitive and high quality proposals that can potentially make them more successful in receiving federal grants for economic development purposes.

## INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings from the Survey on Federal Funding for Economic Development activities. The survey, sent to all 88 counties in Ohio, was initiated by the Office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown and was conducted in partnership with the Ohio Economic Development Association (OEDA). It was funded by a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Economic development refers broadly to building the economic wealth of communities and regions and increasing the standard of living for their residents. Different people define the specifics of economic development in different ways; however, for this study the definition of economic development included the following areas: business retention, expansion, and attraction; labor force development; infrastructure; brownfields development; innovation and technology commercialization; entrepreneurial activity and business startups; and development financing mechanisms.

Federal grants can provide significant resources to communities, however, taking advantage of these resources requires the time and skill to investigate and pursue funding opportunities that fit the economic development priorities of a locale. Federal grants are scarce, and competition for these grants is very strong. The survey was intended to gather input from both the experienced grant writer and the novice working for county governments in Ohio.

Through the survey, information was obtained on most important economic development needs, experiences with federal grants for economic development, details on successful and unsuccessful federal grant proposals submitted, and organizational characteristics of respondents. The survey also revealed contributing factors to successful and failed federal grant applications and the perceived assistance needed to improve grant writing and success in the federal grant application process.

## METHODOLOGY

The Survey on Federal Funding for Economic Development was sent to county administrators, county commissioners, or economic development personnel in all 88 counties in Ohio. The survey instrument was mailed on September 17, 2007. Respondents were given the option of returning the survey by mail or answering the questions online. Collection of the survey occurred from the last week in September to the second week in November. Thirty counties responded to the survey, a 34 percent response rate. The survey instrument is provided in Appendix A.

The survey instrument consisted of both open and closed-ended questions. Responding counties were grouped into two categories. The first category was based on whether counties are metropolitan or non-metropolitan. Metropolitan status of counties was determined using the rural-urban continuum codes<sup>1</sup> (provided in Appendix B) developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Economic Research Service (USDA-ERS). The second category was based on

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<sup>1</sup> Rural-Urban Continuum Codes form a classification scheme that distinguishes metropolitan (metro) counties by the population size of their metro area, and non-metropolitan (non-metro) counties by the degree of urbanization and adjacency to a metro area or areas. The metro and non-metro categories have been subdivided into three metro and six non-metro groupings, resulting in a nine-part county codification.

the county's population. Using 2006 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, counties with more than 100,000 people were categorized as big counties while counties with less than 100,000 people were categorized as small counties. The questions on the survey were therefore analyzed for the sample as a whole, metro and non-metro counties, and big and small counties.

## CATEGORIES OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The survey was grouped into two major categories and responses compared across these two groups. First, respondents were grouped using metropolitan or non-metropolitan status of the county. Second, respondents were grouped into two size categories and analyzed. The size category was based on the 2006 population of the county. As shown in Table 1, of the 30 responding counties, 18 were metropolitan and 12 were non-metropolitan counties. When grouped by population size, the sample consisted of 13 big counties and 17 small counties. There are 40 metropolitan counties (45%) and 48 non-metropolitan counties (55%) in the state of Ohio. There are 60 counties (68%) with less than 100,000 people in Ohio and 28 big counties (32%). The survey respondents were more likely to be from metropolitan counties than not. Also, big counties had a higher representation in the sample compared to Ohio.

**Table 1. Distribution of Counties**

| County Groups                 | Distribution of survey respondents |            | Distribution of counties in Ohio |            |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|------------|
|                               | Number of Counties                 | Percentage | Number of Counties               | Percentage |
| Non-metropolitan Counties     | 12                                 | 40%        | 48                               | 55%        |
| Metropolitan Counties         | 18                                 | 60%        | 40                               | 45%        |
| Small Counties (<100,000 pop) | 17                                 | 57%        | 60                               | 68%        |
| Big Counties (>100,000 pop)   | 13                                 | 43%        | 28                               | 32%        |

Respondents were evenly distributed across the state of Ohio with the southern part returning the survey at a slightly lower rate than the rest of the state (see map on next page).



## ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESPONSES

### CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

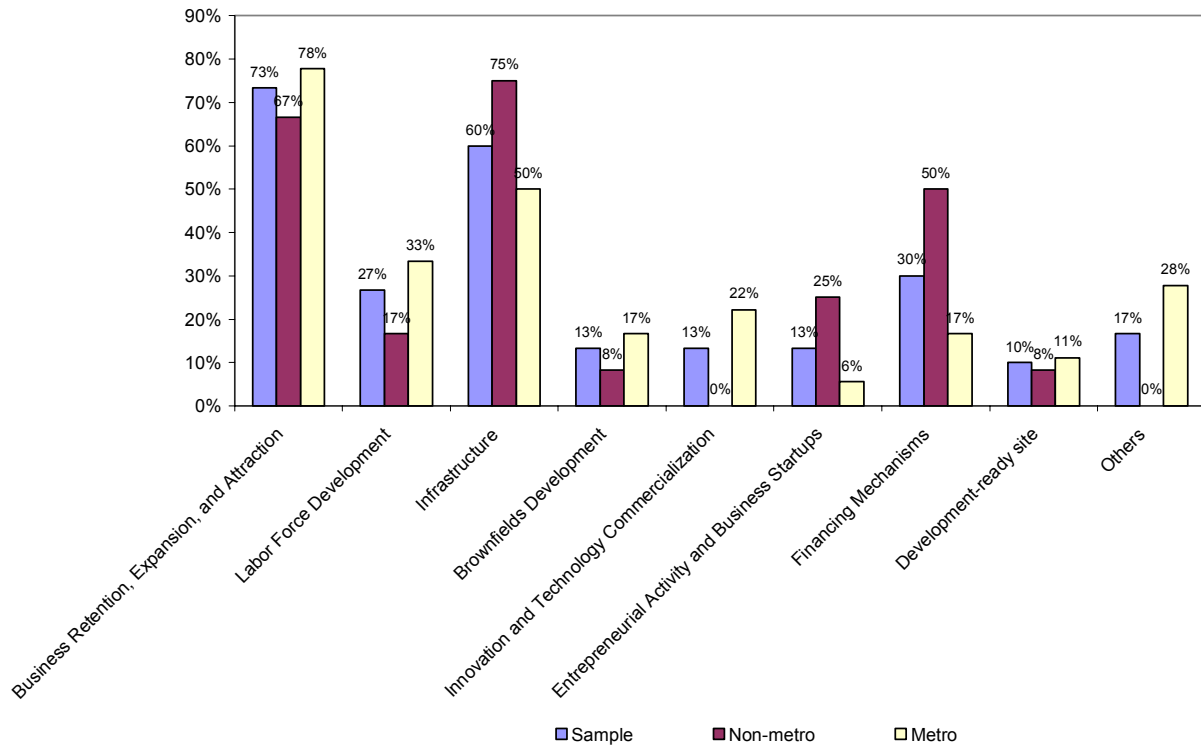
#### Most pressing economic development needs

Respondents were asked to list the three most pressing economic development needs facing their county. Although this question was intended to be open-ended, most respondents used the list from the definition of economic development provided at the top of the survey to answer the question. The responses indicated that the most pressing economic development needs for most counties were business retention, expansion and attraction, selected by 73 percent of respondents, followed by infrastructure (60%) and financing mechanisms (30%) as shown in Figure 1. These responses were expected, since job creation and payroll are critical contributors to a community's tax base. Only 10 percent listed the creation of development-ready sites as a pressing economic development need.

The order of importance varied between the metro and non-metro counties. For the non-metropolitan counties in the sample, the three most pressing economic development needs were infrastructure (75%); business retention, expansion, and attraction (67%); and financing mechanisms (50%). In metropolitan counties, the most pressing economic development needs were business retention, expansion, and attraction (78%); infrastructure (50%); and labor force development (33%).

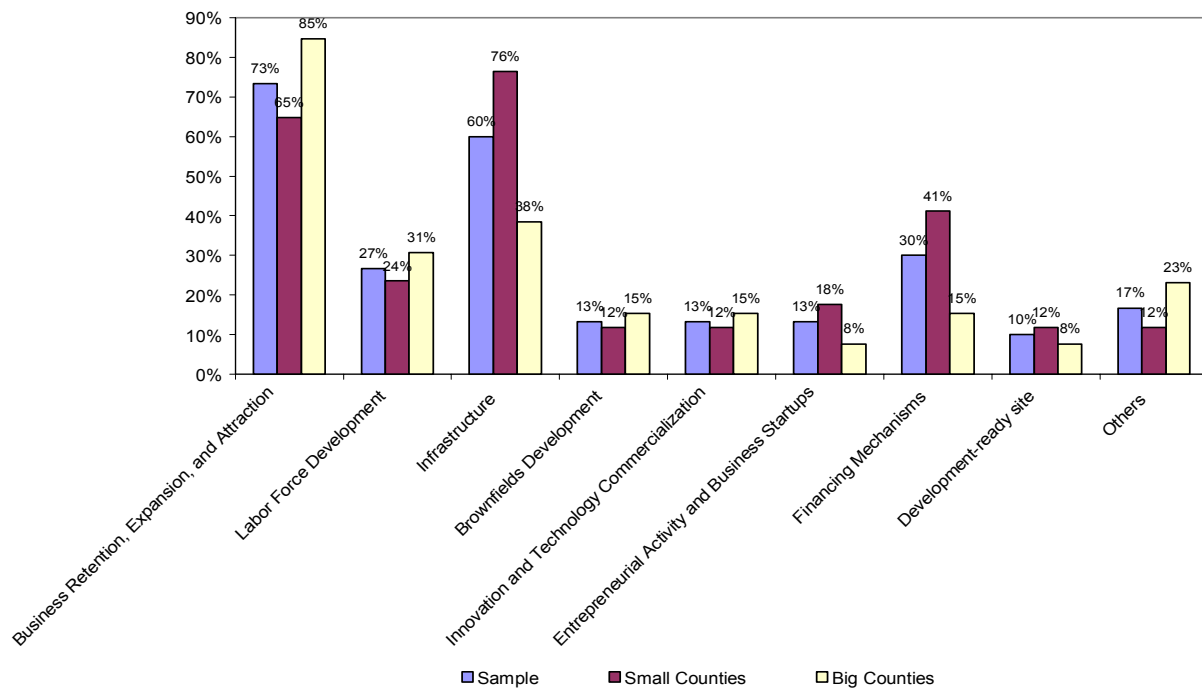
Twenty-eight percent of metropolitan counties cited other pressing economic development needs. For instance, some metro counties listed the need for improved coordination among multi-economic development groups as one of the most pressing economic development needs. Other responses such as the revitalization of county economic development groups, promotion of high technology jobs, elimination of Ohio tax incentives for business expansion and relocation, and overcoming a reputation as a union town were some of the most important economic development needs facing the counties. All counties that listed innovation and technology commercialization as a pressing need were metropolitan. Specific infrastructure development needs reported by respondents ranged from physical infrastructure such as roads, bridges and buildings, to water and sewer, and high speed internet for business parks.

