

President Obama's 2015 budget: Bringing back homeland and justice grants

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The White House and President Barack Obama posted the [fiscal year 2015 budget](#), which includes a number of initiatives from job growth and fiscal responsibility, to improving the nation's security. Usually we think of national security at the federal level, with the Department of Defense and intelligence agencies, but often the first line of defense within the United States is held by state and local officials.

For nearly a decade, most Homeland Security and Justice Department grant programs have been reduced or remained stagnant. In cases like with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), there are numerous grant programs, each with their own rules and regulations. As part of President Obama's budget for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), these grant programs will be simplified and consolidated into the already existing Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP). While it is unclear the amount of funding that will be allocated, a more easily understood program will benefit state and local agencies vying for that money. Oftentimes agencies, particularly smaller ones, get bogged down with grant proposals and ultimately fail to win funds for reasons such as being unqualified for the grant to begin with.

As part of the budget proposal, both DHS and the Department of Justice (DOJ) would offer billions of dollars in grant funding. The DHS would have \$1 billion for border protection and another half-billion dollars for technology research and development, and other initiatives. The DOJ and the DHS would offer local agencies millions to retain and rehire employees, including emergency management agents and police officers. The Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) has been funded in previous years, but a renewed commitment to these funds would be a vital source of money for local agencies. Agencies that are not connected to many of the federal criminal databases could utilize these funds to get up to speed as well as invest in officers.

Analyst's Take

It is too soon to know whether President Obama's budget will pass as constructed today. However, the inclusion of the public safety, emergency preparedness and other justice programs is a promising sign, especially to cash-strapped state and local agencies. There are numerous programs, including state criminal history initiatives that could move forward if funding is made available. The use of new technology in the justice system and within homeland security and emergency management would be welcomed by vendors with new tools, software and hardware that could reduce time in the field. Vendors should begin to follow the budget process to see what grant programs are funded, and reach out to existing clients who may want to expand existing systems or explore new opportunities.