Alas, this is the last. My predecessors as chair of NLPES all seem to say the same thing: the year goes by very fast. It does. However, the year has been busy, rewarding, interesting, fun, and a great learning experience. And, I look forward to not being chair as well. As one songwriter said “How can I miss you, if you won’t go away?”

And now for the annual wrap, an apparently required part of this column. The wrap up is this: you have a wonderful volunteer executive committee that has dedicated itself to pushing forward with new ideas and new projects while maintaining the framework set up by their predecessors. The Committee has made changes in the awards program that I believe increases fairness and clarity. The website has improved, particularly with the front page and with the removal of old information that was gathering many layers of electronic dust.

In the area of e-learning and professional development, we have started the NLPES Podcast series, Spark! The third installment of Spark! will soon be available. The Podcast features a conversation about the upcoming NLPES Fall Professional Development Conference with John Sylvia, the Director of the Performance Evaluation and Research Division in West Virginia. As you are likely aware, West Virginia is the host state for the conference, to be held in the capitol city of Charleston.

The NLPES fall conference subcommittee has worked with the West Virginia folks to plan a top-notch professional development experience for September 18 - 21. The professional development subcommittee is also working on e-learning opportunities for the upcoming year aimed at the NLPES members who are not able to travel in-person to the NLPES Annual Meeting or the Fall Professional Development Conference.

The annual meeting subcommittee has pulled together an exciting array of NLPES-sponsored sessions for the NCSL Annual Meeting this August in Boston. We will offer sessions on the synergy between the work of evaluation offices and states’ budget processes, improving transparency in government, how evaluations can impact the law, and the benefits and pitfalls of privatization. We are also excited to present a session by the USDA Graduate School entitled Decision Support: Building Better Analytical Skills. In addition to the sessions above, all the NCSL staff sections are co-sponsoring sessions on Managing Change and Transition, Dealing with Conflict, and Separation of Powers.

So, where do we go from here? One hope is Hawai’i. Actually, I say that in all seriousness. Hawai’i has put in a bid for the NLPES fall professional development conference for 2009. The immediate reaction of many of my peers is “I’m not going to approve folks to go to Hawai’i.” The talk is it costs too much, or it looks bad, or I can’t go to my committee or legislative leadership for approval of that. I am asking all of you to take a deep breath and open your minds to the possibility.

Hawai’i has been an ardent supporter of NLPES and NCSL. They send many staff to all of our professional development conferences and annual meeting sessions. Audit staff have served on the NCSL Executive Committee and Standing Committees, as well as on our NLPES Executive Committee. I have a problem with automatically turning our back and saying no, we can’t hold a conference in Honolulu. I believe the costs will be in line, or only slightly more than other conferences,
and perhaps cheaper for west coast folks. We expect that such a conference would have a strong international flavor from countries in the Pacific Rim, an opportunity we have not had before. And I believe that with advance planning and details of the value of the conference, we can convince our legislators that we have solid reasons for holding a conference in Hawai‘i.

I usually would not devote space to a conference two years in the future. But the initial reaction I have heard from some quarters to the prospect has bothered me. We are supposed to be a group that can think outside the box. We should be a group that honors volunteerism, service and quality. So, for decision-makers reading this, please take a breath and give all the angles some thought. And for the rest, remember, those who do good and hard work are more likely to be rewarded with training opportunities. Hint, hint.

Again, this is my last column. It’s been an honor to serve on your Executive Committee and to serve as Chair. Let’s keep program and policy evaluation moving forward. My advice? Give our legislators all they need and what they need. Be clear, be direct, and enjoy your jobs. Aloha, ciao, shalom and goodbye.

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**E-Alerts: Another Way to Get Your Message Out**

Kathy McGuire (Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability)

One key to successful evaluation is communicating results. At OPPAGA we try to communicate with our legislators in as many ways as possible, and one method we have found to be particularly successful is our end-of-project e-alerts. Due to their content, brevity, and timing, these e-mail messages help us inform and protect our members.

E-alerts include the name of the soon-to-be-released report, a sentence describing whether or not we expect the report to be controversial, and a succinct summary of our findings. This brevity makes the e-alerts fast and easy to read, and allows our busy legislators to take in the major messages even before they receive the report. Legislators also appreciate the advance warning on whether we expect the report to be controversial.

