

Introduction

Grants of federal or state funds to encourage agencies and communities to initiate, increase, or change practice have been an accepted part of the governmental landscape since the 1930s. As social science has developed a better understanding of how people grow and change, programs to address economic and social problems have increasingly looked at multiple influences that impinge on social problems. Whether change efforts intend to make incremental improvements in systems and the services they provide or more significant changes in community patterns of thinking and interaction, current grant programs tend to emphasize intervention at multiple levels to improve outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

Yet, over time there has been very little analysis of the state grant making process, across agencies, to better understand how agencies support collaboration and community change processes. Accordingly we decided to undertake an exploratory study of grant making by state departments in Michigan to better understand how the process can be improved to enhance success for community improvement initiatives. In doing so, we reviewed a sample of state grants programs whose aim is to initiate community change or improvement. These types of grants represent only a small portion of the work of state departments, as the major work of state government is maintaining basic services.