

# *Grantee Partnership Project Staff Survey Results*

Executive Summary — March 2009



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## I. Background and Methodology

The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) in Partnership with the Rasmuson Foundation, Mental Health Trust, Mat-Su Health Foundation, and the Foraker Group initiated the Grantee Partnership Project (GPP) to improve its grantmaking operations and to strengthen the relationship between DHSS and its grantee partners. To evaluate the project's progress within the Department, DHSS elected to conduct a survey of DHSS Program Managers, (PM), Administrative Managers, (AM) and Grants Administrators (GA) to:

- Obtain a measure of GPP knowledge and perception to-date.
- Gather information that can be used to identify and shape future GPP activities.
- Establish a baseline measurement against which to measure future improvements.

The survey was conducted over a two-week period, December 26, 2008 through January 7, 2009. Surveys were distributed by DHSS to 135 DHSS PMs, AM, and GA. A total of 73 substantive responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 54%. Responses were received from DHSS staff by Division as follows:

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| • Division of Public Health              | 23.6% |
| • Division of Behavioral Health          | 15.3% |
| • Division of Senior Disability Services | 11.1% |
| • Division of Juvenile Justice           | 8.3%  |
| • Division of Public Assistance          | 12.5% |
| • Office of Children's Services          | 11.1% |
| • Commissioners Office (FMS)             | 20.8% |

Staff response by position is as follows:

- |                                       |       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| • Program Manager/Coordinator/Officer | 61.1% |
| • Administrative Manager              | 4.2%  |
| • Grants Administrator                | 25.0% |
| • Other                               | 9.7%  |

## II. Project Knowledge and Information Sources

One objective of the survey was to assess familiarity with the Grantee Partnership Project. Analysis of the survey responses shows that DHSS has been very successful in making DHSS staff aware of the project. Nearly 73% of respondents indicated that they were at least somewhat familiar with the project. 23% responded that they were very familiar with the project. While these numbers are very encouraging, still 6% of DHSS staff did not receive information regarding this project.

As another part of the survey, DHSS wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of its various communications vehicles. Based on the responses received, "Staff Communication" was

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identified the highest (35%) followed by staff who were directly involved in the project (23%), staff who learned about the project from their agencies, (20%) and those who read about the project through the “Streamline” newsletter.

The results from the survey indicates that DHSS is doing a better job communicating with staff, as it continues to improve its internal communication process department wide, enhanced knowledge of the project will increase.

The following are recommendations on how that might be accomplished:

- Maintain an accurate, up to date distribution list for all DHSS Program, Administrative, and Grant staff.
- Continue to publish and distribute the “Streamline” newsletter.
- Consider highlighting the project more prominently on the website.
- Encourage staff to share information with peers. Suggest that “Streamline” newsletter be posted on bulletin boards, etc.

### **III. Project Effectiveness**

Another objective of the survey was to assess DHSS satisfaction of the project’s performance to-date. DHSS staffs were asked to provide an overall project assessment, as well as to evaluate six (6) specific areas of interest to DHSS.

Reviewing the responses to the overall question, there are promising indicators. On the positive side 22.5% of respondents said that they were very satisfied with the project’s activities thus far and very few (less than 9%) indicated that they were dissatisfied. Additionally, almost half of the respondents (46.6%) remain indifferent as to the project’s progress to-date.

In addition to the overall question, DHSS staff were also asked to rate the effectiveness of the following six project activities:

- Communication between GA and PM
  - 35% Successful
  - 20% Somewhat effective
  - 9% Not effective
  - 25% Don’t know
  - 11% N/A

Communicating between GA and PM topped the communication review with a combined rate of 55% of the surveyors believing communications were either successful or somewhat effective. 9% said not effective, 25% didn’t know, and 11% said not applicable.

- Communication between Grantee and PM
  - 22% Successful
  - 18% Somewhat effective

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- 12% Not effective
- 37% Don't know
- 11% N/A

Communications between Grantees and PM rated No. 2 with a combined rate of 40% of the surveyors believing communication are either successful or somewhat effective. 12% identified not effective, 37% identified they didn't know, and 11% identified not applicable.

