

Episode 26: Capacity Building for CBOs: Illinois' Institute 2 Innovate

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Intro:

Welcome to the NCJA podcast. This podcast series explores promising practices, provides guidance on strategic planning, and discusses how the Byrne Justice Assistance grant program or Byrne JAG contributes to improving justice systems across the country. We hope you enjoy it.

Amanda Blasko:

Hi everyone, and welcome back to another episode of the NCJA podcast. My name is Amanda Blasko and I'm a program manager here at the National Criminal Justice Association. Today's episode is a deep dive into Institute 2 Innovate, a holistic capacity building program for community-based organizations. We'll discuss what capacity building really means and how it differs from training and technical assistance, the workings and development of the program itself, and advice and takeaways for other state agencies who are hoping to build something similar. I'm thrilled to be here today with Delrice Adams, the executive director of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and the creator and driving force behind Institute 2 Innovate. Delrice, thank you so much for being here on the NCJA podcast. Would you mind briefly introducing yourself?

Delrice Adams:

Sure, Amanda. Thank you for having me. I consider myself a justice warrior with over 25 years of direct social service and criminal justice reform efforts. In 2020, the Illinois Governor JB Pritzker appointed me to lead the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. So I spearhead the state administrative agency that oversees the VOCA and VAWA victim services grants as well as criminal justice work and violence prevention. My platform is equity, fairness, and opportunity. Those are the priorities of every grant program and policy administered by ICJIA, and we want to make sure that community is definitely resourced. We feel like a lot of the answers to our issues around violence and victim services lies in the hands of community, and so that is something that we prioritize and has been very important and you'll hear more about the Institute as a means and mechanism to do that.

Amanda Blasko:

Thank you. So just as a way of level setting here at the beginning of the episode, so capacity building is one of those phrases that we hear often in the criminal justice space, but I think sometimes we're not always on the same page as to what that phrase really means. Would you mind just kind of in the context of Institute 2 Innovate describing what does capacity building mean and how does it fit into larger discussions of equity, both in terms of criminal justice broadly, but also within grants administration and funding decisions?

Delrice Adams:

Yes. So capacity building in the traditional sense has always meant building the ability of agencies to successfully administer grant dollars. So it's making sure that they have the appropriate amount of staff and that they're structure and infrastructure is in place, that they're able to have a fiscal agent who can help them to do the reporting and make sure that they're in compliance with all the rules of traditional funding. So we think of it in a very stoic way of making sure that people can be in compliance. We take a

broader definition of capacity building and it is to make sure that smaller grassroots organizations who have not had traditional dollars but have done some really incredible work with a very vulnerable and marginalized population that we seek to service and that they actually have the resources that they need, but that they also understand what it takes to be successful in having grant dollars and doing that grant administration.

But most importantly that we create that infrastructure and development for them so that they're sustainable so that they can actually do the work long-term in community and not just be like a one and done or they get grant dollars and they dissolve because they don't have that infrastructure and the capacity to actually handle those dollars.

Amanda Blasko:

Thank you. And I feel like this leads into my second question. So I think a lot of state agencies and really agencies in general that provide grants, for example, they do provide training and technical assistance in some capacity or other forms of support. So in your mind, what are the key differences between a capacity building program and just your typical forms of support and training and technical assistance options?

Delrice Adams:

Yeah, capacity building is more about the organization. It's more about really taking the time to get under the hood of that organization, which is really difficult as a government entity because we have traditionally said, show up in your best self, come all dressed up. We don't want to know about your scars or anything that you have. We don't want to know about your imperfections. You have to be ready. And what we're shifting and saying that we know that we have not put in the amount of time and resources and training and building in these organizations, so we want to know where do they fall short. So capacity building is really about the development of the organization. In our program we do things in terms of looking at their processes, looking at their boards, helping them to develop some basic principles of missions and values, things that may be as an organization, they haven't had time to step back because again, they haven't had traditional funding. So they've been piecemealing all along the way.