Timing is also critical. We send an e-alert to every legislator as soon as the director approves each report to go to the print shop, which is generally three days before report release. This way each member knows when a report on one of “their” issues is about to be released and can be prepared to answer questions from the press. The e-alert example below announced the release of a potentially controversial report.

**“Dissatisfaction with School Governance, Student Behavior and Parent Support, and Career Opportunities Lead to Teacher Attrition”**

OPPAGA is about to publish a report that examines why public school teachers leave the classroom. We are providing this early briefing to help you prepare for any questions you may receive about the report. We anticipate that the report will be released soon, and we will deliver a copy to your office at that time. The full report will be available on OPPAGA’s website (www.oppaga.state.fl.us) shortly thereafter.

We anticipate that the report will likely receive substantial attention.

We reached three conclusions in our report.

- Approximately 10% (14,700) of Florida’s public school teachers left their positions last year, contributing to the state’s teacher shortage. Teachers who responded to our survey left their positions for a variety of reasons. Thirty percent left because they were dissatisfied with work conditions and another 11% wanted to pursue other career opportunities.

- The main sources of dissatisfaction leading to attrition were school governance, student behavior and parental support. While both current and former teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their compensation, but this factor generally did not differentiate between teachers who left the profession and those that stayed in the classroom. However, teachers with advanced degrees or earning lower compensation were more likely to leave the field.

- To address these factors, the Florida Legislature could expand and revise school leadership professional development initiatives, develop a career ladder system for teachers, and require additional behavior management education for teachers.

We conclude with the name and contact number for the staff director in charge of the review, and our director’s signature. For more information on OPPAGA e-alerts, please feel free to contact me at mcguire.kathy@oppaga.fl.gov.
Program evaluators can gain valuable guidance and training at the 2007 NLPES Fall Conference. This conference features three educational tracks designed to enhance evaluation skills, examine important issues facing state government and explore ways to improve the internal process of conducting performance evaluations. One special aspect of the conference is that the Graduate School of the United States Department of Agriculture is conducting the skills enhancement track.

Conference attendees have the opportunity to meet West Virginia’s Governor, Joe Manchin, during a reception at the Governor’s Mansion, followed by dinner in the rotunda of the State Capitol building. Activities include white water rafting and a reception at the Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences. Mark your calendar today to attend the 2007 NLPES conference.

For more information, visit us online:

Sponsored by The National Legislative Program Evaluation Society
Hosted by The West Virginia Performance Evaluation & Research Division
Using Evaluations for Policymaking

Charles Sallee (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee)

We Are Legislative Evaluators And Are Here To Help

As legislative evaluators, we often have the pleasure of working with executive agencies that are happy to see us, are forthcoming with information, and enjoy going before legislative committees to explain publicly why things aren’t working as they should. If this describes your life as an evaluator stop reading now, retire and enjoy the memories. Otherwise read the following case study about the ups and downs of the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) review on New Mexico’s behavioral health system.

In 2004, the Legislature created the Interagency Behavioral Health Purchasing Collaborative (Collaborative), consisting of 21 agencies, to develop and coordinate a single statewide behavioral health care system. The Collaborative pooled appropriations from these agencies’ into a single managed care contract with a company called ValueOptions.

Bend, Don’t Break

Ever have agencies say the timing just isn’t right for an evaluation, it is too soon and come back later? Understandably the Collaborative was concerned about the Legislature’s heightened interest in how things were going only two years into what they considered a ten-year process. Our reports, while fair, point out areas needing improvement and agencies don’t like the negative attention. At the time, the Collaborative was receiving positive national attention and was a high profile executive initiative but was struggling to produce data to our budget writers. Legislators were receiving numerous constituent complaints about the change – providers not getting paid, etc. Each wanted an independent assessment of any problems.

Recognizing these needs and that the Collaborative was still in a transitional phase we moved the review back six months and carefully crafted our review objectives to focus on implementation status and the Collaborative’s oversight structure and ability to ensure consumers received high quality services.

Pick The Big Fights Wisely

Are agencies always forthcoming with sensitive information? A typo on a contract amendment with ValueOptions alerted us to a possible change in Medicaid managed care rates during the last month of the fiscal year. Agency officials acknowledged the rates were “adjusted” but would not provide the contract’s rate sheets saying the information was not public. Confidentiality agreements historically solved this problem. After obtaining other public documents, including insurance filings, we estimated an $11 million dollar increase. Officials confirmed the dollar amount but disputed the calculated percent rate increase.