**Figure 1. Most Pressing Economic Development Needs by Metropolitan Status of County**



Analysis of economic development needs based on population size of responding counties yielded a similar distribution to that for metro and non-metro counties. Infrastructure (76%); business retention, expansion, and attraction (65%); and financing mechanisms (41%) were the three most important economic development needs in small counties while business retention, expansion, and attraction (85%); infrastructure (38%); and labor force development (31%) were the most important economic development needs in counties with a population of more than 100,000 (Figure 2). The results show that infrastructure development, entrepreneurial activity and business startups, financing mechanisms, and development-ready sites were a bigger development need for small counties compared to bigger counties. Important differences occurred in the innovation and technology commercialization option; 12 percent of small counties listed this as a pressing need whereas none of the non-metropolitan counties cited this need. Likewise, a higher percentage of small counties (12%) compared to non-metropolitan counties (8%) reported creation of 'shovel-ready' or development-ready sites as important to the county.

**Figure 2. Most Pressing Economic Development Needs by Size of County**



### Source of information on federal economic development grants

Respondents were asked to select from a list of six possible sources the means through which the county received information about federal grant opportunities for economic development. Figure 3 shows that the most dominant source of information on federal grant opportunities for the sample were professional networks (18 respondents). Other sources included requests for proposals (RFPs) from a federal agency, with seven responses followed by newsletters with five responses and the Federal Register with only three responses. Six respondents obtained information about federal funding for economic development through Regional Development Districts and Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) representatives. A few others stated that they did not know of any sources from which they could receive information on federal funding for economic development. For respondents who had no source of information on funding, providing them with a list of funding opportunities and funding agencies would make them more apt to submit proposals. Eighty percent of respondents who did not receive information on federal funding from any source reported that the best way to send them information on federal funding opportunities was by email, and the remaining 20 percent reported that a website would be the best medium.

Both metro and non-metro counties were more likely to receive information through professional networks. A few non-metro counties received information through RFPs and the Federal Register.

Several counties listed professional networks that provide them with information on federal funding opportunities for economic development including Ohio Economic Development Association (OEDA), Ohio Department of Development (ODOD), International Economic



Development Council (IEDC), County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO), and consultants.

**Figure 3. Source of Information on Federal Economic Development Grants by Metropolitan Status of County**

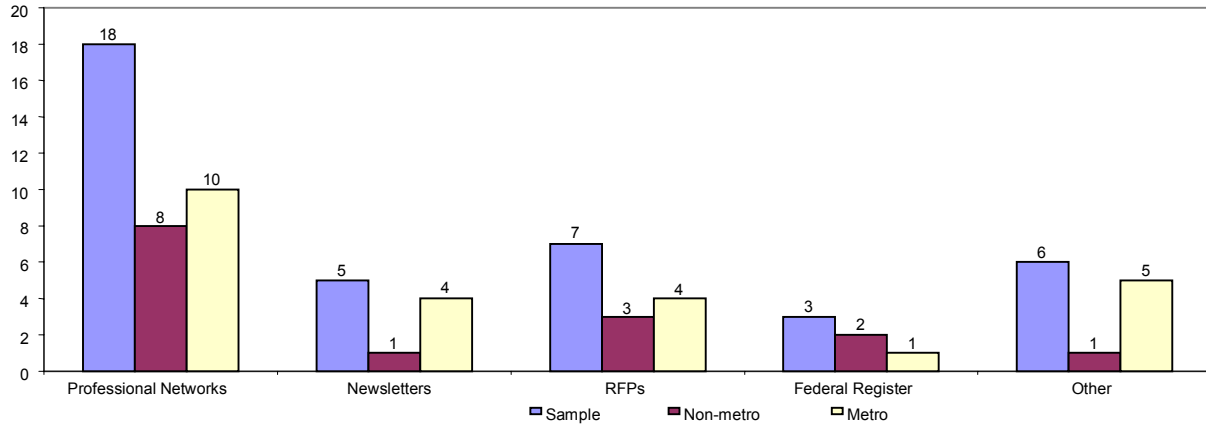
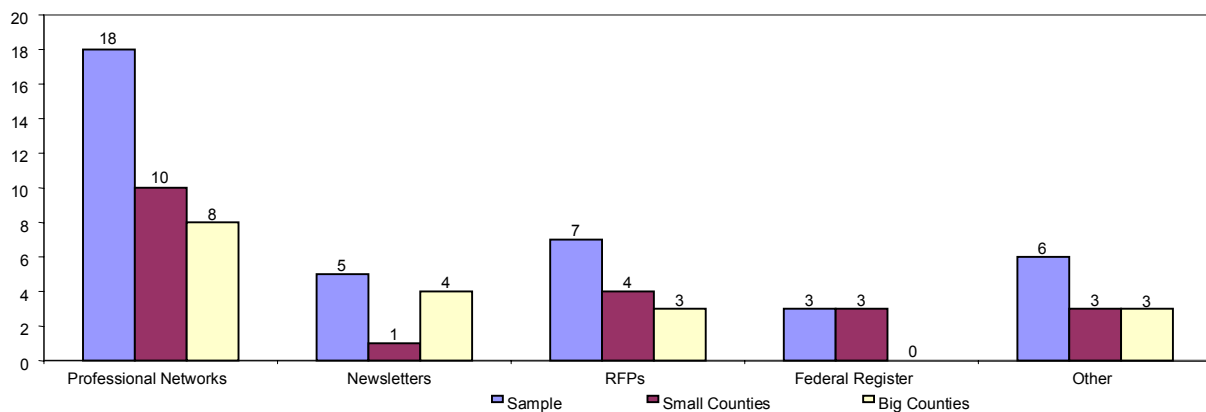


Figure 4 shows that sources of federal funding information based on county size were similar to that for metropolitan and non-metro counties. Professional networks were the prevalent means of information for small counties (10 respondents) and big counties (8 respondents). Newsletters were a more dominant medium for big counties than small counties while the opposite is true for the usage of the Federal Register for grant information.

**Figure 4. Source of Information on Federal Economic Development Grants by Size of County**



### Submission of federal grant proposals to fund economic development activities

Respondents were asked whether they had submitted a grant or loan application to a federal agency in the past five years to fund economic development projects or activities. More than half of respondents (19 counties) reported that they had submitted grants to federal agencies for

economic development initiatives as shown in Figure 5. This is a reassuring number since it indicates that more counties than not realize the importance of economic development and are not deterred by the application process. Seven non-metro counties and 12 metro counties had submitted federal grant proposals in the past five years. The higher number of counties that applied for federal ED grants also shows that if barriers to the application process are decreased, more counties might be willing and able to apply for grants for economic development.

**Figure 5. Submission of Grant Proposals in Past Five Years by Metropolitan Status of County**

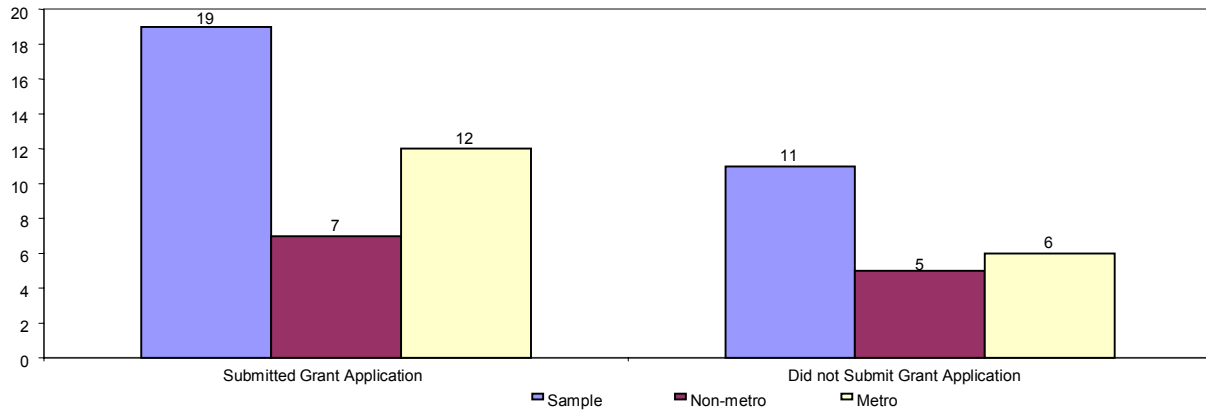
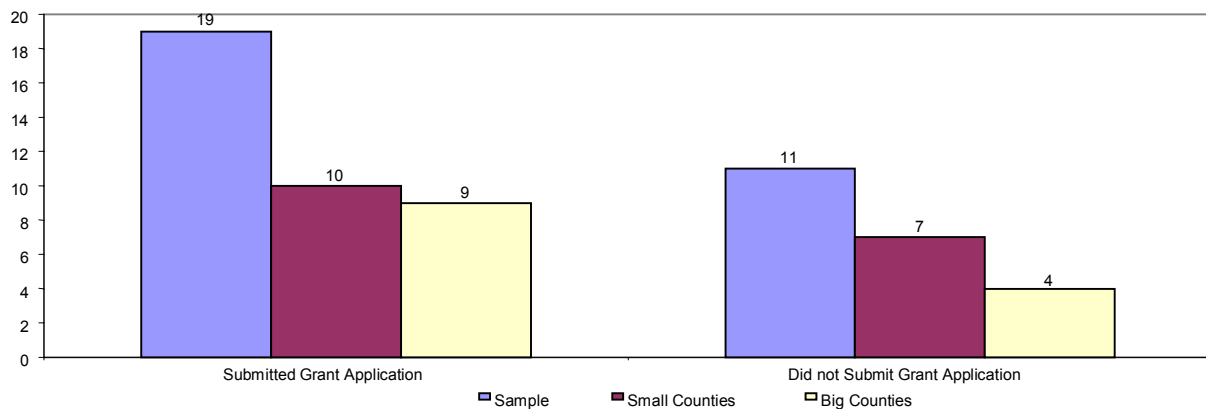


Figure 6 shows the number of counties that submitted federal grant proposals for economic development by size of county. In both big and small counties, the number of counties that submitted proposals was higher than those that did not submit federal proposals for economic development. Big counties, however, submitted federal grant proposals at a higher rate than small counties; 69 percent and 59 percent, respectively.