And I think the biggest difference between capacity building and technical assistance is technical assistance is those organizations who are already in relationship with government, they're already have grant dollars, we're helping them, training them around the best practices and how they should be implementing based on already set criteria. So that would be the biggest difference. It's really just helping. Technical assistance is more about the learning and understanding to get the grant dollars administered the way the program was written and the way that the government entity sees fit. Whereas capacity building is really that investment in community, in those community-based and localized organizations.

Amanda Blasko:

There's been so much historic disinvestment in certain communities, especially communities of color. So to see a government agency making a concrete effort to make an investment in those communities and in those organizations, I feel like that's just so huge, just knowing that people have decided to make an investment. Now that we've clarified what capacity building is, I'd love to turn more in depth to Institute 2 Innovate. So how did the creation of the Institute 2 Innovate come about?

Delrice Adams:

It came about as an observation. As I mentioned before, I consider myself a justice warrior. So I've worked over decades in the field and at all levels. I used to be in community, actually a program director at a local nonprofit organization. And then I worked in all levels of government, city, county and state. And when I came to the state, we were beginning to evolve and really target smaller organizations in our grant making process, particularly with our restore, reinvest and renew, which is our R3 grant dollars, which comes from the cannabis tax revenue. And what I was witnessing is that the staff were struggling. I have amazing staff at my ICJIA, they do incredible work, but they were used to traditional bigger organizations with lots of experience who have had state dollars for maybe a decade, in terms of our victim services some of them have had VOCA or VAWA for 20 years. And these were newer organizations getting violence prevention dollars. So very critical work, important local work because each community, each block may need a different kind of initiative or strategy.

And our grant monitors and our managers were struggling with the amount of engagement that they needed to have, the amount of teaching and handholding. And some of the organizations came to us and they were not ready. They had mastered having a good grant writer that got them the award, but they had never had this large amount of investment. And while it was the thing that we think everyone needs, we're like, oh, if we can just get organizations dollars, that's the fix. But what you don't want them to do is struggle with the grant administration. And that takes up 70% of their time and they're not able to focus on the programming or reaching the population that they need to reach or doing that really critical, unique type of services that actually got them awarded the grant.

And so the Institute 2 Innovate was an idea that I've been toying with when I was at the county and really had started thinking about it at the city working on violence prevention. How can we make sure that the smaller grassroots organizations that we're touching the hardest to serve population, so they're doing exactly what we know needs to be done to actually move the needle on violence, and how can we make sure that they get dollars. And not only do they get the dollars, but they're successful. And so I started thinking about leadership academies I had been in, or even college or my graduate program, there was always a learning curve of a process where you learn all the things from A to Z that you need to know, and then you can go out and practice and implement.

And so I was thinking, hey, we need something very similar to that, really teaching best practices, evidence-based types of curriculum around the models of good organizing, good organizations, what they need in their organization to actually implement impactful programming, and then what type of staffing structure is needed and necessary for them to be able to be compliant and reporting and be able to understand budgets and direct costs and all those technical terms that government dollars bring to bear. And so the Institute is a mechanism for really wrapping our arms around small organizations, giving them the guided support that they need in the grant administration process, but before that building that muscle and the capacity that their organizations need in order to be able to thrive and succeed.

Amanda Blasko:

If a smaller, let's say it's a community-based organization, has a grant and they're struggling with some pretty major compliance issues, because they weren't set up for success and they're very unfamiliar with the very strict rules that often these grants carry with them, would it be pretty much impossible to ever get a grant again with those compliance issues against you? I guess it's my question. How hard is it to get another grant if you once had compliance issues?

Delrice Adams:

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's a great question. It really speaks to the need of what the Institute would help with, because that's a part of the sustainability piece. We have had many times organizations that weren't ready and they were issued state or other government funding and were not successful. That puts them on a stop pay list or a compliance list where they are marked as not able to have other types of funding. It could even be in different agencies. So once you get on, for example, Illinois stop pay list, you're forbidden from having funding from all of the sister agencies across the state until you fix that issue or whatever it is that led for you to get on the stop pay list. So there is a lot at stake when organizations aren't ready and somehow are not in compliance.

