

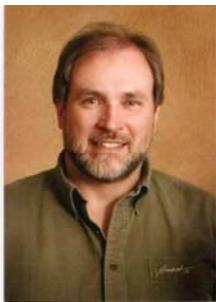
NLPES News

National Legislative Program Evaluation Society

A Staff Section of the National Conference of State Legislatures
FEBRUARY 2008



Chair's Corner Tim Osterstock (Utah)



Unlike our national elections, every year is an election year for the NLPES Executive Committee. So, sitting here in a sorta warm office with a blizzard blowing outside, it seems like a good time to detail for all of our members what the NLPES Executive Committee

(EC) is all about and where I think we may be going in the future. My hope is that a number of you may be interested in running for the committee in the future and continuing its good work. Mostly, I'm hoping that anything I say won't dissuade any of you from running because serving on the committee is truly worthwhile.

The EC, as established in NLPES's by-laws, is charged with addressing, as arbitrary as it sounds, the five purposes of the organization. Two of the stated purposes: advancing the art and science of evaluation and promoting the exchange of ideas are quite general and very much open to interpretation. The other three: enhancing training, recognizing significant contributions, and identifying new issues are much more specific. Our by-laws are rather scant as to how the purposes should be addressed. Fortunately, we have organizational traditions to reinforce our fear of change that pretty much set some of what we do in stone. In fact, the only real direction from our by-laws is that the EC Chair is required to appoint EC members to committees, four of which are titled: nominations and elections,

awards, professional development and training, and communications and technology.

The EC is a practical group that, for a number of years, has settled on six subcommittees that mostly follow the by-law committee requirement and does address all five of the stated by-law purposes. It seems like pretty mundane stuff. Each year, for professional development and training, we have NLPES-controlled sessions at the NCSL Annual Meeting, excuse me, now called the NCSL Legislative Summit, and we have our NLPES Fall Conference. For awards, we recognize achievement at the annual meetings. For communication, we have our newsletter and webpage. Our elections happen every year and we just keep going on. All of these functions seem to allow for the exchange of ideas and identification of new issues so, from the outside, it looks like pretty much everything the EC does is straightforward following the status quo. Wrong.

Each one of the abovementioned tasks requires EC members to exercise their best judgment, be persuasive, and invest their time, lots of time. Hours are spent reading through award submittals, reviewing conference sites and budgets, identifying and chasing down speakers, and working with NCSL. And, not being in a static field, each year brings changes to each of these activities. Each year also brings new challenges as the EC, with greater frequency, shows its willingness to take on more difficult tasks.

I am now in my sixth and final year as a voting member of the EC and I have watched the committee grow and, especially in the last three years, challenge the status

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quo. As a result of the EC's shepherding and strong host state participation, our Fall Conference seems to be gaining momentum and increasing in quality. NLPES stood up to NCSL's high overhead cost allocations for our Fall Conference and improved the financial stability of our future conferences. Electronic learning is getting off the ground with conference session discs rather than the older, bulkier, bound version. We have improved web-based member feedback mechanisms to aid in future session speaker and topic selections. And, this year, we are resurrecting an e-version of the state survey to get a better handle on who our members are and what they want. (Please fill it out; EC members will be contacting each of you who are sluggish about getting it completed.)

Over the last two years, with thanks to Ken Levine, NLPES has been testing podcasting as a mechanism for getting information and training out to our members in a way that fits individual time constraints. This year, we are exploring session video as a way of getting Legislative Summit and Fall Conference session training out to members unable to attend the meetings. We are also working with the never-ending struggle to get our website up to date.

Last year, the EC started working on major updates of our awards and recognitions. While the change is somewhat controversial, we are simply attempting to better match our awards with the work of all our member agencies, large and small. I personally have felt that we have been far too

limited in what we recognize as "good work" and have overlooked the contributions of a number of our member offices.