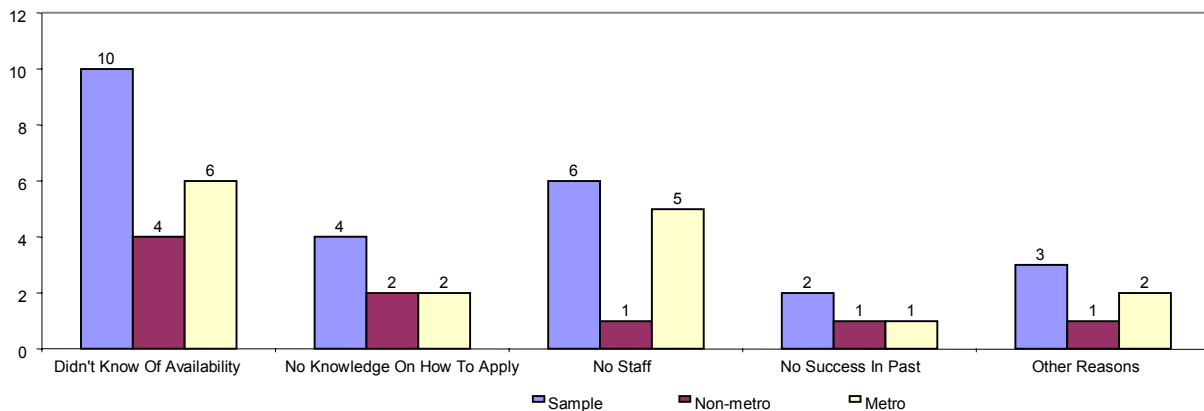
**Figure 6. Submission of Grant Proposals in Past Five Years by Size of County**



### Why did counties fail to submit federal grant proposals for economic development activities?

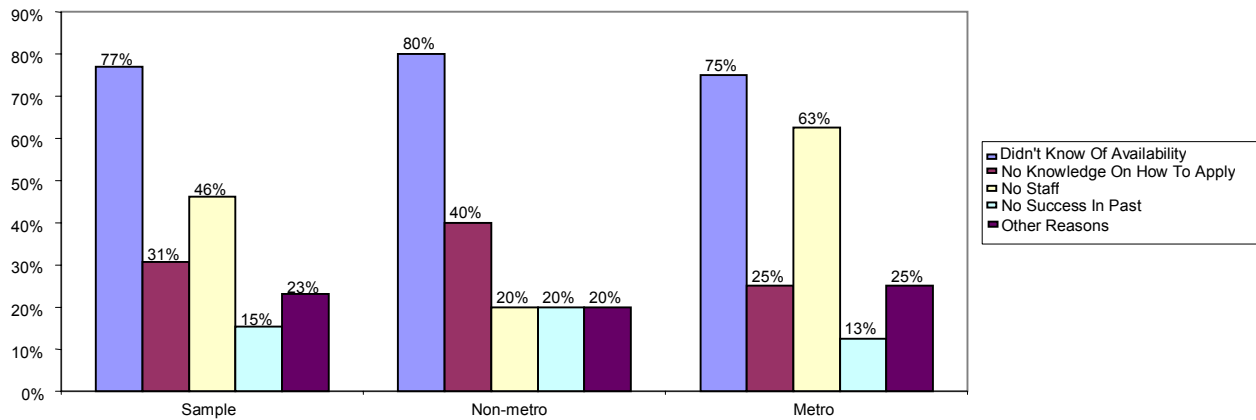
Figure 7 shows the reasons why proposals were not submitted. Ten of the 11 counties (91%) that did not submit federal ED grant proposals reported that they were not aware of the availability of such grants. Other important reasons for not submitting funding proposals were the lack of staff to devote to the process (6 counties) and limited knowledge on how to apply for federal ED grants (4 counties). One metro and non-metro county each did not submit applications for federal ED funding because they were not successful in the past and did not apply because they did not expect to get funded. These results from the responding counties suggest that counties would increase their submission rates if they had information on federal agencies and the type of funding opportunities available from each agency. Access to professional grant writers or collaboration with other local governments or economic development organizations might provide counties with the tools necessary to write and submit grant proposals for federal economic development funding. The three counties that selected other reasons for not submitting proposals reported that the county was not eligible for several federal grants or did not have projects that qualified for federal economic development grants.

**Figure 7. Reasons for Not Applying for Federal ED Grants by Metropolitan Status of County**



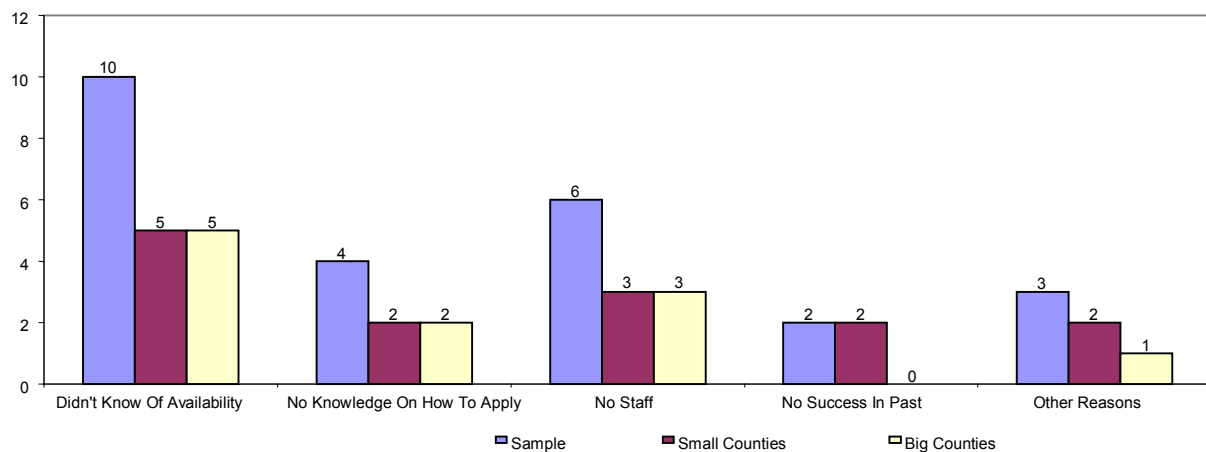
For both metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties, the most common reason for not submitting a proposal for funding economic development projects was the lack of knowledge about the availability of grants as shown in Figure 8 (75% and 80% respectively). For metro counties, the second most important reason was the lack of staff to devote to the grant writing process (83%) whereas for non-metro counties, the second most dominant reason was the lack of knowledge on how to apply for such grants (40%).

**Figure 8. Reasons for Not Applying for Federal ED Grants by Metropolitan Status of County (%)**



How did small and big counties differ in their responses compared to non-metro and metro counties? Figure 9 shows that five small counties responded that they did not submit federal grant proposals because they had no information on grants. Three small counties did not submit federal proposals because they had limited staff, and two had no knowledge on how to apply. The same number of big counties responded in a similar manner. Both counties that reported they did not submit because of their failure to secure grants in the past were small counties. Past failures in receiving grants were more likely to discourage submission in smaller counties than in big counties.

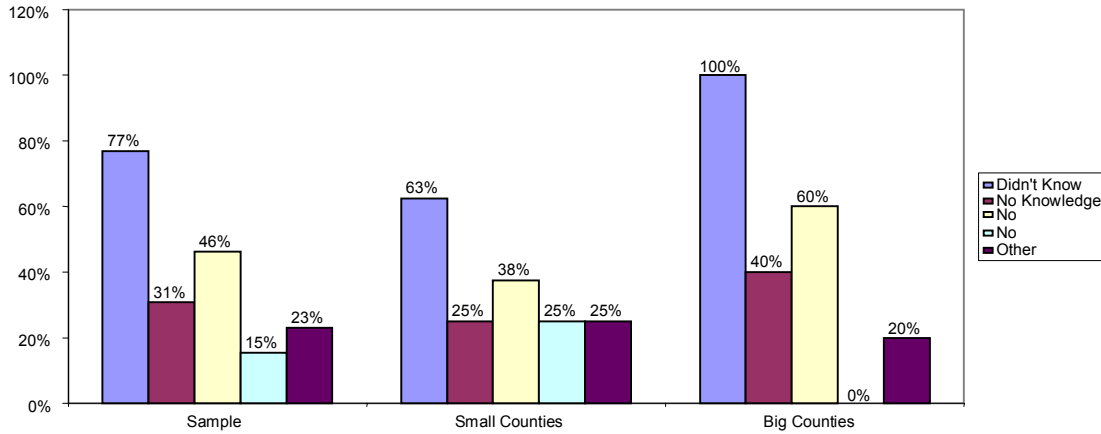
**Figure 9. Reasons for Not Applying for Federal ED Grants by Size of County**



All big counties that did not submit grants reported lack of knowledge as one of the major reasons (Figure 10). Sixty percent of big counties reported that having no staff caused them not to apply; this was followed by 40 percent who did not submit proposals due to lack of information on how to apply. These numbers are higher than that for small counties, 38 percent and 25 percent, respectively. For both counties with populations below and above 100,000, the provision of information on federal grant opportunities for economic development and access to

staff to assist in writing federal proposals will help increase the rates of submission of federal grant proposals for economic development.