And it could be something as simple as they don't have a third party audit, and that could be a requirement of their state funding, but they never had this threshold of dollars before. So do they know a firm? Do they know how to have an engagement with someone who can do that third party audit? But just not submitting that report can land you on the stop pay list. And that one's just an example. That one's an easy fix. Some of the issues are a little bit more complicated where organizations don't understand how line items work on their budget. And so they're thinking, oh, I have a hundred thousand dollars. I'll just do what the program needs. And they overspend in say supplies. And the state agency is saying, oh no, you couldn't spend 50,000 in supplies. Your budget is only for 45,000. You owe us 5,000.

So that can be a hardship for organization who thinks, oh, wow, I was just doing great work. Who knew they were so strict about the budget? So it's all of these nuances that it's complicated. Grant administration is pretty complicated, and I don't know if we acknowledge that, and if we acknowledge it to organizations where this is foreign. They've never spoke in this language. They never had to manage this type of funding with all of the compliance and criteria. And I don't know if we even touched on this, Amanda, but Illinois has a Grants Accountability Transparency Act. We call it GATA. And GATA was put in place about maybe seven years ago, and it mirrors the federal CFR 200 compliance. So the rules are very close to the federal rules around grant administration. So they're pretty strict and some agencies are clueless. Maybe they've had foundation dollars, which are very flexible.

You can do a lot more with them. And now they have this very regiment structured grant that they really have to be on top of crossing their T's, dotting their I and maybe they don't have that infrastructure because the program director is also the fiscal manager in doing all of the fiscal and program reports. There's a lot at stake in not investing in organizations, not bringing them up and training them, if you will, so that they can be successful and that they learn, that they truly learn what it takes to be a successful grantee of federal and state dollars.

Amanda Blasko:

You've already briefly mentioned some of the services that are provided in terms of capacity building for the Institute 2 Innovate, but I guess just overall, what are the primary services that the Institute provides?

Delrice Adams:

Yeah, we use a cute little acronym because you know you can't work in state government without acronym, called the PARLOR process. Again, it's embedded in evidence-based types of development, organizational development, so planning, administration, resources, learning, optimization and relationships. That's what PARLOR is. So planning more around the development of their mission, vision and strategic plan, everything from that to administration of establishing their board and executive staff to resources. What is a fund development plan? How do they prove that they're able to manage fiscally?

What do they know about financial standards? Learning meaning what's the human capital needs? What are your training needs for staff? A lot of smaller organizations don't have training budgets, or staff development is the last thing they can think about because they're really just piecemealing enough money to operate their programming. But that learning is so key and critical because you need experts in the field. You need people who really understand the ecosystem and the dynamics as well as best practices of whatever programs they're administering.

Optimization is we hope that we can help them develop protocols that help with effectiveness and program outcomes so that all of these smaller organizations can tell their impact stories, they can really collect data and understand when they're having impact or when they need to make adjustments. And then relationships. No one can survive without networks. Again, maybe they don't know an auditor, so how can they be in a network where people can offer a referral or they don't have a grant writer? Is there a grant writer that can be shared across organizations? So really helping them build those networks and relationships and things if you think about it that some of our traditional very strong organizations and community have a YMCA or Boys and Girls Club. They have that type of infrastructure already in place. So how do we bring the smaller grassroots organizations up to par.

Amanda Blasko:

That's really great. And I also like just how holistic the approach is and just how you said at the beginning of our discussion, just how it's about making sure the whole organization achieves success beyond even just one singular grant opportunity, or any grant opportunity. It's goes further and more encompassing than that. With that in mind that it's very holistic an approach, how did you go about coming up with the curriculum for the Institute? Did you model it after anything existing or was it starting from scratch?