Rather than request that LFC issue a subpoena or seek an Attorney General opinion to obtain the rates, we chose instead to simply point out the year-end funding increase publicly and that LFC staff was not allowed access to the full contract. This approach provided the “hook” necessary to gain widespread attention from legislators on the need for better financial accountability from the Collaborative.

Keep It Simple

We used a simple report theme to describe our findings and recommendations – “The Collaborative needs improvements in three key areas: accountability, authority and administration.” We kept reinforcing this theme throughout the legislative hearing.

Play Nice With Others: Coordinate!

Early coordination with other legislative staff helped broaden the report’s exposure to legislators beyond the LFC. This approach resulted in presentations to two other key interim committees and subsequent support of the statutory recommendations.

Don’t Fear Stakeholder Input

Relevant recommendations also broaden support for policy changes and stakeholder input helps make recommendations relevant. For example, stakeholders were struggling to keep up with rapid Collaborative decision making and spending. The review found problems with lack of rulemaking authority, even though the Collaborative was charged with creating a single system; no requirements to include and inform the public of its decisions; and funding buried in large block grants at multiple agencies. Recommendations to grant rulemaking authority and create a consolidated behavioral health budget received widespread support – particularly from consumers, families and advocates who wanted a greater participation and transparency in the system.

Even Popular Ideas Don’t Create Change

The results of the report were great – multiple committees supported legislation with our recommendations and consolidation of behavioral health appropriations was started. The Chair of LFC carried comprehensive legislation with our report...
recommendations to near unanimous passage. Unfortunately the bill was not popular with one very key stakeholder. Can you say veto?

Abraham Lincoln: Leadership Lessons for Our Times (and All Times)

(Reprinted with permission of the Government Innovators Network, Harvard University [www.innovations.harvard.edu])

Doris Kearns Goodwin, an award-winning presidential historian, recently completed a book on Abraham Lincoln. What else can be written about this extraordinary leader?

The title of her book, Team of Rivals, offers a clue. Lincoln included in his first cabinet the three men who were his rivals for the Republican nomination for president: William Seward, Salmon Chase and Edward Bates. Each was better known and more accomplished than Lincoln.

But Lincoln saw the enormous crisis facing the country, and he was determined to find the most capable men to help lead the nation. Slowly, he earned their respect as he kept his eye on the enormous challenges facing them.

How did Lincoln, whose political career included two failed campaigns for the U.S. Senate, two undistinguished years in the U.S. House, and no executive experience, rise to the occasion and lead this team of fierce rivals during our country’s biggest crisis?

Goodwin’s book provides these insights:

Magnanimous

One of Lincoln’s strongest traits was that he was generous to others, and never held a grudge. When he lost elections that he might have won, he warmly congratulated the victors. After a painful loss to Stephen Douglas in an 1858 race for the Senate, he told those who had worked hard to defeat him, “I cannot for a moment suspect you of anything dishonorable.”*

Lincoln’s choice of Edwin Stanton for secretary of war is another example. Stanton had treated Lincoln in a derogatory way when they first met during a trial six years earlier. However, Lincoln didn’t hold grudges. He only asked: Who can organize the government for war? He’d seen Stanton’s extraordinary competence and energy during their earlier encounter, and that convinced him to appoint Stanton to the critical post.

Modest, Yet Self-Confident

Lincoln loved to tell stories, and was a master at it. Often, he was the butt of his own jokes. He was well aware of his awkward gait and less-than-photogenic face, and he used self-deprecating humor to disarm his opponents.

His confidence came out in many ways, most notably in choosing three rivals for his cabinet. When asked why he’d selected them, he replied, “We needed the strongest men of the party in the Cabinet…. I had looked the party over and concluded that these were the very strongest men. Then I had no right to deprive the country of their services.”

Political Skills

Lincoln had a great ability to keep his finger on the pulse of public sentiment. And he understood that one of his most important roles was to educate people and shape public opinion. As he put it, “With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”

Lincoln long believed that “if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.” Yet, he didn’t voice that opinion in his political campaigns. As passions grew over the slavery issue, he modified his position and resolved to free those slaves in the Confederate states. But he came to this slowly, and later said that “had the [Emancipation] Proclamation been issued even six months earlier than it was, public sentiment would not have sustained it.” Lincoln saw how emancipating slaves in the South would benefit the war effort. As he helped others see the military benefits of emancipation, their support for it grew. It’s important to note that Lincoln saw emancipation as a highly moral act, the one thing he thought he would be remembered for, but he also saw the strategic value in it, and that helped convince others to support it.