For me, the biggest step we are taking now is that of developing an NLPES based peer review process. This actually began a few years ago with Florida initiating a review through NCSL rather than going to another organization, and it has evolved since then. Nearly every other national audit/evaluation organization has an established peer review process. We have fallen behind in this area and really need to step up and show that NLPES is a leader in the evaluation field. To do this, I believe that we must make peer review an ongoing NLPES program, not a sometimes NCSL function. The EC is working to establish peer review policies and procedures as well as documentation standards and cost controls. This needs to be a member-driven system that can provide the best review possible at the lowest possible cost. I know this sounds kind of preachy but I believe it is important and that we can do it.

Bringing us back to the beginning, the last item to discuss is our EC election process. This year, we are considering a realignment of EC member terms from two-year to three-year commitments. Program changes do not occur overnight or over two years, this change may allow greater continuity on the committee and accelerate program changes. The commitment would be longer but would allow the EC members to see some of their work through. Throw your hat in the ring and give it a try, it's a great opportunity to help our organization.



News From the Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee

Dr. Gary VanLandingham, NCSL Staff Vice Chair (Florida OPPAGA)

A little-known but important part of NCSL is the Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee (LSCC). Nonetheless, it is working on some major projects that have the potential to strengthen NCSL's services to evaluators and audit staff.

To give some background (don't yawn yet), NCSL is a complex organization that represents the nation's 50 state legislatures. It is governed by an executive committee composed of both legislators and legislative staff, and is led by both legislator and staff officers. The LSCC is composed of two representatives of each of the ten staff sections (including our NLPES chair and vice-chair), plus

the sixteen staff members of the executive committee and the three national staff officers—the chair, vice-chair, and past chair (confused yet?). The staff executive committee members and officers are chosen by a nominating committee at the NCSL Annual Meeting and serve three-year terms. The Executive Committee and the LSCC meet four times a year.

The LSCC typically meets the day before the Executive Committee and works in committees to address topics that affect legislative staff nationwide (more on that later). The Executive Committee provides oversight of NCSL's budget and programs, as well as discusses critical national issues that affect all states such as the

federal No Child Left Behind Act and what NCSL's position should be in lobbying Congress on its reauthorization.

By this time, you are likely thinking "Why should I care if our esteemed NLPES chair and vice chair get to go off to these meetings? What are they doing for me?" (Come on, you know you were thinking it...).

Well, rest assured that Tim and Jan aren't just off on some quarterly junket and the LSCC is working hard on some pretty important things. The LSCC meetings are grueling—the recent January one started at 7:30 in the morning and its committee meetings ran for about 11 hours, followed by another full day of Executive Committee meetings the next day. While the food at the meetings can be somewhat better than the average gruel, it is generally standard conference hotel fare. So, folks don't go to LSCC meetings to hang out, but instead look forward to getting back to their day jobs where the pace is somewhat saner (at least on a good day).

Currently, the LSCC is working on several major topics that will improve NCSL's services to all legislative staff:

- The legislative institutions committee is assessing major factors that are affecting state legislatures over the next 25 years and developing strategies for addressing these challenges. It is also working with NCSL staff to develop a web resource on separation of powers issues, including the importance of legislative oversight (e.g., our jobs);
- The marketing and outreach committee is working to develop better ways to market NCSL's services to legislative staff and legislators so that both staff and members understand what NCSL can do for them and how to get involved with the organization. The committee is also working to update NCSL's lists of legislative staff to make sure that all staff receive information from NCSL;

- The professional development committee is examining ways to strengthen training programs for legislative staff, including developing e-learning programs. The technology now exists to provide high quality training programs over the computer, which has the promise of revolutionizing how we receive professional development. For example, in the future NLPES may be able to deliver all the training needed to meet the Yellow Book 40-hour mandate via the Internet, which would be far more relevant than the training we often end up getting stuck with to meet this requirement;
- The technology review committee is working to redesign the NCSL website so that it is easier to find information, as well as make easier for NLPES to maintain its portion of the website (such as making it easier to find copies of the Fall 1994 *NLPES News*). It is also monitoring the roll-out of a new 50-state bill status system that will enable staff to track legislation nationwide;
- The staff section officers committee is examining issues related to professional development seminars like our annual NLPES fall training conference. This group arranges multi-staff section meetings—for example, several staff sections will join NLPES in Hawaii for the 2009 training conference (imagine that); and,
- The Standing Committees committee is examining ways to strengthen the role of legislative staff in the NCSL Standing Committees, which meet three times a year to develop NCSL's lobbying position on federal issues.