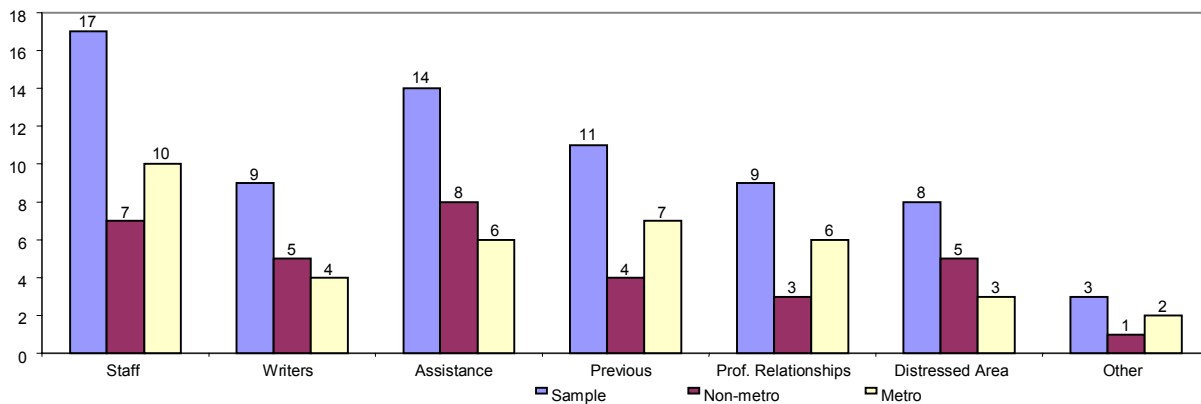
**Figure 10. Reasons for Not Applying for Federal ED Grants by Size of County (%)**



### Reasons for successful grant applications

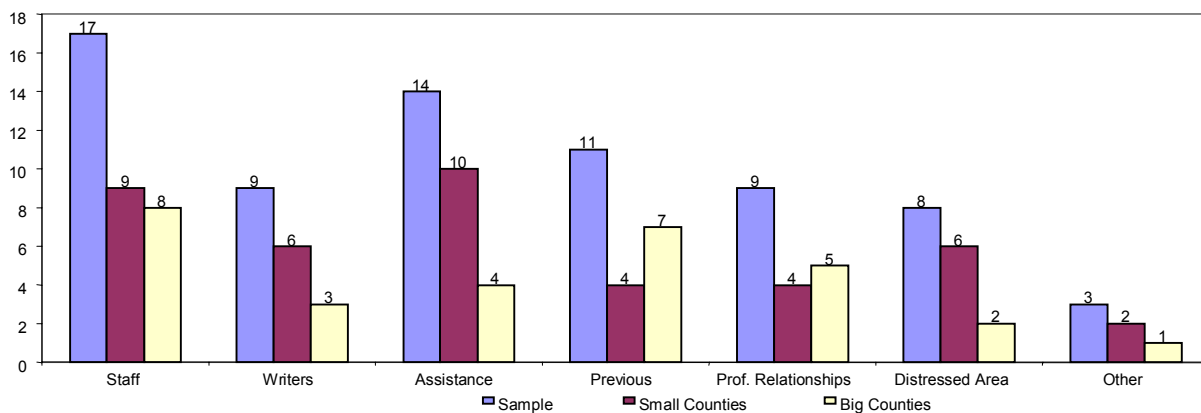
Respondents were asked to indicate the factors that contributed to their success in receiving federal funding. Figure 11 shows the distribution of these responses for the sample, non-metro, and metro counties. For the sample, the most common reasons for success were having staff familiar with the application process (17 respondents), receiving assistance from other organizations (14), and getting previous awards from the same agency (11). Other reasons for success included having professional grant writers, having relationships with staff in the awarding federal agency, and operating in a distressed area that qualifies for federal awards. The major factors that contributed to successful grant applications for non-metro counties were receiving assistance from other organizations (8 counties), having staff familiar with applications to federal agencies (7 counties), operating in a distressed area (5 counties), and having professional grant writers (5 counties). The major factors that influenced success in the grant application process for metro counties were somewhat different from non-metro counties. For instance for metro counties, the most important contributing factors to success was having staff familiar with the process (10 counties) followed by a history of receiving awards from an agency (7 counties), having professional relationships with staff in awarding federal agencies (6 counties), and receiving assistance from other organizations (6 counties).

**Figure 11. Reasons for Successful Grant Application by Metropolitan Status of County**



In small counties, similar to non-metro counties, major reasons for success were assistance from other organizations, knowledgeable staff, professional grant writers, and being in a distressed area (Figure 12). Similar to metro counties, big counties credited staff, previous awards from federal agencies, relationships with staff from awarding federal agencies, and receipt of assistance from other organizations for their success. Receiving previous awards from the same federal agency was of greater importance to big counties since a higher percentage (54%) of these counties selected this option compared to 23 percent of small counties. On the other hand, getting assistance from other organizations was more critical for small counties than for big counties.

**Figure 12. Reasons for Successful Grant Application by Size of County**

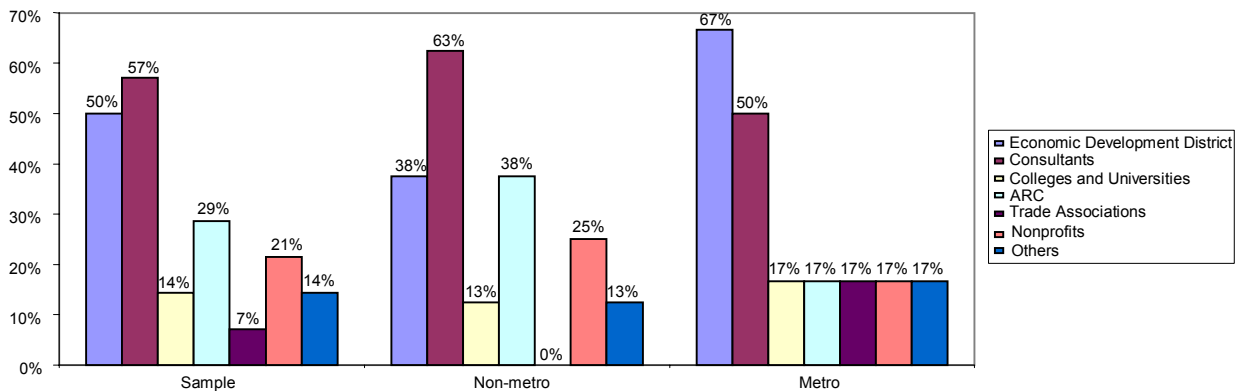


**Source of assistance**

In the previous section, it was shown that 14 counties attributed their successful grant applications to assistance from other organizations. What organizations provided assistance to respondents who were successful in getting federal funding? Figure 13 shows that the 57 percent of the sample that got assistance received it from consultants such as Bleckman & Associates, Burgess & Niple, Peterman & Associates, Poggemeyer Design Group, and Port Authorities. Economic Development Districts, as designated by U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), provided assistance to half of those who got outside assistance in

applying for federal grants. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)<sup>2</sup> and other nonprofits provided assistance to 29 percent and 21 percent, respectively. The most dominant source of assistance for non-metro counties came from consultants (63%), followed by assistance from EDA (38%) and ARC (38%). Also, 25 percent of non-metro respondents reported that other nonprofits were instrumental in their receiving federal economic development grants. In metropolitan counties, the two dominant sources of assistance were Economic Development Districts (67%) and consultants (50%). All the other sources of assistance each provided help to 17 percent of metro counties.

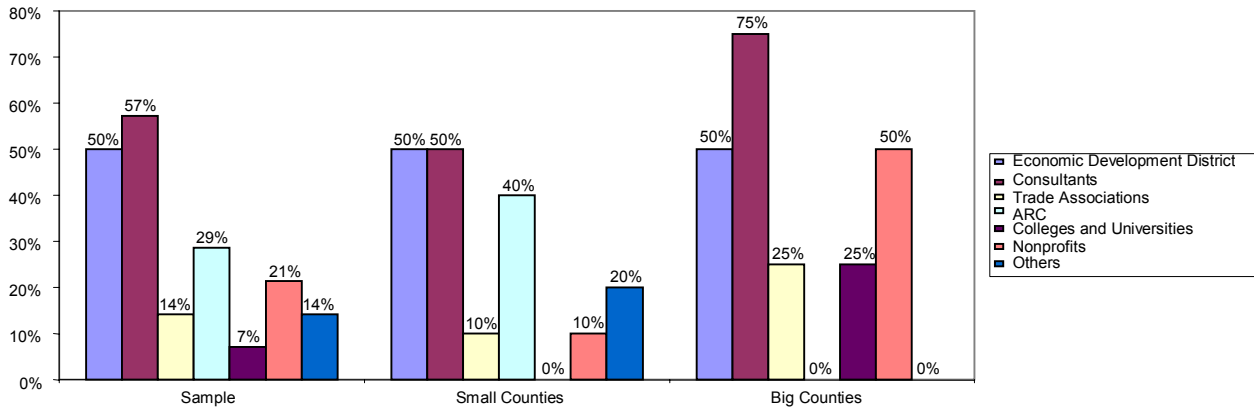
**Figure 13. Source of Assistance Received that Contributed to Success in Federal Grant Application by Metropolitan Status of County**



Responses for small and big counties are shown in Figure 14. Assistance from Economic Development Districts and consultants were of equal importance to small counties, with each providing assistance to 50 percent of small counties compared to 50 percent and 75 percent, respectively, for big counties. ARC provided assistance to 40 percent of small counties. Colleges and universities provided assistance mainly to big counties. Cleveland State University and Lorain County Community College were the two institutions of higher education that assisted respondents in the grant writing process. Nonprofits were an important source of help for big counties.

<sup>2</sup> Counties located in the southeastern part of the state of Ohio received funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). ARC serves 29 counties in Ohio.

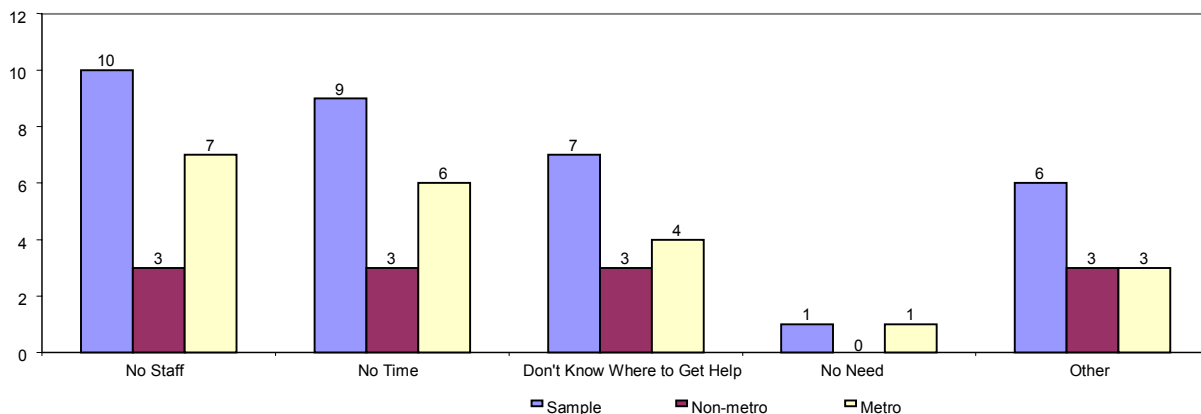
**Figure 14. Source of Assistance Received that Contributed to Success in Federal Grant Application by Size of County**



**Reasons for failed grant applications**

Figure 15 shows some of the major factors that contributed to failure in receiving federal grants for economic development. Counties failed to receive grants because they had no staff with appropriate knowledge and expertise, had no time, or did not know where to get help from outside organizations. These factors each contributed to why three non-metro counties failed to receive federal grants. For metro counties, the most important factor was the lack of knowledgeable staff (7 counties), no time (6 counties), and no knowledge on where to get help. Some counties reported that they did not apply due to federal regulations. This information is very useful because it indicates that if counties have access to professionals with appropriate knowledge and expertise and if they are equipped with information on where to get help from outside organizations, they could increase their success rates.