Empathy

Lincoln excelled at sensing others’ needs and capabilities. Because he was so good at putting himself in the place of others, he found the most effective ways to connect with people. This ability gained him life-long supporters.

In 1854, he gave his first major anti-slavery speech. The previous day, Stephen Douglas had spoken for three hours on the same topic. Lincoln was moved to respond, and gave an impassioned speech. Rather than castigate slave owners and call them immoral (as many abolitionists did), Lincoln did a remarkable thing: He denied any fundamental differences between those who did and did not own slaves, remarking that “…they
slave owners are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not now exist amongst them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist amongst us, we should not instantly give it up…. I surely will not blame them for not doing what I should not know how to do myself.”

Magnanimous, modest/self-confident, politically astute, empathetic. These lessons are as powerful today as they were in Lincoln’s time. And, given the divisive, ineffectual state of American politics today, they are certainly needed.


**Investigating the Texas Youth Commission: The Texas State Auditor’s Office’s Immediate Response to a Sizeable Challenge**

Lisa Collier, CPA (Texas State Auditor’s Office)

On March 2, 2007, the Texas Legislative Audit Committee determined that gross fiscal mismanagement existed at the Texas Youth Commission (TYC), the state agency responsible for confining certain youths who have committed crimes. Serious allegations of abuse at TYC facilities prompted the Committee to offer the Governor the option of directing TYC to develop a rehabilitation plan with the assistance of the Texas State Auditor’s Office. The Committee requested that the rehabilitation plan be completed within 15 days.

**Conducting the Investigation**

The Texas State Auditor’s Office immediately sent an audit team with forensics expertise to the TYC central office; additional audit teams were dispatched to 3 of the 39 TYC facilities across the state. We also developed hard copy and electronic surveys to be completed anonymously by both the youths confined at TYC facilities and the employees who worked there. Focusing our resources enabled us to shed light on numerous deficiencies and complete the bulk of the investigation within just one week.

We expanded our efforts the following week and sent audit teams to an additional 32 TYC facilities. A total of 3,280 TYC youths (68.26 percent of all youths in TYC facilities) and 1,865 TYC employees (38.48 percent of all TYC employees) responded to our surveys. Throughout the project, we coordinated closely with other investigative authorities and referred more than 400 potential abuse cases for further investigation.

**Analyzing Our Results**

In just two weeks, our investigation yielded a significant amount of information about deficiencies in TYC’s physical security; youth grievance process; organizational structure; resource allocation; and workloads, qualifications, and training of facility staff.

For example, we identified several facility structural and policy issues (insufficient use of surveillance cameras, no maximum occupancy rates, and insufficient juvenile correctional officer-to-youth ratios) that impaired the physical safety of youths in TYC facilities. We also found there was no independent and centralized entity assigned to the investigation of youth grievances. In addition, our investigation uncovered significant weaknesses in TYC’s workforce management practices and employee screening and background checks.

**Recommend Changes**

On March 16, 2007, we released the results of our investigation in a 60-page report that included dozens of concrete recommendations to TYC and the Texas Legislature to correct the deficiencies our auditors had identified.

At the legislative hearings that followed, we testified publicly about what we had observed at the TYC facilities and the deficiencies we had identified. We also participated in work groups that were drafting legislation related to TYC’s rehabilitation plan. Following the release of our report, the Governor appointed a conservator to oversee TYC.

Many of our recommendations were included in TYC’s rehabilitation plan and the conservator’s report; many of them also were incorporated into legislation enacted by the Texas Legislature. Significant recommendations included:

- Improving the youth grievance process by creating an independent Office of Inspector General to oversee the investigation process and establishing a juvenile advocacy group to represent youths.
- Classifying youths based on age and offense.
- Improving the staff-to-youth ratio.