The LSCC plans to have work completed on several of these topics by the July NCSL annual meeting (AKA the Legislative Summit). As incoming staff chair, I can confidentially predict that ongoing work will continue on several of the issues over the next year as well. I'll have more on that in a future column.

NLPES Fall Training Conference

September 23-27, 2008

Madison, Wisconsin

Hosted by the Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau

Skills development, issue-oriented sessions, and round-table discussions in an award-winning city



STATE PROFILE: Tennessee Offices of Research and Education Accountability

Established: 1994

Governing Body and Duties: We are unusual in that we don't work for a committee or other governing body, but respond to requests from the entire General Assembly. The Office of Research handles all requests affecting general government; the Office of Education Accountability focuses completely on P-12 education issues.

Staff Background: Presently have 17 professional staff: one Ph.D., one J.D., eleven masters degrees (various social sciences); four bachelors' degrees (economics, finance, history)

What We Want You to Know About Tennessee: Our music is not all "country" and our people aren't either.

Biggest Misconceptions: Because we work for the Comptroller's Office, we must be financial auditors.

Little Known Facts About the Comptroller: He does a great Elvis impersonation.

Best Things About Where We Work: We get to visit animal shelters; our office is near the Chile Burrito.

Biggest Misunderstanding: That we're trying to harm the education system by identifying its weaknesses.

Great Moments in Tennessee History: American women would not have gained the right to vote in August 1920, without the courage of one young Tennessee legislator. He heeded his mother's warning not to return home if he failed to vote "Aye" for the women's suffrage amendment. (Always listen to your momma.)

Adventures in Program Evaluation: Analysts were told by an alternative school director that "We don't allow no devil worhippin' in here." We decided against a finding on the implications for students' religious liberties.

Common Office Phrases: "I've got a hot one!" (Calendared bills in need of a fiscal note support form immediately.)

Not for the Faint-Hearted: Our report editing process- so you think you can write?

Most Difficult Assignment: Staffing the Death Penalty Study Committee and listening to discussion of various methods of lethal injection.

Oddest Media Request: To explain why inability to calculate postage could be a possible sign of math illiteracy



Crafting Your Message: Turning Your 50 Page Report Into a 15 Minute Presentation

Justin Brown and Martha Erwin (Virginia JLARC)

Translating your agency's written products into concise and meaningful presentations can be the best way to convey report findings and add value to the legislative oversight process. Creating effective presentations requires adapting to the fixed aspects of the presentation environment and using a deliberate approach.

Adapt to Fixed Aspects of Presentation Environment

Much of the presentation environment is usually beyond the presenter's control. The legislative analyst must adapt to these fixed aspects when preparing to make a presentation.

Presentation content and format typically already determined. Developing a presentation from a written report means that most of your presentation content already exists. In addition, most legislative oversight organizations have standardized presentation formats. This means that the look, organization, and content of your presentation are largely fixed.

Agency conventions dictate tone and format. The legislative environment varies by state, yet is typically steeped in history, formality, and procedure. These conventions largely dictate the tone the legislative analyst must take when making a presentation to legislators. They can also dictate the amount of time a presentation is allotted on the agenda (and thus, in a way, its significance).

Physical layout and audience affect presentation. Most legislative oversight agencies make presentations in large rooms used for committee meetings or public hearings. The physical layout of these rooms (standing at podium or sitting at a table), the technology available (projector and microphone or paper), and those in attendance (agency officials, lobbyists, media, or the public) can have a large effect on the presentation.

