

F2 Solutions uses Expert Reviewers, Scoring Tools and an Online Platform to provide Grant and Peer Reviews for Federal Discretionary Grants



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CEOCFO: *Mr. Leeks, what is the focus today at F2 Solutions?*

Mr. Leeks: F2 Solutions is a federal government contractor focused on conducting grant reviews for federal discretionary grants.

CEOCFO: *What is involved in reviewing a grant? How do you work with an agency on doing so?*

Mr. Leeks: Before a grant can be issued by the federal government it has to be reviewed by peers. What we do is provide the peers to review the grant. When grants are received for any program, for instance, something like teenage pregnancy prevention, you may get two hundred or three hundred applicants to apply for those funds, and each of those applications needs to be reviewed by peers.

CEOCFO: *How do you pick the right peers for any given topic?*

Mr. Leeks: We use areas of expertise to choose the right peers, as well as their resumé or curriculum vitae. We make a list of people who are qualified in their area/s of expertise as it relates to the grant and then we supply the list of the qualified people to the federal government for them to choose which reviewers they would like to use.

CEOCFO: *When you are looking at these experts is there something you might look at in a resume to know that someone might be better at this than another person or do you go on face value?*

Mr. Leeks: Normally there are several things that I know the federal government looks for, such as years of activity in the area of expertise. They also look for things like the education level. Based on those, they may do some type of testing of the reviewers to verify that they meet the agency's need. Then they will select which reviewers they would like to use. They also make selections on who will serve as the chairperson for each review.

CEOCFO: *Is there a set fee the government will pay the reviewers or is their asking price a consideration?*

Mr. Leeks: The price varies; it varies because some applications, depending on their requirements, are more complex and larger than others. Therefore, payments can differ based on the program being reviewed.

CEOCFO: *Do you continually look for new experts? Is it a revolving list? How do you stay up to date on who is available and what they have to offer?*

Mr. Leeks: Normally, prior to a review, we solicit reviewers by area of expertise, and we encourage them to go to our website to register their information. If they are already registered, we ask them to update their information. Based on that data is how we choose the list to supply to the federal government.

CEOCFO: Are there many companies that provide services similar to this?

Mr. Leeks: No, there are not many. However, there are probably quite a few that provide the general service. Our specific service is somewhat of a niche.

CEOCFO: Are there particular agencies in the government that you prefer to work with, given a choice, or is it pretty even handed in your relationship with the agencies and where you come into play?

Mr. Leeks: F2 Solutions can be a big help to any agency that deals with discretionary grants. There are agencies that deal with different types of grants, like research grants, that are less likely aimed at the type of work we do.

CEOCFO: Is everyone aware of F2 Solutions and what you can offer or do you need to do outreach to let people know you are around?

Mr. Leeks: I always lean on my marketing team; I tell them, "You have got to get out there and tell them what we do and find different ways to get it done." I would say that there is still a huge opportunity to let the federal government know what we can do. You know, there are two sides to that story. We also must approach them with a contract vehicle that they can use to get to us.

CEOCFO: What have you learned about working with the government and how to navigate some of the challenges?

Mr. Leeks: I have learned that I really must listen to the client to understand where their problem is. Then I can approach them with a solution at their level. That is because some agencies do much of their work in-house and some outsource everything. Therefore, for me to work with most agencies, I have to meet them at their level of need; and by listening to them it is easier for me to determine where help is needed.

"What you probably do not know is that most of the people that work within this company have worked for years in the grants arena and they really enjoy it. That, along with an approach to helping our clients find solutions, is a great combination; it is pretty powerful. F2 Solutions really does stand above the rest!" - Lynn Leeks

CEOCFO: Looking at your site I see a number of other services; event management and IT solutions. Are those ancillary to the grants part of the business?

Mr. Leeks: They are. Some of them are connected as well, for instance Conferencing. The grantees need to understand different ways to apply. The federal government will hold conferences to explain a grant program; I can help them there, with securing the venue. Onsite grant reviews are directly connected to the conferencing work that we do; IT development is connected as well. Our *Reviewer Registry* website has a client interface where the client can log on and select reviewers that they might want to use for a grant review cycle. The use of IT helps up facilitate the process. We also offer various support services, such as onsite personnel for filing and data entry. We really offer a wraparound approach that can be tailored to meet an individual client's needs.

CEOCFO: Was it a deliberate strategy to develop in this niche space or was it more opportunistic? How did you get this going?

Mr. Leeks: It was opportunistic; I guess that is my answer. My background is in application development. I developed an application for the federal government several years ago and it spread throughout numerous agencies. It had to do with reviewing grant applications. The system is now called ARM (Application Review Module). When I developed this system, I realized that different agencies and programs had a bigger need; they needed people to operate the system. Therefore, I went into that business and that is pretty much how F2 Solutions got started.

CEOCFO: How is business these days?

Mr. Leeks: It is actually pretty good! This will probably be a really good year for us; and as long as discretionary grants remain available, we will be here to assist the federal government with getting its work done.

CEOCFO: What is your strategy for the next year or two? What might be different if we speak in 2020 or 2021?

Mr. Leeks: We will focus on contract vehicles. Right now, F2 Solutions is an 8(a) business and its certification will expire next year. Therefore, contracts that I have secured through that vehicle will have to be secured in a different way. This means the way that I get business is what will really be different next year.

CEOCFO: Did you want to elaborate on the strategy or is that not something that people should need to know?

Mr. Leeks: I will be competing with the big boys, so I will be using contract vehicles like GSA.

CEOCFO: How do you prepare for that?

Mr. Leeks: It is not easy! We align ourselves along with large businesses that work in our wheelhouse and we offer our areas of expertise to them. Many times, we are procured through subcontracts. Therefore, we would work with the larger companies.

CEOCFO: Why should people choose F2 Solutions? Why pay attention to the company. What if anything might people miss about F2 Solutions that they should understand?

Mr. Leeks: One thing that we excel at is solving problems. Perhaps it is because of my background in application development, which requires you to constantly troubleshoot to resolve issues, but the F2 team and I seem to shine in this area.

When I go to a client and they have a problem, we sit there, we study, we get our groups together and we come up with the best solutions for them. We don't leave the client out of the process, as they play an integral role in helping us to devise an appropriate solution. Our approach is very inclusive, and clients appreciate that. We are good at that, so fixing their problems is what I would say that F2 Solutions is really good at.

What you probably do not know is that most of the people that work within this company have worked for years in the grants arena and they really enjoy it. That, along with our approach to helping our clients find solutions, is a great combination; it is pretty powerful. F2 Solutions really does stand above the rest!