- Communication between GA and AM
  - 19% Successful
  - 16% Somewhat effective
  - 6% Not effective
  - 47% Don't know
  - 11% N/A

Communications between GA and AM received a lower score. With a combined rate of 35% of the surveyors believing communication are either successful or somewhat effective. 06% identified not effective, 47% identified they didn't know, and 11% identified not applicable. However, it should be noted that it is usually the lead GA III for a division that communicates with an AM while most of the response to this question would have been from GAI/II's which may have resulted in the lower score.

- Communication between AM and PM
  - 19% Successful
  - 13% Somewhat effective
  - 12% Not effective
  - 45% Don't know
  - 9% N/A

Communications between AM and PM came in at a combined rate of 32% of the surveyors believing communications are either successful or somewhat effective. 12% identified not effective, 45% identified they didn't know, and 9% identified not applicable. As with the GA to AM communication the low score here may be the result of AM to PM not being a one on one relationship with respondents. Many DHSS offices have 'lead' program managers overseeing a group of program managers and act as the contact with the AM for all projects they oversee.

### **Communication Conclusion:**

The Grants and Contracts GAs and PMs are very successful in communicating with each other. This is due to an established process that was developed years ago and continues to improve daily. The process is strictly maintained and governed by the Grants and Contract Support Team to ensure past efforts of standardizing department grant processes continues. Ongoing grant training is provided to staff, which ensures all staff have a good understanding of the DHSS grant process and the regulations that govern them.

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Communication between Grantees and PM is not as successful. This may be due to the distance between the Grantee and PM. This should change in the near future, due to the Grantee Relations, P&P recently developed and approved by the Commissioner. This P&P will require PMs to communicate with grantees on a regular basis. This issue will also be identified in the Program Management Training soon to be implemented department wide.

Communications between AM and PM/GA received the lowest scores, but as pointed out above may be due to a less than one on one relationship.

### **Recommendations:**

Delivery of Program Manager training and communication of newly approved P&P (Located at <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/grantees/>) should increase communications between these groups, although the following recommendation should also be considered:

- Work with FMS to develop Policy and Procedures to standardize a process that meets the needs of PM, AM, and the Grants and Contract Support Team, to more accurately identify and detail program budgets.
- Clearly identify and project budgets for current and future years.
- Develop timelines for AM to present prior year or proposed budget to PM early enough, so that the PM can review or revise budget to meet future spending needs of the program.
- Develop timelines for PM to submit future/proposed budgets with narrative in support of their program to their AM for current and upcoming fiscal years.

The budget should identify increases or reductions to the budget with attached justification. The budget narrative must clearly identify how funds will be spent during the following year. Information should identify:

- grant award funds; (funds to grantees)
- personal service funds; (funds to cover DHSS staff in support of program)
- potential travel funds; (funds to be used for DHSS travel)
- potential contract funds to support program; and
- other funding expenses in support of the program.

Development and implementation of this P&P will ensure grant funds are not over expended or under expended. (Lapsed)

### **Final two Project Effectiveness issues:**

- Establish a single point of contact for grantees
  - 26% Successful
  - 16% Somewhat effective
  - 11% Not effective

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- 41% Don't know
- 4% N/A
- Acknowledging and rewarding best practices and outstanding performance among grantees.
  - 14% Successful
  - 10% Somewhat effective
  - 11% Not effective
  - 59% Don't know
  - 6% N/A

Acknowledging and rewarding best practices and outstanding performance to grantees who have successfully met program goals, conditions, and grant administrative requirements was rated the lowest with a combined successful and somewhat effective score of 24%. The Department has a lot of room to improve on recognition grantees efforts of providing quality health and social services to Alaska citizens. DHSS will implement its new recognition of grantees for the closeout of fiscal year 2009 grants. DHSS is in the process of re-writing e-grants to include a mechanism that will allow PM to input into e-grants the performance of each grant program. When PM complete their final reviews and find that the program has been successful in meeting all requirements of the program and grant administration, the PM will approve a letter and certificate of recognition to the grantee.

#### **IV. Assessment of overall grant making**

In addition to questions about the Grantee Partnership Project, DHSS staff was asked to evaluate a number of aspects of overall DHSS grantmaking practices. In general, responses to this question were also favorable. It should be noted that the highest ranked area is Payments with 57% rating it as effective. This is a clear improvement from the start of this project. The establishment of two fiscal positions solely dedicated to grantee payments has proved extremely successful.