Analysts who prepare a presentation in a vacuum or assume an “ideal” environment do so at their peril. But by being aware of the fixed aspects of a presentation, they can anticipate and usually avoid potential problems and focus on those elements they *can* control.

Use a Deliberate Approach to Prepare, Develop, and Deliver the Presentation

You can turn your report into an effective presentation using a cumulative, three-phase, ten-step process. Using this process requires starting early and believing that the presentation is as important, or even more important, than the written report.

Phase I: Prepare

Whether in sports, academic exams, or legislative oversight, much of success or failure is determined long before the “big event.” While in certain cases you may have little time to adequately prepare your presentation, whenever possible, start early and cover these key steps:

1. Integrate the development of your presentation with the final stages of report development. This will allow for adjustment of the report’s tone and emphasis and make the key messages of the report and the presentation more congruent.
2. Do your homework by knowing your audience, content, and the vulnerabilities/weaknesses of your study. A prepared presenter understands the positions of the audience and has carefully considered how the presentation content will be received given those positions.
3. Know your personal tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses. While there is no single best way to make a presentation, there are specific techniques that work better given a person’s unique style. For example, if you tend to talk too fast, build “pause moments” into your slides.

Phase II: Develop Content

Now that you are ready to develop the presentation content, resist the urge to immediately start typing away. What’s important at this stage is to have a fresh perspective driven by objectives and messages, and a willingness to pare down content to the most critical information. Developing strong presentation content entails these key steps:

4. Develop a presentation outline. Identify your key objectives for the presentation and let them drive the outline. Make sure to address the key themes and findings from the report.
5. Build presentation content to convey the message. Strong presentation content uses active voice and “telegraphic” headings; avoid complete sentences, but also avoid vague or cryptic “verbal scraps.”
6. Build slides that provide the right amount of detail. (If not using slides, the same principle applies.) Keep it simple, but cover what’s important. A strong presenter provides just enough detail for legislators to understand whether they should be concerned, ask for additional information, or take certain actions.
7. If using slides, build them to emphasize the visual. Presentation slides should not look like report pages. Use graphics where appropriate to simplify and enhance the presentation’s key messages. Most graphics or tables from a written report need to be streamlined or simplified to work in a presentation.

Phase III: Deliver

Finally, the day has arrived. You are well prepared and have developed a strong presentation—all of which is meaningless if the presentation does not go well. Even the most experienced legislative analysts may get nervous before a major presentation, but still succeed because they are well prepared and in the right frame of mind. Effective presentation delivery entails these key steps:

8. Use a tone consistent with the environment and content. An effective legislative analyst is always professional and respectful to legislators. The analyst should be an involved and, at times, persuasive presenter. However, this must be balanced with being objective and fact-based. The analyst’s tone should match the presentation content; serious issues should not be addressed in a lighthearted way.

9. Be a value-added presenter. Don't just read the slides, but make your delivery consistent with and complementary of the slides. Vary the pace, volume, and intensity of your voice to emphasize key points and maintain audience interest.
10. Succeed beyond the slides. Despite all the preparation, there will be questions you may not be able to answer. It's all right to not be omniscient. Welcome questions as an opportunity to further inform, build interest, or

clarify previous points. React to unplanned events or questions with an analytic and calm frame of mind. Being in an emotional or fearful state hinders your ability to think clearly. And always be prepared to distill your presentation into a shorter message that addresses your key points.

Using the above process never guarantees an effective presentation. Adding these principles, however, to an analyst's toolkit provides a repeatable approach to presentations that can lead to improvement over time.



Peer Review: More Than a Look Over Your Shoulder

Sarah Resavy and James Barber (Mississippi PEER Committee)

What is Peer Review?

The term *peer review* is commonly used to describe the formal process for monitoring compliance with quality control policies and procedures of CPA firms and governmental audit organizations. The process is also known as a quality control review or quality assessment review.

