How’s Your Browser?

New Grant Websites Can Be Challenging, But There Can Be an Easy Fix

Don’t throw your computer out the window. Check your Internet browser.

During the past year, the grant community experienced new and redesigned websites that can sometimes throw the best of us off guard when technical difficulties prevent access to time-sensitive information or interfere with registration and submission requirements. The two most notable sites are the System for Award Management and Grants.gov.

SAM.gov was launched last summer when the former Central Contractor Registry transitioned to the new site along with other key federal systems. SAM.gov is managed by the Government Services Administration and will eventually host eight separate systems including CCR. Prior CCR registrations were planned to migrate automatically to SAM.gov, but many users experienced issues with their migration. Registrations should also be renewed annually, so users who were unaware of the site change or migration, may discover unanticipated glitches when renewing for the first time.

The redesigned Grants.gov site is managed by the Department of Health and Human Services and launched late July. The launch caused a partial system shutdown. The site was functioning within a few days by early August, but users still experienced difficulties.

A Common Problem

Both of these sites caused many headaches as users attempted to access them soon after a launch or for the first few times. Screen manipulation, site navigation, data entry, search functions and online processes that enable users to register, submit, update records and search for grants can become impossible to execute. Some users received error messages. Some just sat clueless before a great white screen.

While both SAM.gov and Grants.gov provide technical assistance, there may be an easy fix to an uncooperative site. Check your Internet browser.

Which Browser is Best?

Internet Explorer used to the prime browser, but now there are four widely used browsers: Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Mozilla’s Firefox and Apple’s Safari. All of these browsers should work, but sometimes one browser works better than another. A possible reason could be updates. Users should stay current and apply the latest updates for their browser. It is also becoming more commonplace for users to have more than one browser available on their computers.

In Thompson’s own unscientific and unofficial test, we found that Internet Explorer Version 8 and Version 10 both worked with the redesigned Grants.gov, but our Version 9 did not. The user lacked Explorer’s latest update. If users experience difficulty with Grants.gov, or any other website for that matter, an update or another browser may quickly resolve the issue.

GSA has actually recommended Google Chrome in its training webinars for SAM.gov, but we found Mozilla also worked well with both Mac and PC in our testing.

And while we can’t explain it, we can say with a good deal of confidence that technical difficulties may not always originate from the website itself or the type of computer. It could be the Internet browser.

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Mac and PC

Internet Explorer and Google Chrome are designed for the PC while Safari is designed for Mac. Firefox offers a free browser for both Mac and PC and can be downloaded on either type of computer. Again, while all four browsers are supposed to work, if unexplained technical difficulties persist, a simple switch to another browser may work well.

Don’t Forget About Adobe

While SAM.gov is not dependent upon Adobe, Grants.gov is. If users experience technical difficulties, it may be a matter of checking the version of Adobe. Because Adobe updates its software frequently and it takes a day or so for Grants.gov to catch up, the latest version of Adobe may not always work. For Adobe questions, contact the Grants.gov technical support team.

Technical Support

Both SAM.gov and Grants.gov offer technical support for users of their sites. Both sites also offer training videos and other resources. It is always an appropriate option to contact the technical support team for these sites. ✷