**Figure 15. Reasons of Failure to Receive Federal ED Grants by Metropolitan Status of County**

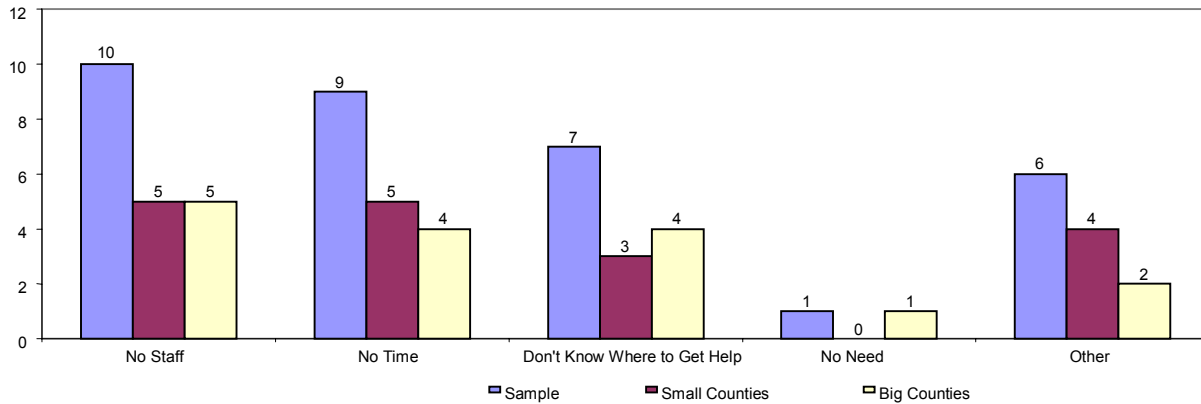


For both small big counties, “no staff” and “no time” were the main factors contributing to their failure followed by no knowledge on where to apply (Figure 16). Access to information will go a



long way towards helping counties get the assistance they need so that they can effectively compete and receive federal grants for economic development.

**Figure 16. Reasons for Failure to Receive Federal ED Grants by Size of County**



### Type of assistance needed to increase number of successful applications for federal funds

Figure 17 presents the type of assistance needed to make counties more successful in the federal grant application process. The sample results show that almost two-thirds of respondents (19 counties) reported that increasing their knowledge of availability of federal funding would make them more successful in securing federal funding. A list of federal agencies for which respondents want more information is provided later in this report. The next most cited forms of assistance needed by counties were access to training in federal grant writing (11 counties), access to people with experience in receiving federal funding (10 counties), and access to professional grant writers (7 counties). In effect, counties want information on where funds are, where to apply, and training so that they can apply more effectively. Next, they want access to experienced professionals who can help write and submit high-quality proposals to increase their chances of getting federal grants.

For both non-metro and metro counties, knowledge of availability of federal funding got the highest number of responses followed by access to training in federal grant writing for non-metro counties and access to people with experience in receiving federal funding for metro counties. A smaller number of counties reported that they needed some other form of assistance, particularly increased local government collaboration and revised federal regulations.

**Figure 17. Type of Assistance Needed by Metropolitan Status of County**

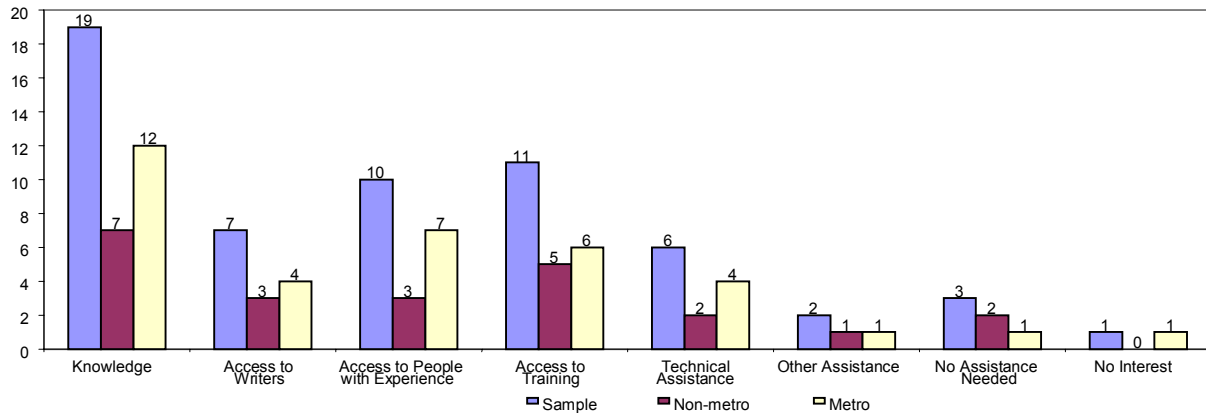
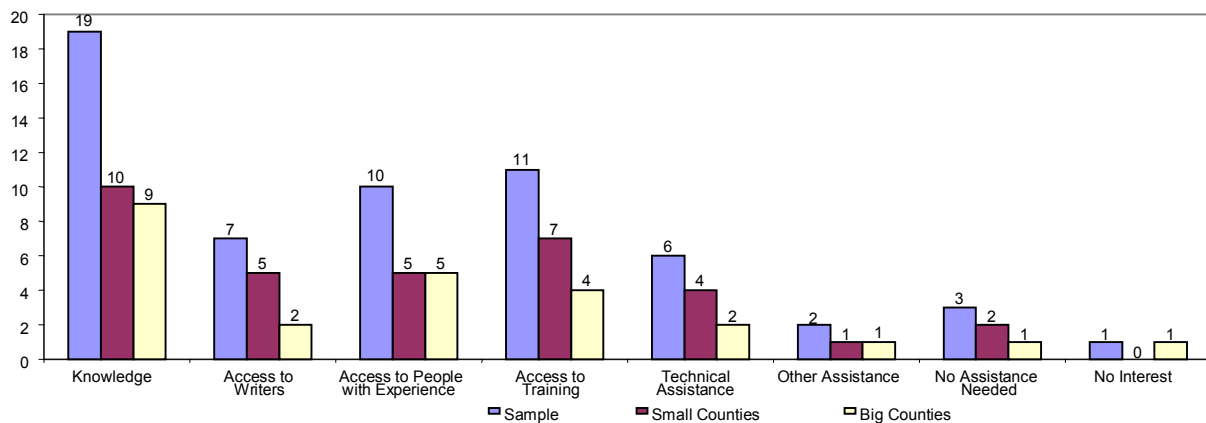


Figure 18 shows the type of assistance needed by size of county. The chart shows that when counties are categorized by population size, the most important assistance needed by both county groups is increased knowledge of availability of federal funding opportunities followed by access to training in federal grant writing for small counties and access to people with experience in receiving federal funding for big counties. These results suggest that an important way to increase federal grant applications by Ohio counties is to provide them with more knowledge on federal funding opportunities and either train them in grant writing or facilitate access to professional grant writers.

**Figure 18. Type of Assistance Needed by County Size**



### Best medium for receiving information

The survey results revealed that it is important to get federal funding information to counties in a more effective manner. Respondents were asked about the medium through which they preferred to receive information on federal grant opportunities. As shown in Figure 19, a majority of counties (21 counties, 70%) responded that email would be the best way to get information about federal funding opportunities. Metro counties were more likely to choose email than non-metro counties. The next most important way to get information was through a website (9 counties, 30%) and a newsletter (7 counties, 23%). A combination of email and website or newsletter will most likely reach all counties.

**Figure 19. Best Medium for Receiving Grant Information by Metropolitan Status of County**

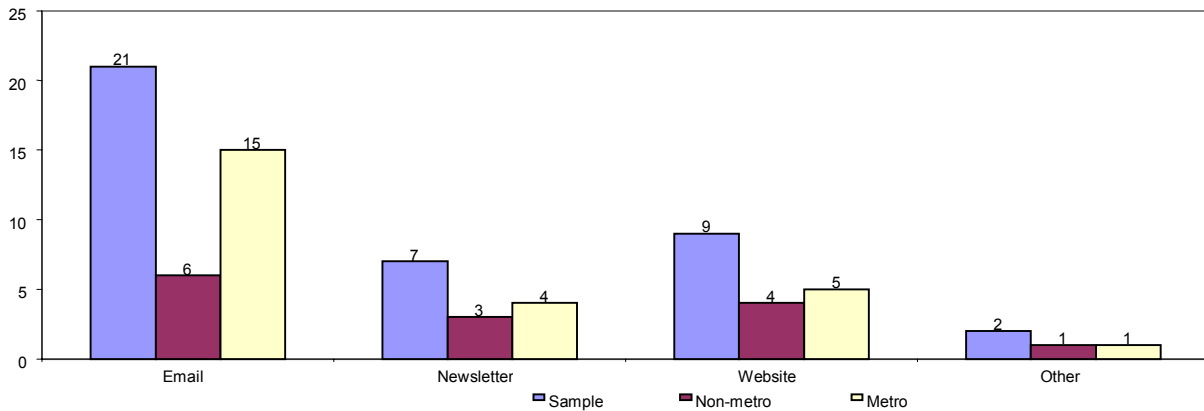
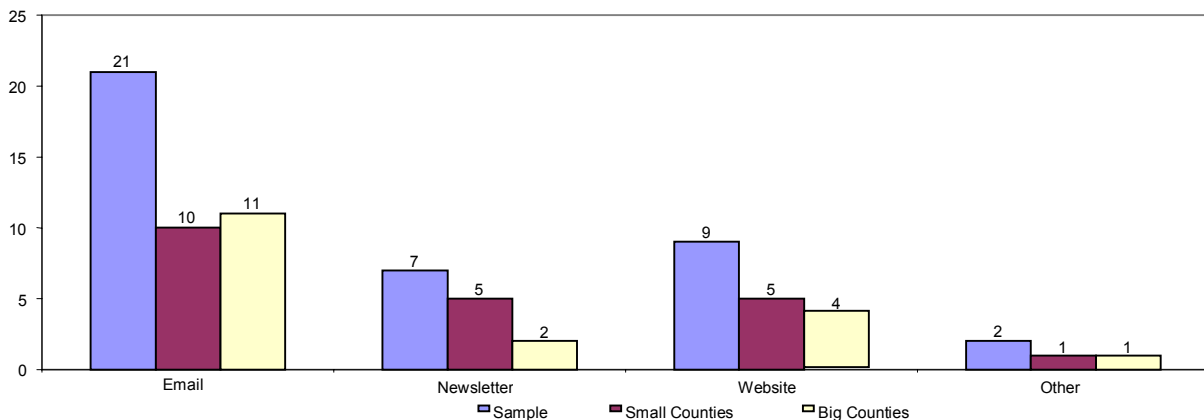