Our investigative report is available online at http://www.sao.state.tx.us/Reports/report.cfm/report/07-022.
Résumé Blunders

In a recent CareerBuilder.com survey, hiring managers and human resource professionals across the nation shared the most unusual résumé blunders they’ve come across in their careers. Top slip-ups from the survey included:

* Applicant attached a letter from her mother.
* Applicant specified that his availability was limited because Friday, Saturday and Sunday were “drinking time.”
* Applicant explained that he works well nude.
* Applicant explained an arrest by stating, “We stole a pig, but it was a really small pig.”
* Applicant drew a picture of a car on the outside of the envelope and said it was the hiring manager’s gift.
* Applicant explained a three-month gap in employment by saying it was because he was getting over the death of his cat.

Office Happenings

**Arizona**
The Office of the Auditor General has welcomed Catherine Dahlquist to Performance Auditor Manager. Catherine will be responsible for overseeing the team that conducts audits of the Department of Economic Security Child Protective Services Division. Also, the Office promoted Pam Niesl and Sara Bessette to Auditor II positions.

**Florida**
OPPAGA has welcomed the following new employees: Kimberly Barrett; Glenn Holley; Jillian Hughes; Amy Lowry; Ed Madden; Brook Pace; Audrey Rice; and Kathy Witgert.

**Kansas**
The Kansas Office of the Legislative Post Auditor recently received an “Excellence in Accountability” award from the National State Auditors Association. The office received the award for its report entitled “Cost Study Analysis-Elementary and Secondary Education in Kansas; Estimating the Costs of K-12 Education Using Two Approaches.”

**Maryland**
The Maryland Office of Legislative Audits (OLA) received its second “Excellence in Accountability” award in as many years from the National State Auditors Association. The Special Project award was for the OLA’s monitoring and reporting of the corrective actions taken by the State Board of Elections and the local boards of election in several large Maryland counties in response to a number of problems noted during the September 2006 primary election. That primary election was the first statewide all-electronic election in Maryland making use of both electronic voting machines and poll books. At the request of legislative leadership, the OLA developed a monitoring process and generated weekly status reports between the primary and general elections. These reports provided current information to the presiding officers and the public on the
primary election problems and required solutions, helping to ensure a successful November 2006 election.

**Minnesota**

Jan Sandberg retired in June after seventeen years as a program evaluator with the Office of the Legislative Auditor.

**Mississippi**

The Joint Legislative PEER Committee recently welcomed Sarah Resavy as an evaluator.

**New Mexico**

The Legislative Finance Committee has hired three new program evaluation staff: Donna Hill-Todd, a credit union executive with prior experience at the Labor Department and the Texas State Auditor’s office; Jennifer Leal, a New Mexico State University accounting graduate; and, Kami Gupta, a University of Texas at El Paso accounting graduate with project management experience and years of service at IBM and New Mexico Department of Health.

**North Carolina**

The Legislative Services Commission recently announced the creation of the Program Evaluation Division within the Legislative Services Office. The Commission also announced the appointment of John Turcotte as Director of the Program Evaluation Division. John has a long and distinguished career in the program evaluation field having served as director of the Mississippi and Florida legislative program evaluation offices.

**West Virginia**

John Sylvia, Executive Director of the Performance Evaluation and Research Division, will marry Susan Basta on July 21. Following the wedding in Mineral Wells, West Virginia, John and his new bride will be taking a family vacation to Walt Disney World.

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**From the Editor**

♫ Summer time, and the living is easy ♫ Not so! If you’re a legislative program evaluator or auditor. It seems as though summer months are just as busy as other times of the year. However, we can all take heart that our efforts during these “lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer” could result in meaningful legislation when our legislatures convene again.

Please remember that NLPES has two excellent training opportunities on the horizon. Our organization will sponsor or co-sponsor several sessions during the NCSL Annual Meeting in August. Gerry Schwandt (Michigan) is chair of the Executive Committee’s Annual Meeting subcommittee and has worked diligently to plan meaningful sessions for our members who will attend the Annual Meeting in Boston. Following on the heels of the Annual Meeting will be the NLPES Fall Training Conference hosted by the West Virginia Performance Evaluation and Research Division. John Sylvia and his capable staff are planning sessions that will be beneficial to all levels of evaluators and auditors, as well as social events that will be fun and enjoyable. Plan now to attend the training conference in Charleston, West Virginia.

Thanks to Ken Levine for serving as NLPES Chair over the past year. Ken provided tireless leadership to the Executive Committee and worked hard to make our organization relevant and accessible to all members.

*James Barber*