Delrice Adams:

Yeah, I hate saying start from scratch because nothing ever really starts from scratch. But there was no blueprint. We looked, again, I had this idea and did a little bit of research and was looking for something that specifically spoke to government. There are some programs out there, but they're maybe philanthropic or another community-based organizations whose mission is to help other smaller organizations, but there was really nothing in the field that government was doing at this scale. So we may offer a capacity building grant where we say, Hey, we're offering \$40,000, small organizations you can use this to build staffing. But there was nothing in place that really provided this level of, I consider intense engagement. We do have what we call grant coaches are in place. And so each organization in the Institute is assigned to a grant coach. And these grant coach, they're different subject matter experts.

So someone may be really great at organizational development, somebody else may be really great at website design, so they're assigned to one, but they can use any coach within the Institute when we get to certain parts of that curriculum to really be able to lean on them, to gather information, to ask questions, but just someone there that's providing a guided approach. The other thing that was missing when I looked or looked for models that we could use, we definitely wanted to have something unique where it would give organizations this stamp of readiness where other people in the field could say, oh, hey, they went through these steps and really did some improvements to the organization where we can look at them differently. We do a full assessment on all of the organizations is pretty lengthy where we look at all of those different parts of an organization that we talked about and let them know where do you think you land?

Where do you need the most improvement? Where are you pretty strong at and you thrive and you don't really need a lot of attention. And then bringing that coach in to help in those targeted areas really build the muscle, I like to say, of that organization. And again, that's going to lead to sustainability, that's going to lead to them being more viable, more marketable. They're going to have stronger programs to present. They're going to be able to compete in the landscape of grant. The grants is a really tough market. To get a grant takes a lot, but to continuously have funding for years to come, it does take a skill and a readiness that the Institute we think helps organizations get to.

Amanda Blasko:

Could you speak to the structure of the Institute as well as the length of it? Is it like a in person online group setting? What does that kind of look like for participants?

Delrice Adams:

It's online primarily. So it's six months. There are six months of curriculum, they meet every other week, so twice a month online because of two things. One, we just learn how to do that better in a pandemic environment. And so we want to continue that learning, but it also affords us to be broad. So our organizations can come from anywhere in the state, and Illinois is a pretty long state, so you could drive from one point to another point. It could be like seven hours from north all the way to East St. Louis. So this gives us the ability to be statewide. There is two in-person points of contact, one in the midst of the Institute, and then they're culminating graduation we call it is in-person.

So yeah, that's pretty much the structure. After the six months, our organization releases a competitive capacity building NOFO and they can apply and they'll meet the criteria because one of the criteria is that you participated in some capacity building program in the last year. And so that part of the Institute has 12 months of guided grant administration where the coach stays with them throughout the process of their grant administration along with they have a regular traditional grant monitor and all that, but this is an extra person that they can lean on, they can ask questions to, they can reach out to, they could be a liaison between their monitor in them. So it's really, I like to call it guided grant administration in an intense type of relationship building.

Amanda Blasko:

I like that. The guided grants administration. So the coach part, was that something that you pulled from some type of existing model or what made you think, oh, a light bulb moment? Because that just seems like a light bulb moment to me because I feel like that's one of the things that would make a huge difference.

Delrice Adams:

Yeah. So I am a social worker by trade. I don't know if I mentioned that. And so when I, maybe 20 years ago, I was a case manager for our department of Children and Family Services, and these were family, it was called intensive family services. And these were families where the court thought this mom could be a great mom, she's got an allegation, but we think it's circumstantial. And so this program provided them a case manager for 28 days and they called it intensive services because that case manager was with that family every day for 28 days, just helping them get resources, making sure they had everything that they needed, really building life skills with the family, with the hopes of the child being able to stay connected with their birth family.

And so I was a case manager and so I knew how the model worked and we had great success, and the success was just predicated on that intense level of engagement because if it's a foreign ask for someone, they need a learning curve, they need to have someone that they can ask those questions to, that they can bounce things off of that they can get a better understanding. The one thing that I kept seeing at ICJIA, we do use a lot of acronyms, but just grant talk, it's another language and where monitors were thinking they were explaining things and they were saying, you need to do this, you need to do that. Here's our policy. Here's what you can submit as a compliance document.