Figure 20 shows the preferred medium of receiving federal funding information by county population size. As in non-metro and metro counties, the majority of small counties (10 counties, 59%) and big counties (11 counties, 85%) preferred email. While small counties were indifferent between receiving federal grant information through a website or newsletter, big counties preferred a website over a newsletter.

**Figure 20. Best Medium for Receiving Grant Information by County Size**

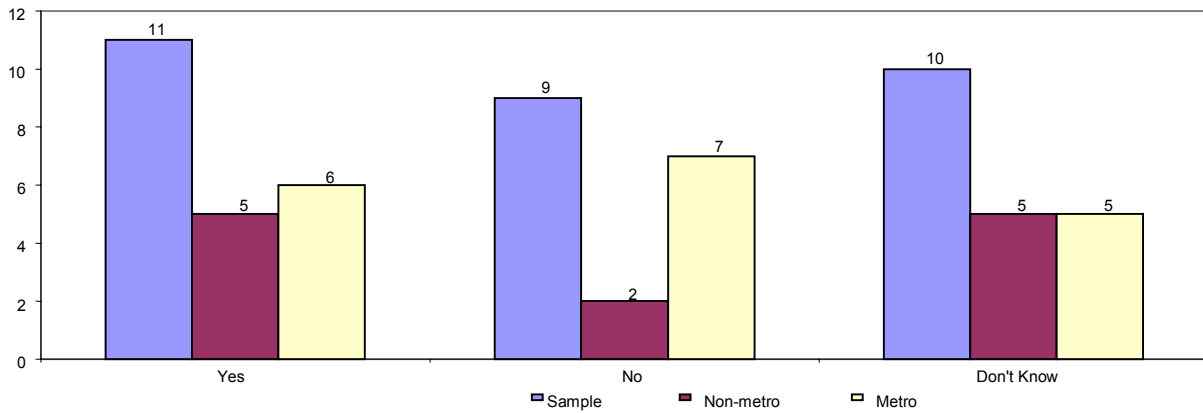


### Goal of increasing applications for federal funding for economic development

Figure 21 shows whether county governments have the goal of increasing the number of applications for federal funding for economic development. Eleven counties responded yes, nine responded no, while 10 responded that they did not know. Non-metro counties were more likely to respond yes to this question compared to metro counties. Only two non-metro counties said they did not currently have the goal of increasing the number of applications for federal funding for economic development. Surprisingly, seven metropolitan counties responded that they did not intend to increase the number of applications for federal economic development funding, a slightly higher number than those who responded in the affirmative.

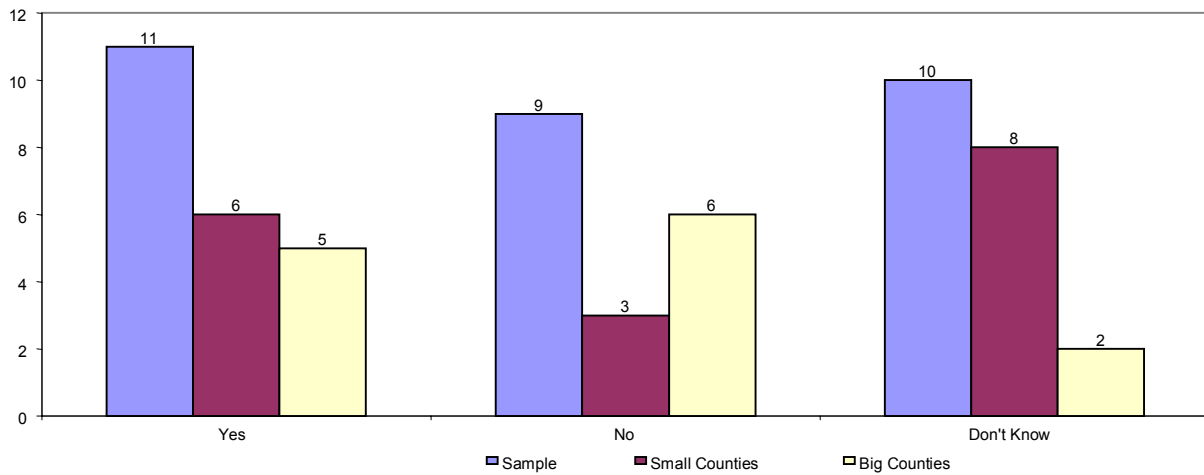
Despite this response, counties should still be sent information on grants because this response could be due to their failures in the past and other reasons such as no time or no staff with experience in the process. Another possible reason for these results is the lack of strategic or future planning. Once assistance is provided to counties to make their applications more competitive and successful, they are likely to submit more applications for federal funding.

**Figure 21. Goal to Increase Applications for Federal Funding for ED by Metropolitan Status**



For small counties, twice as many counties responded that they wanted to increase the number of applications compared to those who did not want to increase applications (Figure 22). Eight small counties did not know what their county’s economic development goals were. The number of big counties that responded that they wanted to increase federal applications was almost the same as those who responded “no,” with the negative responses being slightly higher than the positive responses.

**Figure 22. Goal to Increase Applications for Federal Funding for ED by Size of County**



### Involvement in regional (multi-county) economic development initiatives

How involved are survey respondents in regional economic development initiatives? Most of the counties surveyed (23 counties) responded that they were involved in regional or multi-county economic development initiatives, as shown in Figure 23. The proportion of non-metro counties that are involved in multi-county economic development initiatives is similar to that for metro counties. Regional (multi-county) economic development initiatives are important because they can help counties pull resources together to better all communities involved in the partnership. Although 23 counties reported that they are involved in regional (multi-county) economic development initiatives, only two reported that collaboration with another county helped them receive federal funding for economic development. This suggests the need to explore whether regional collaboration may lead to more federal funding or whether federal funding is geared to individual political jurisdictions.

**Figure 23. Regional (Multi-County) Economic Development Initiative by Metropolitan Status of County**

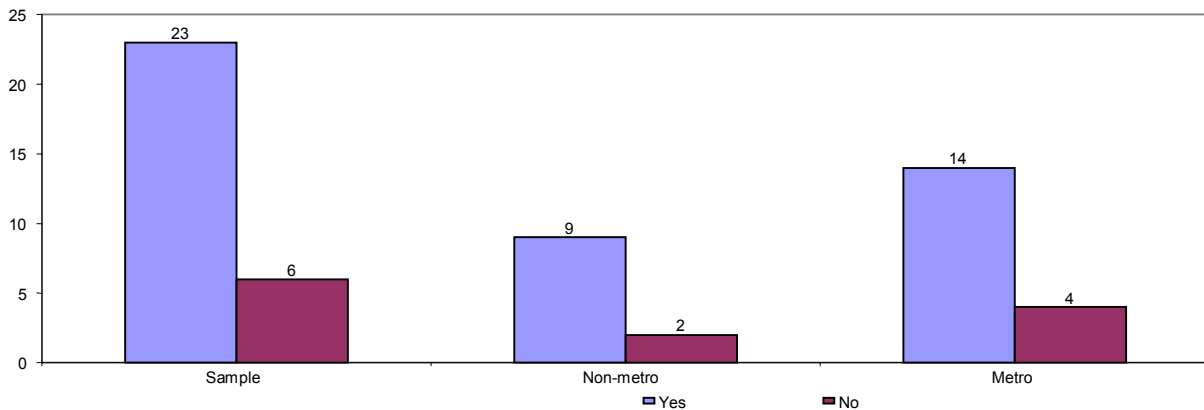
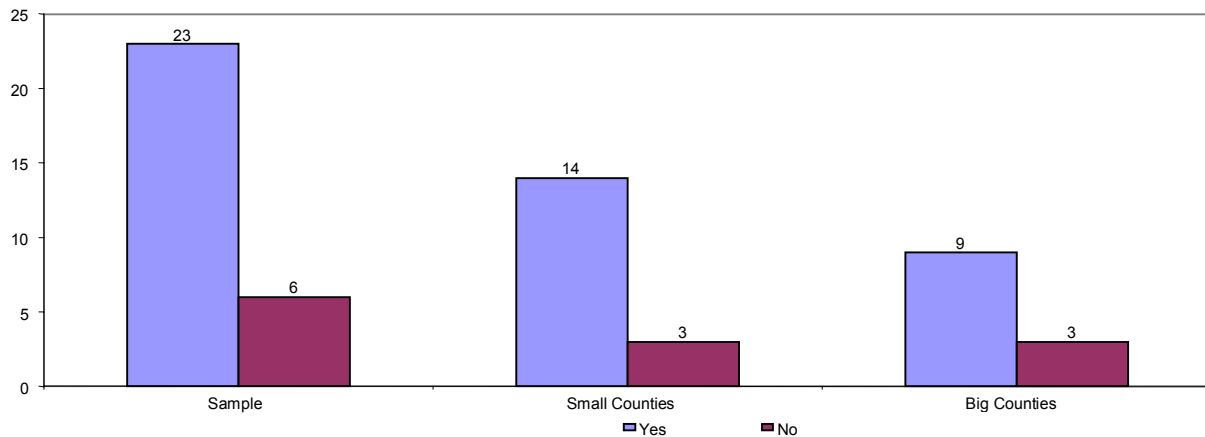


Figure 24 shows the regional collaboration of small and big counties in the survey. A majority of small counties (14) and big counties (9) reported that they were involved in regional economic development initiatives. The survey did not ask details about the collaborative efforts of counties. No information was obtained about how strong the collaboration is and what areas of local government they occur in.

