



Ministering to the administrators

IF GRANTWRITING CAN FEEL LIKE AN OVERWHELMING JOB—HOLED UP IN AN OFFICE, TRYING TO SYNCHRONIZE INTO ONE COHERENT DOCUMENT DIFFERENT DATA AND PARAGRAPHS WRITTEN BY DIFFERENT PEOPLE—IMAGINE, THEN, THE PLIGHT OF THE GRANT PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR, WHO IS ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUM OF ALL OF A GRANT PROGRAM'S PARTS.

As the past few years have made evident, grant program administration is far more than just writing checks. Priorities must be established, worthy grantees selected, and grant-funded projects monitored to ensure their success. In the most ideal situations, the grant program administrator is able to practice oversight without interference, to serve as a guide rather than a dictator.

It's a complex job that requires not only subject area expertise that agrees with the goals and objectives of the grant program but also managerial skills, financial know-how and mastery of the fundamentals of the grants process. And it's not something in which you can get a degree. How ironic, then, that while grant applicants can, with the proper funds, get significant help with their applications, grant program administrators are largely left to muddle through the complexities of their role on their own.

NEW RESOURCES

There is, however, a fairly new resource for state administrative agencies (SAAs) to help them better fulfill their important role. The National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA), which represents state officials who administer criminal justice funding, has recently launched the Homeland Security Preparedness Technical Assistance Program (HSP-TAP) to expand its resources to state

officials who administer funding from the Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP).

The program, titled "Enhancing Grants Management Capacities for State Administrative Agencies," is intended to meet the needs identified in the recommendations outlined in the June 2004 *Report from the Task Force on State and Local Homeland Security Funding*. Applicable funding programs include: the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP), the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) Program, the Citizen Corps Program (CCP), the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP), the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) Program and the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) Program.

The training focuses on enhancing or improving such administrative functions as: financial management, procurement, performance measurement, monitoring and auditing, public information and media relations, electronic grant management systems, building public/private partnerships and strategic planning. The program is currently funded through an ODP grant that was prompted by the 2004 report.

THE ASSOCIATION

According to NCJA's Executive Director, Cabell Cropper, NCJA has been around for 30 years, 49 states are members and six of those states' criminal justice programs also administer domestic preparedness funding. NCJA sees definite overlap between domestic preparedness and criminal justice. Just as precursor crimes may precede terrorist actions, such as obtaining illegal identification, weaponry or explosives, terrorism itself is a crime.

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now provides training to SAAs who may have limited, if any, experience with grant administration. In addition, they work to connect states' homeland security offices with resources available through states' justice-related departments and offices.

Lisa Nine, senior staff associate at the NCJA, has been working with SAAs through the NCJA program for a little over a year, along with Jay Marshall, former deputy director with the Bureau of Justice Assistance. With experience in both grant program administration and grantseeking, Nine understands the needs of both

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parties and their mutual responsibilities. In her words, many of the SAAs she has encountered are "terrific operations people," but "when it comes to the administration of federal grant money, many are out of their element."

For example, while someone from a financial background may be very adept at the financial management of the program—which is certainly vital—they may not be familiar with the need for evaluation of the types of performance measurements that are necessary to monitor the realization of the grant program's objectives.

With this in mind, NCJA has created a curriculum that seeks to protect SAAs from the frustration of reinventing the wheel. Using tools and resources avail-

FUNDING & Resources

able to the justice community, NCJA seeks to demystify the process that leads to successful program benchmarking, evaluation and administration. Services include instructive documentation outlining best practices and other information, multistate workshops and on-site technical assistance.

The challenge is to ensure that pre-existing resources that are well known in criminal justice circles but virtually unheard of elsewhere are being utilized. Nine explained, "This is an issue of awareness." To this end, NCJA surveyed SAAs on best practices. The recommendations released by the task force in June 2004 responded to these surveys.

The NCJA multistate workshops include basic fundamentals of grant administration and are designed to meet issues raised by ODP preparedness officers. The first pilot was offered in Portsmouth, NH, in June 2005 for the seven states in the northeast region. As with all subsequent workshops, NCJA asked participants to bring their homeland security team, rather than just their financial officers.

"We like to see people working in policy, program administration and finance—the greatest benefit is that it

gives the policy folks an idea of the enormous policy responsibilities placed on the grant administrator," said Nine. She reported that most of the states have staffs that average five to seven people. NCJA plans to conduct two workshops in each of the ODP regions through November. In addition to the fundamentals, the workshops include breakout sessions to discuss problem areas.

FOLLOW-ON SUPPORT

Once SAAs are aware of the resources and provided with a primer on the fundamentals of grant administration, there is generally some need for on-site technical assistance, particularly as states tackle more complex management issues, such as auditing and benchmarking. NCJA has also developed a curriculum for strategic planning that has been adapted for planners in ODP. Once an on-site consultation has been requested, participants at the SAA and NCJA discuss current procedures to identify in advance the issues that need to be resolved through the consultation.

NCJA plans to gather information culled from the workshops into a compendium that will be available on a

compact disk and distributed at future workshops. It also will be available on the NCJA technical assistance website, which will go live later this year. The goal of these materials is to provide a forum for SAAs to share best and promising practices. In these and other efforts, NCJA is also pleased to be cooperating with the ODP's new Office of Grant Operations (OGO).

Because taxpayer dollars must be used to the best effect, grant management is necessarily complex. NCJA wants to ensure, however, that it's manageable. The bottom line is simple, Nine explained: "We don't want the administration to be so overwhelming that you can't get the program in place—that way your people [the applicants] are prepared to respond to crisis events."

For more information on NCJA's technical assistance offerings, visit www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/ta_catalog.htm. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the Centralized Scheduling and Information Desk at 1-800-368-6498 or askcsid@dhs.gov. HST

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