It was like just being missed, just people weren't getting it. It was going over their heads. And then there was a level of frustration because we weren't receiving what we needed, or it was taking so long, or a community was like, these people are out to get us. They want us to fail. They're asking for all this stuff. They asked for it multiple times in different ways. This is a setup. And it was just not working on both hands on the community end as well as us as government doing the grant work. And so it was just important to step back, say, what is the thing that's missing in how we do it?

And that thing was the capacity, our own capacity in ICJIA to do this level of engagement. We just didn't have the bandwidth. We're not staffed like that. Many of our staff are not community centered, they're, I don't know, accountants or they're compliance officers, and so they're just all about the rules and this was more about relationships. And so that piece was really key and important and that through my social work background and love of all things community is how we came about the grant coaches.

Amanda Blasko:

That's really cool. And just hearing you talk about it is just really clear how your own professional experience and your passions has appeared in the final product here, which is really cool to see. How are participants selected for the program? Because I know you mentioned that a lot of the organizations that you're working with or you most recently finished the cohort was very gun violence specific. So are all the cohorts going to be specific to violence prevention or gun violence prevention? And how do you select those participants

Delrice Adams:

At this time they are all violence prevention. That's the area that we're targeting because most of the resources, new resources that we have coming through the state of Illinois are robust in terms of violence prevention. And so we're getting the bulk of new organizations doing work in that area. We have what we call a request for information was our competitive outreach that we did asking. It was very short, a couple of questions with the criteria that organizations had to have a budget, less than \$2 million. They needed to be localized and serve the community that they were situated in. And at the time for this first cohort, they could not have any state funding. And so over a course of, I believe it was two years. And so we got a lot of organizations that, again, really small localized groups, many of them had never had state funding.

I think one of the also key things was the commitment. That was probably one of the last things that sorted people in terms of their ability to participate, and they had to be able to commit to the two workshops a month. Some people opted out and said, I can't do it now. We'll just go on. And they predicated on funding. If the legislator and the governors feel this is value, ICJIA will continue to advocate for resources for the Institute. And so there'll be continued cycles. But yes, our first cohort was really small. It was nine organizations who said they were capable of making that commitment and they fit into the criteria. And at the beginning we did not have dollars to guarantee people. There was no promise of funding. And so some people aren't attracted to it. They made some hard choices as to

whether or not they could take the time out to do something like this, when for them just getting funding is their priority. They don't have time to really think of a long-term process to do that.

Amanda Blasko:

So for the participants, it's completely free, I'm assuming, right?

Delrice Adams:

Yes, it is completely free. And we got a lot of great feedback where again, because this is new, it's a pilot, we are researching it, ICIJIA has a robust research and evaluation unit, and so we're evaluating so that we can tell how impactful is it. But just the feedback, the just narrative responses organizations gave us specifically after graduation was that they're blown away. This is something they never had. It's almost like a graduate program for nonprofits who want to be successful administering grants. Most people do grant administration just learning on the fly. It's like parenting. There's very few parenting courses out there. So important, but no one's really telling you step by step in that different phases and age. No one's saying, Hey, when you get to 300,000 in grants, it looks different, or when you get to a million, you have to build a bigger infrastructure. No one's really helping agencies grow and develop in that way. And so it's very apparent this is much needed and people appreciate it and we can't get enough of folks saying, when are you going to do the next one?

Amanda Blasko:

That's exciting. That's always exciting feedback. So now that the first cohort has graduated, which is so exciting, have there been any lessons learned along the way in terms of things you might want to change for the next cohort group?

Delrice Adams:

Yes, we definitely want to give them more space to have peer exchange. They begin to do that organically and we were like, oh wow, why didn't we think of this? Why didn't we put that in the curriculum? We had a lot of debriefing where they got to give us feedback, some just traditional surveys of how were the courses, but we also did some other feedback loops where they gave us some real honest suggestions about different parts of the curriculum or even the order like, oh, you all should have had a speaker or somebody come in to talk about this part, the branding and the websites before we went and talked about the networking and relationship building with outside organizations. So lots of very detailed lessons learned and how we can improve. The other thing I think is the assessment tool. We underestimated the value of it and we heard from the organizations that it's so valuable to them that they can use it beyond the Institute.