**Figure 24. Regional (Multi-County) Economic Development Initiative by Size of County**



### Number of years of receipt of funding from federal agencies

Experience with the federal funding process usually translates into higher rates of success for counties in receiving additional federal grants. In order to get a sense of the level of experience of respondents, they were asked to indicate the number of years for which they had been receiving funding from federal agencies. From Table 2, it can be seen that eight counties reported that they had not received federal funding or had a history of federal funding of less than a year. Seven of these were metro counties. Also, three had received funding for one to 10 years, eight for 11-20 years, and two for more than 20 years. Metro counties were more likely to have longer years of receiving funding from federal agencies.

Five small counties had received funding for 11 to 20 years, a slightly higher rate than for big counties. This could be due to small metro areas being more proactive in trying to catch up to metro counties through increased development activities. Big counties received funding from federal agencies at higher rates for all other categories than small counties. It was expected that metro and big counties would have more experience with funding from federal agencies than non-metro and small counties.

Two counties responded that they had been receiving funding for several years but did not indicate the specific number of years; on the other hand, seven counties skipped this question.

**Table 2. Number of Years Respondents Have Received Funding From Federal Agencies**

|                    | Less than 1 year | 1-10 years | 11-20 years | over 20 years | No response |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| Sample             | 8                | 3          | 8           | 2             | 7           |
| Non-metro Counties | 1                | 1          | 3           | 0             | 6           |
| Metro Counties     | 7                | 2          | 5           | 2             | 1           |
| Small Counties     | 3                | 1          | 5           | 0             | 7           |
| Big Counties       | 5                | 2          | 3           | 2             | 0           |

## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS

### Number of times counties applied for and received federal funding in the past five years

For counties that had submitted federal grant proposals in the past five years, a follow-up question asked for the number of times counties had applied for federal funding. Five of the 19 counties that had submitted federal grant proposals (refer to Figures 5 and 6) had submitted only one federal grant proposal each. Six counties submitted two to six proposals, three counties submitted between five and 10 proposals, and two submitted more than 10 proposals each.

Respondents were also asked the number of funding awards they received of the grant applications sent in the past five years. Ten counties reported that they received funding for all the proposals they submitted, with the number of successful proposals ranging from one to five for these counties. Two counties received a third or less than half the number submitted, while three other counties received half or more than half but not all grants submitted.

### Source of information on funding opportunity applied for

Respondents were asked how they found out about the funding opportunities they had applied for. The results showed that counties that submitted federal grants in the past five years found out about the funding opportunities for which they applied through different means including ODOT representatives, Congressmen, local partnerships with other county and state offices, consultants, NOFA, CFDA, Buckeye Hills, and U.S. DOL.

### Assets or strengths

Respondents were asked to list some of the strengths that enabled them to be successful in the federal grant application process. Several of the strengths that made the federal grant process successful related to availability of resources. In particular, having experienced grant writers and professional staff such as county engineers and planners and knowledge of federal grant programs and funding opportunities were some of the common strengths that led to successful federal grant applications. Other assets that counties had were networks with local, state, and federally elected staff as well as growth partnerships and coordination/collaboration between counties and economic development offices. Others reported that they were able to accurately assess problems and opportunities, had innovative program ideas, followed through on

identified initiatives, and paid attention to detail in the grant application. One respondent reported that their good working relationship with ODOD was their main asset. Several respondents also reported that their responsible and efficient administration of federal funds in the past contributed to their success. A few others indicated that their regional priorities and location helped them obtain federal funding.

These strengths in counties that have been successful in the federal grant process will help to establish a roadmap of some things that have worked. Non-successful counties could adopt some of these techniques to help make them more competitive in the federal grant application process. For instance, access to resources such as professional grant writers or consultants with experience pertaining to applications to federal agencies could go a long way towards empowering counties to be more successful in applying for federal grants.

### **Barriers to successful application for federal funding**

In addition to their strengths, respondents were asked about the main reasons they were unsuccessful in applying for and receiving federal funding. Some of the most common responses given were the lack of staff to devote to the process or the lack of grant writers, lack of knowledge on the availability of funds and funding sources, and the lack of experience on the federal funding process. Others reported that the major barriers were the lack of multi (county) government collaboration, lack of matching funds for grants, and rigid criteria and restrictions on the use of federal funds. Other common responses were the lack of time, the competitive nature of grants which tended to discourage them from applying, and too much paper work and “federal red tape” to navigate through. One county stated that it did not have the budget to hire a consultant, and another reported that it had limited resources to devote to the whole federal grant application process. Another barrier reported was that valuable facts in the funding process were not effectively communicated. One county complained that regional programs and partnerships had to be made before the application was made and this made on-time submission of applications difficult. Another county noted that lack of training on the grant application process was a barrier. A couple of counties reported that county demographics and location in the southern part of Ohio put them at a disadvantage.

The barriers listed by respondents are very insightful and provide policy makers and economic development professionals with some tools to help change or decrease some of these barriers. For instance, access to training in the grant writing process will make the application process less daunting and make county grant writers more efficient and potentially increase their competitiveness. In addition, access to consultants or professional grant writers or officials familiar with the federal grant application process can help remove barriers facing counties.

### **Information on specific grants**

Respondents who had been successful in the federal grant application process were asked to list information on the federal agencies to which they applied, the purpose of the grants, and the amount of money requested and received. Questions were also asked on whether they had submitted proposals to the agency in the past, whether application were in response to federal mandates, and the time period for the grant.

Although the survey asked for federal grant information, counties also listed state grants. Responses indicated that applications were made to various federal agencies and the dollar amounts requested ranged from \$50,000 to \$6 million. Respondents to the survey made federal



grant applications to 20 different federal agencies in the past five years. The Department of Labor received applications from seven counties, the highest of all the federal agencies, followed by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), each with four applications. Three applications were submitted to Ohio Department of Development (ODOD), and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and Economic Development Administration (EDA) received applications from two counties each. Several other agencies each received federal grant applications from one county—Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS), Industrial Development, Natureworks, Federal Highway, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Federal Covered Bridge Fund, Division of Waterworks, Corp of Engineers, Chemical Insecticide Corporation (CIC-Brownfields), Buckeye Hills, and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). A majority of grants (11) were submitted in 2007. Five grants were submitted in 2002 and four in 2003.

### **Previous submission of proposal to federal agency**

Respondents who had submitted grant proposals to federal agencies were asked whether it was their first time applying to that agency. This is important since respondents reported that one of the reasons they were successful in the federal grant application process was their previous awards from the same agencies. The results show that while 13 of the applications were being made to the federal agency for the first time, 23 applications were made to agencies with which the county had a previous history. The higher number of those with previous submissions indicates the importance of previous applications and the fact that success with a particular federal agency was likely to result in continued applications to that agency. Earlier analysis in this report showed that 11 counties reported that they were successful in receiving grants because they had received previous awards from the federal agency.

### **Purpose of grants**

Respondents were asked to list the economic development needs for which federal grant applications were submitted. Responses revealed that economic development purposes for which federal grants were submitted fall into five major categories—infrastructure; labor force development; business retention, expansion, and attraction; economic development in general; and brownfields development. A few others fall under some different categories discussed below.

The economic development purpose with the highest occurrences was infrastructure development (13 submitted proposals) followed by labor force development (7), business retention, expansion, and attraction (7), and brownfields development (4). The federal proposals submitted for infrastructure development purposes were predominantly for water and sewer projects. Other infrastructure development projects were for roads, bridges and highways, and broadband to technology parks. Business retention, expansion, and attraction proposals were submitted primarily for the development of industrial parks. One proposal each was submitted for entrepreneurship and business startups, financing mechanisms, increasing regional collaboration, creating development-ready sites, homeland security—airport, air guard base, cleanup of watershed, and purchase of Enhanced 911 (E911) equipment.

At the beginning of the analysis in this report, it was shown that the two most pressing needs for respondents were business retention, expansion, and attraction and infrastructure. The

submitted proposals confirm that these are the two areas of greatest need since the majority of proposals submitted over the past five years were for these two economic development purposes.

### **Federal mandate**

Federal grants applications submitted by respondents were rarely in response to federal mandates. Only two out of the 40 grants submitted by counties were in response to federal mandates, with one stating that the proposal was specifically in response to EPA mandates. Grant proposals were not submitted simply because they had to be submitted, but because local policy makers want to increase the standard of living of their constituencies and build the economic wealth of their communities.

### **Amount received versus amount requested**

Respondents were also asked about the dollar amounts requested in submitted proposals and the amount received from federal agencies. The highest dollar amount applied for and received was for \$6 million and the lowest was for \$50,000. Seventeen counties (57%) received funding from federal agencies over the past five years with each county listing one to three awards. A majority of applicants received the entire amount they applied for. Of the 32 proposals with complete data, 27 (84%) received 100 percent of requested funding, three respondents (9%) received five to 10 percent less than the amount requested, and one received 0.6 percent less than requested. Only one respondent received half of the requested amount (\$500,000 instead of one million dollars). It appears that although some respondents did not receive funding for some proposals, they did not provide information on the grant proposals that failed to get funding. The three proposals that did not get funded were in the amounts of \$5 million submitted to ODOT for a new highway interchange, \$1 million submitted to the Corp of Engineers for water and sewer and an air guard base, and \$3 million submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor-Wired Program for economic development.

### **Federal agency information**

In order to make federal funding opportunities more accessible to counties, it is important to survey the specific federal agencies counties are interested in. Information about these agencies including the types of projects that are funded and application instructions and deadlines could then be made available to counties through periodic emails, newsletters, or a website. A majority of respondents requested more information on the following federal agencies: Economic Development Administration (EDA), Department of Labor (DOL), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Education (DOE), and Department of Commerce (DOC). A few respondents also wanted knowledge on availability of funding from the Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Development (DOD), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Three counties were more general in their request. One county wanted information on all agencies that fund economic development projects, another wanted federal agencies that fund workforce development, infrastructure rebuilding, and expansion, and a third wanted information on federal agencies that provide funding for infrastructure or land development.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

All of the counties surveyed reported having economic development needs they wanted to address. While some counties had submitted applications and had been successful, others were not successful in the application process. Some counties did not submit applications for federal funding. For all counties, various factors contributed to their success or failure in getting federal funding. Most counties reported that they needed some form of assistance to become more successful in applying for federal funding for economic development purposes.