- RFP Process
  - 34% Successful
  - 41% Somewhat effective
  - 3% Not effective
  - 22% Don't know

Grants and Contracts are currently working to revise the current RFP. Revisions will include streamlining the RFP to make it more user friendly. RFP development is also touched upon in the Program Managers Training. It is believed that ongoing training along with the RFP revision will make using the RFP a simpler and positive experience.

- Quarterly Reports
  - 42% Successful
  - 34% Somewhat effective

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- 5% Not effective
- 18% Don't know

DHSS is currently reviewing all 100+ quarterly narrative reports to evaluate whether or not reports can be streamlined. Ongoing efforts to train all Program Managers and Grantees in the use of Logic Models will assist in the streamlining of grant reports. The Department does not intend to reduce the number of narrative reports, but will review the reports in hopes of streamlining what is collected by every program. Fiscal reports have already been incorporated in to eGrants.

- Communication between state and providers
  - 37% Successful
  - 37% Somewhat effective
  - 3% Not effective
  - 23% Don't know

Increasing communications between DHSS and our grantee partners has made giant leaps over the past two years. Ongoing Logic Model efforts have brought DHSS and grantees together to work on program related issues. Giving grantees a mechanism to provide input regarding program delivery was always a tricky thing to manage. Under a competitive solicitation, input from potential grantees would have been declared a procurement violation. Today, DHSS works with communities and across divisional lines in order to ensure the most appropriate services are being designed. DHSS has conducted numerous public gatherings/home town meetings. Opening program concerns up to the public through “home town meetings” is a positive and legal way to collect firsthand grantees program recommendation/advice and other issues DHSS's faces when it releases a RFP for the delivery of direct services.

- Technical assistance
  - 39% Successful
  - 33% Somewhat effective
  - 4% Not effective
  - 25% Don't know

As DHSS continues to train Program Managers, Administrative Managers, and Grants Administrators, it is expected that each of this positions will be able to provide in depth technical assistance.

- Payments
  - 57% Successful
  - 19% Somewhat effective
  - 1% Not effective
  - 23% Don't know

Grants and Contracts have established a sound process that ensures payments are made within 25days of receipt of the complete approved report. DHSS new P&P not only

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identify the time frame for processing a payment, they also identify who is responsible for gathering, processing, approving, and certifying all grant payments. eGrants has an evaluation tool that keeps track of how long each staff takes to process their part of the payment request.

- Communication about DHSS priorities
  - 30% Successful
  - 38% Somewhat effective
  - 7% Not effective
  - 25% Don't know

The department has put together a planning committee to look at way to improve how DHSS communicates between Divisions. DHSS is doing a better job working across division lines, with a vision to coordinate services that affect multiple groups and are supported by multiple state and local agencies.

- Development of Policy and Procedures

As identified above, DHSS has developed numerous P&P. When this survey was released, the identified P&Ps had not been approved. To date the three P&P have been approved, while two more are in the review and approval process.

### DHSS Comments:

- There needs to be more communication within the State government. I spoke with a provider at the grocery store last night who says the state is doing well in improving systems, less cumbersome process in her opinion.
- While streamlining the process is important, little is being considered regarding the coordination and management of the actual services delivery when decisions are made regarding reporting and communication between the grantees and the program coordinator in terms of actual concrete services outcomes. If we hear less often from grantees, then we know less about what they are doing. That is common-sense stuff. With the volume of grantees losing their grant funding and failing audits, it is not the time for this agency to be lowering expectations in terms of report and acceptability. Bad for business.
- Since the Grantee Partnership Project is still underway, I don't feel I know enough of its outcome to answer the one section above. As far as the overall DHSS grant making systems such as e-Grants and the process with that, is how I based my answers to the last section of the questionnaire. The efforts to train on the Logic Model are good and hopefully grantees will be offered the same opportunities for the training. It may take awhile for efforts to impact all those affected.
- Continue to work out the kinks in e-Grants before switching to electronic quarterly narrative reporting. Allow programs the flexibility to gather the info they need for evaluation when they switch over instead of one cookie cutter form.

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Promote the new P&P in the Program Manager training for new staff and maybe a couple quick seminars for existing program managers. Thanks for the work you're doing!

Train program manager/coordinators and grantees together to enhance communication. Sometimes we don't know our grantees except through e-Grants, cfr's, etc... It would be helpful for Program Managers/Coordinator to be trained more on how we can help our grantees.