It can be a litmus measure of how their organization is growing and where they need to put some resources in development. When we talk about board, a lot of people didn't know, oh, what? You can have a board that's a fundraising board versus a board that has experience in certain expertise that you can rely on. And that's leverage. So where they don't have dollars all the time, how can they have people that support their organization who can still help the growth and the development happen when they're trying to raise funds for their program? So a few nuggets that we took away that we'll incorporate as we build out and hopefully do a second cohort. And then we'll make those adjustments so that the program really speaks to the audience that we're targeting.

Amanda Blasko:

Since we're on the subject of reflections, do you have any reflections from making the Institute 2 Innovate a reality from the beginning of the process to the graduation of the first cohort that you'd like to share with our podcast listeners? And any kind of advice on where agencies that are seeking to create a capacity building program or maybe even just offer some capacity building services, where might they start?

Delrice Adams:

Yeah, that's such a great question, Amanda. I have lots of reflections. I was so overjoyed with the first graduating because it was a tough road. There were a lots of challenges and setbacks and I would say people not really fully invested. They were like, oh, great idea. But as a government entity, they're like, oh, that's risky. You're going to pour into these organizations. Are they going to expect something of you? Now do they think that they automatically get state funding? And it was like, no. We'll have very clear definitions of what everyone's role is, what the Institute is, what it's not, and then the funding piece. I think it was very hard for just thinking overall budget. They're like, wait, this is money that's going into helping organizations grow. What are we getting out of it? It doesn't sound like we're getting a service. What if they take their nice new developed org and go somewhere else?

So it was all these questions of is this really cost-effective? Will it have a positive impact on the state? And the answer was yes. If we have viable super effective, impactful organizations that can sustain themselves, that can do the type of intensive work around violence prevention that we need, it helps the whole state. It saves the whole state money, whether they are a grantee of ours or getting money from philanthropy or other government entities, city or county. They're in the ecosystem thriving and really touching that population that we need to have the supports and the resources that will help them not continue to have those risk factors or things that lead to violence. So it is a win-win any way you look at it. So I reflect a lot on, it was a hard road, but at every detour in turn, it was worth it to try to get over that hump. I would encourage anyone who's thinking about it start small.

I had a big vision. I wanted \$4.5 million. I want to have all of this all incorporated. I want to have the curriculum piece and the grant making piece all together. I want to do a hundred organizations upfront. And it did not materialize like that. It started to come about smaller and in parcels like, okay, you have funding for your staff. Thank you, I appreciate that. Let's start. Okay, now you have funding for grants. So it took a while for all the pieces to come together, but in terms of equity, I just think it's critical. It's probably going to be the most crucial thing that you do if you are serious about being equitable in your grant making, because just to change your practice and say, Hey, we're going to bring in groups that have been historically disinvested. Now we're going to just open the floodgates and give them resources, which is an amazing thing. But you're almost doing more harm because you're not giving them the proper tools to be successful.

And so if you look longterm, I think it's our responsibility as government to begin to learn and understand what capacity building means and how do we intentionally support organizations that we know do the critical work that we cannot do alone.

Amanda Blasko:

I agree. I feel like it's a desperately long overdue endeavor. Can I ask just about, because you mentioned being a rocky road, especially in the beginning with getting people on board with the idea, how did you go about explaining the value of the program to them? Did you do presentations? Was it a lot of relationship building as we've talked about a lot here in the episode? I think that would be of interest to a lot of other agencies who might find themselves in a similar boat.