The most pressing economic development needs for counties in the survey were business retention, expansion, and attraction; infrastructure; financing mechanisms; and labor force development. The importance of these economic development needs was confirmed by the fact that grant applications submitted in the past five years were mostly for projects in these areas.

More than half of the respondents obtained grant information from professional networks. Newsletters, requests for proposals (RFPs), and the Federal Register were used to a lesser extent. Counties that reported having no reliable source of information on federal grants indicated that email would be the best way to get information to them.

More than 50 percent of the sample had submitted proposals in the past five years. More than a third of respondents (37%) reported that they planned to increase applications for federal funding for economic development.

However, 37 percent of counties did not submit proposals. The main reasons why respondents did not submit proposals were because they were not aware of availability of funding, lacked staff to devote to it, or lacked knowledge on the federal grant writing process. Past failures deterred only two counties from reapplying.

The results showed that the three most important reasons for successful grant applications were having staff familiar with applications to federal agencies, receiving assistance from other organizations, and getting previous awards from the same agency. Having professional grant writers and having professional relationships with staff in awarding federal agencies were also important factors for successful federal grant applications. The most cited source of outside assistance in the federal grant writing process was consultants, followed closely by Economic Development Districts. The reasons why some counties were successful in securing federal economic development grants can provide a guide or roadmap for less successful counties.

Most counties that did not receive federal funding for economic development purposes attributed the failure to lack of staff with the necessary expertise in receiving grants, lack of time, and lack of information on where to get outside assistance. Providing counties with information and training will help reduce some of the barriers to successful applications. These results are very informative in that they provide some tools to help increase submission of federal grant proposals for economic development and perhaps success of proposals.

When counties were asked to name the type of assistance they perceived to be most needed, almost two-thirds (63%) responded that they needed more knowledge on the availability of federal funding. A third of the sample reported that access to training in federal grant writing and access to people with experience in receiving federal funding were key areas where assistance was needed. Most respondents asked for more information on both federal and state agencies.

Seventy percent of respondents reported that email was the preferred method of receiving federal funding information followed by a website and newsletter. The type of assistance needed by counties can therefore be transmitted via email and a website or newsletter.

About a third of the sample reported that they intended to increase applications for federal funding. A third responded that they did not intend to increase applications for federal funding for economic development, and the remaining one-third were not sure if the county planned to increase applications.

Applications submitted in the past five years were made to several federal agencies. Dollar amounts received ranged from \$50,000 to \$6 million. A majority of respondents received funding for the entire amount applied for. For 23 applications, the county had submitted grants to that same federal agency in the past compared to 13 first time applications. Counties were more likely to continue to submit proposals to federal agencies they were familiar with.

Although a majority of counties reported that they were involved in some regional (multi-county) economic development initiative, only two reported that such collaborations resulted in successful grant applications. More information on the type of partnerships that could help counties increase successful federal funding applications could be included in the information provided to counties.

The results from the survey suggest that if counties are provided with information about availability of federal funding for economic development, training on grant writing, and given access to professionals who can assist in identifying eligible projects and writing proposals, they are more likely to increase applications for federal economic development funding. In addition, counties may also become more successful in the application process.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The results from this survey have already proved to be beneficial in shaping some policy initiatives. The office of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown and other partners have begun to implement some of the findings of this report. Specifically, they have conducted several seminars across the state of Ohio on how to access federal funding. They are also helping local communities with where they can obtain information on funding. In addition, the office of Senator Brown is working on identifying resources to link communities with people who can help them in the federal grant writing and application process. Another important step is stressing the importance of having a good working relationship with the congressional offices since they were a good source of information for some counties in the survey. Finally the survey findings will lead to the creation of a database of contacts of people, organizations, and institutions that can help with federal funding issues.

# APPENDIX A

## Survey on Federal Funding for Economic Development

### Survey Purpose

Federal grants can provide significant resources to communities; however, taking advantage of these resources requires the time and skill to investigate and pursue funding opportunities that fit the economic development priorities of a locale. Federal grants are scarce, and competition for these grants is very high. This survey is intended to gather input from both the experienced grant writer and the novice. The end result will initiate a database that will guide users through a catalogue of programs from a wide variety of federal departments that award economic development grants. Ultimately, this survey will result in the creation of a “help desk” to provide assistance to beginners so that the grant application process can be mastered. Please respond to the survey by November 10<sup>th</sup> and return it in the postage-paid return envelope or fill out the survey online at the following website: [http://urban.csuohio.edu/surveys/ed\\_federal\\_funding.shtml](http://urban.csuohio.edu/surveys/ed_federal_funding.shtml).

### Definition of Economic Development

Economic development refers to building the economic wealth of communities and regions and increasing the standard of living for their residents. Different people define the specifics of economic development in different ways; however, for this survey we define economic development as including the following areas:

- Business retention, expansion, and attraction
- Labor force development
- Infrastructure
- Brownfields development
- Innovation and technology commercialization
- Entrepreneurial activity and business startups
- Financing mechanisms

1. What are your three most pressing economic development needs?

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### Experience with Federal Grants for Economic Development

2. From what source do you currently receive information about federal grant opportunities for economic development?

- Professional networks. Please list names \_\_\_\_\_
- Newsletters. Please list names \_\_\_\_\_
- Request for Proposal (RFP) from a federal agency. Please list names \_\_\_\_\_
- Federal Register
- Other. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

3. Have you **submitted** grant or loan applications to a federal agency in the past five years to fund economic development projects or activities?  Yes  No

A. If no, why not? (Please ✓ all that apply)

- Did not know about their availability
- Did not have the knowledge on how to apply
- Did not have enough staff to devote to it
- Did not receive grants in the past and chose not to apply again. Please explain. \_\_\_\_\_

Other reasons. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

- B. If yes,  
Over the past five years, how many times did you apply? \_\_\_\_\_  
How did you find out about the funding opportunity? Please specify \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Of all the grant applications you submitted in the past five years, how many funding awards did you receive? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What assets or strengths in your own or other organizations enable you to receive federal funding?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What do you see as the main barriers to organizations like yours successfully applying for and receiving federal funding?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What factors contributed to your success in receiving federal grants? (Please ✓ all that apply)
- Having staff familiar with applications to federal agencies
  - Having professional grant writers or staff with the knowledge and expertise pertaining to applications to federal agencies
  - Receiving assistance from other organizations
    - Economic Development Districts (as designated by the U.S. EDA)
    - Consultants (please name) \_\_\_\_\_
    - Trade Associations (please name) \_\_\_\_\_
    - Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) \_\_\_\_\_
    - Colleges and universities (please name) \_\_\_\_\_
    - Other nonprofits (please name) \_\_\_\_\_
    - Others (please name) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Getting previous awards from the same agency
  - Having relationships with staff in the awarding federal agency
  - Operating in a distressed area, which is necessary for the federal award
  - Other factors, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
8. What factors contributed to your failure in receiving federal grants? (Please ✓ all that apply)
- No staff with the appropriate knowledge and expertise
  - No time necessary to complete application successfully
  - Did not know where to get help from outside organizations
  - My area does not need federal funds
  - Other factors. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

9. Does your organization currently have a goal to increase the number of applications for federal funding for economic development?  Yes  No  Not sure

10. What type of assistance do you need to increase your number of successful applications for federal funds? (Please ✓ all that apply)

Knowledge of availability of federal funding. Please name specific agencies about which you would like information. \_\_\_\_\_

Access to professional grant writers

Access to people with experience in receiving federal funding

Access to training in federal grant writing

Technical assistance from trade associations

Other assistance. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

No assistance needed

No interest in federal funding

11. What type of medium would be the most helpful to receive information on federal grant opportunities (e.g., email, website, newsletter)? \_\_\_\_\_

12. How many years have you been receiving funding from federal agencies? \_\_\_\_\_

### Information on Specific Economic Development Federal Grants

13. For each grant application in the past five years, whether successful in receiving funding or not, respond to the following questions (respond to as many applications as you submitted. Please use additional paper if you applied more than three times):

#### **Grant application #1**

To which federal agency did you apply? (Please name agency and program) \_\_\_\_\_

Was that your first application to this agency?  Yes  No

What was the purpose of your grant application? \_\_\_\_\_

Was your grant application in response to federal mandates? If yes, which ones? \_\_\_\_\_

Dollar amount applied for \_\_\_\_\_

Dollar amount received (if received funding) \_\_\_\_\_

Time period (year or month) applied for \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Grant application #2**

To which federal agency did you apply? (Please name agency and program) \_\_\_\_\_

Was that your first application to this agency?  Yes  No

What was the purpose of your grant application? \_\_\_\_\_

Was your grant application in response to federal mandates? If yes, which ones? \_\_\_\_\_



Dollar amount applied for \_\_\_\_\_

Dollar amount received (if received funding) \_\_\_\_\_

Time period (year or month) applied for \_\_\_\_\_

**Grant application #3**

To which federal agency did you apply? (Please name agency and program) \_\_\_\_\_

Was that your first application to this agency?  Yes  No

What was the purpose of your grant application? \_\_\_\_\_

Was your grant application in response to federal mandates? If yes, which ones?

Dollar amount applied for \_\_\_\_\_

Dollar amount received (if received funding) \_\_\_\_\_

Time period (year or month) applied for \_\_\_\_\_

**Organizational Characteristics**

14. What type of organization do you represent?

- County government
- City government
- Other public entity
- Nonprofit organization
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

15. Is your organization involved in regional (multi-county) economic development initiatives?

- Yes
- No

16. If needed, would you be available for a personal interview following the analysis of survey results?

- Yes
- No

17. Please provide your contact information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### 2003 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes

| Code | Description  |
|------|--|
|      | <b>Metropolitan Counties:</b>  |
| 1    | Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more                            |
| 2    | Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population                         |
| 3    | Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population                           |
|      | <b>Non-metropolitan Counties:</b>  |
| 4    | Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area                       |
| 5    | Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area                   |
| 6    | Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area                      |
| 7    | Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area                  |
| 8    | Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area     |
| 9    | Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area |

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture – Economic Research Service (USDA-ERS)