Delrice Adams:

Yeah. It was a lot of relationship building on all levels. So relationship building with organizations, because we're government, we don't have the best relationship. They don't trust us. They're like, what you want to know all about us? What is that about? So that took some understanding and getting out there, doing that level of outreach. I have a community engagement manager that our organization didn't have that position before. It's a two year old position. And having that person develop those relationships and community was really helpful as we began to do outreach because they had already had that relationship going, they were telling people, I see Joe wants to make sure that we are invested and that we do have that relationship. It was relationship building on the side of internal staff. Our monitors were like, well, what is this new thing? Does it take away from our job?

So really helping them to understand that it is an enhancement, it's almost like having a tutor. So where you can't spend three hours a week talking to the same agency, walking them through documents and the language barrier, you're not set up for that. So this is your support. So it's not only the support for the agency, it's also support for internal staff and then the external stakeholders and partners. So legislators and the budgeters and the people who determine our state agency budget. Really making the case of if we're talking about equity in Illinois, what do we really mean? How can we be authentic in our approach? And then what does it look like in action? And if we're saying it looks like we provide more grant dollars to underserved, underrepresented, historically disinvested organizations, then how do we do that in a responsible way that doesn't cause more harm?

So I think you hit it on the head. It's really not about, the Institute is important. You're going to come up with curriculum that's needed based on your region and what organizations are saying they need. And a lot of what we poured in was things we were hearing or things we were witnessing, organizations were struggling with in our grant administration. So you're going to build that, but the relationship is really the hard work. It's really what you'll need to focus on for your program to be successful and really being thoughtful and intentional about equity and grant making. It's really that simple. And you'll develop those relationships and they'll give you more feedback that'll go into how you develop curriculum, how you structure a capacity building opportunity, and it'll be based on that feedback that you get from those localized organizations, but you won't get that feedback without building that relationship. So that is the key, I think, to having a successful initiative.

I do want to mention that having the governor and the lieutenant governor's support, it came a little bit later, but it is the thing that I think is pivoting now. There's just interest in investing more in capacity building, and I think it came from the top. So it didn't feel like, I just felt like I was just struggling pitching this. I'm just a used car salesman. We need it. And now that the governor and lieutenant governor are out and about talking about capacity building, it feels a little easier. Legislators are like, okay, what do you need? Or should we do a line item for this where I was not getting that before?

Amanda Blasko:

So what changed? How did you get their support? Or was it just by getting the supportive people that might've been underneath them organization?

Delrice Adams:

I think really framing it as equity initiative and understanding this is how do you put equity into action? Because people can talk about it a lot. And both the governor and lieutenant governor, that's priority for them. They're very interested. Each of them talk tremendously about being equitable and having equity. In fact, the governor started, he has an equity office that is unprecedented. We never had that in a state

of Illinois. When I was able to tie that, connect the dot as to this is equity and grant making, capacity building is a key and central component to that. It was like an aha moment for them. And they were like, exactly, this is, the lieutenant governor's all about. She has a justice equity and opportunity office that she actually created. So they're both all about equity. And so I think in the beginning it was just a little risky.

This is not how we really do government. People need to be ready. They need to come to us with great applications. We're not in the business of building people's nonprofits, but when we could see that connectivity to really being true about equitable grant making, I think that they pivoted and were champions after that. And so I do have amazing support from both the governor and lieutenant governor's office. I don't want it to go unrecognized that could do smaller things, but to really do something this innovative and sustain it, you would need that level of support.

Amanda Blasko:

I've said it already on the episode, but I just feel like one of the things I really love about the Institute 2 Innovate is just how holistic the approach is, because we know securing grants and other financial resources is incredibly important and a huge part of capacity building obviously, but ensuring that organizational integrity and sustainability is just as important. So I'm really excited to see how the Institute grows and expands and how you modify it as you get additional feedback from additional cohorts. Thank you so much Delrice for coming on the podcast and talking about how wonderful the Institute 2 Innovate is and how important capacity building is. And I just wanted to say thank you so much for your time, and I think people are really going to enjoy learning your thoughts on this.

Delrice Adams:

Thank you, Amanda. Thank you so much for having me.