The accounting profession's first uniform peer review program was created in 1977 by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA). The program required all member firms conducting attestation functions to adhere to a single set of generally accepted auditing standards. The most important requirement—peer review every three years—would monitor adherence to those standards. The peer review process was initially designed as an educational and remedial program to prevent recurrences of problems and correct deficiencies in the practices of member firms.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO), established in 1921 as the General Accounting Office, promulgated the *Government Auditing Standards* ("Yellow Book") that have been adopted in the peer review process. The GAO disseminated the first Yellow Book in 1972.

In 1991, the National Association of Local Government Auditors (NALGA) established a peer review program to assist member organizations in complying with the Yellow Book standards. NLAGA expanded the peer review program in 2005 to include "Red Book" reviews, or peer reviews for audit organizations utilizing the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal*

Auditing ("Red Book"), adopted by the Institute of Internal Auditing (IIA). For Red Book reviews, audit organizations are required to have an external assessment completed every five years.

A peer review team is engaged by the CPA firm or governmental audit organization to perform the review. Each member of the peer review team is required to be independent of the CPA firm or governmental audit organization and must be qualified to perform the review. The peer review team evaluates the firm's or organization's internal quality control policies and procedures and selects audits and attestation engagements to evaluate whether the firm or organization followed its internal quality control policies and procedures when performing those engagements. The results of the peer review team's evaluation are submitted in a peer review report. The reviewed CPA firm or governmental audit organization responds in writing to the peer review team's comments on matters in the peer review report and/or in the letter of comments. The response describes the actions taken or planned with respect to each matter in the report and/or the letter.

Peer Reviews of NLPES Member Offices

Forty-five states have NLPES member offices that conduct performance evaluations and audits and most of these offices receive a peer review on a regular basis. Over half of the offices—twenty-six—have adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* (Yellow Book) that require the offices to receive a peer review at least once every three years but do not require a peer review to be conducted by any specific organization. Many of these offices conduct both financial audits and program evaluations and, in the past, have chosen to receive peer

reviews conducted by the National State Auditors' Association (NSAA), which was organized as an associate of the National Association of State Auditors, Comptrollers, and Treasurers (NASACT). NSAA provides peer reviews that cover both financial audits and performance evaluations.

Offices must be members of NASACT to request a peer review from this organization. Therefore, NSAA peer reviews are not accessible to many NLPES member offices such as the nineteen offices that have not adopted the *Government Auditing Standards* and that are not NASACT members. In addition to the nineteen unaffiliated member offices, there are NLPES member offices with NASACT affiliation that have expressed a desire to receive peer reviews from another source. A primary reservation with reviews conducted by NSAA is that the organization's emphasis is on *financial* auditing. NSAA peer reviewers may not sufficiently understand how state legislative performance evaluation and audit offices operate.

NCSL-Coordinated Peer Reviews of NLPES Member Offices

To date, four NLPES member offices have requested NCSL's assistance with coordinating peer reviews of their offices. NCSL, with assistance from eleven performance evaluators and auditors from NLPES member offices, has conducted four peer reviews—Florida Office of Program Policy and Government Accountability (2002 and 2006); Hawaii Office of the Auditor (2007); and, Washington Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (2007). The Nebraska Legislative Performance Audit Committee recently requested NCSL to coordinate a peer review of its Performance Audit Section.

Executive directors of the reviewed offices, as well as the NLPES peer reviewers, report that they received benefits from participating in NCSL-coordinated peer reviews. Prior to the arrival of the NLPES peer reviewers, the offices being reviewed were able to take the opportunity to re-examine

how their offices operated. The offices being reviewed were given the opportunity to learn from the peer reviewers on how other NLPES offices function and how to incorporate these practices into their own operations. The reviews also provided feedback and recommendations on how the reviewed offices could improve their structure and processes from an objective group of "outsiders."

In addition to meeting one office's statutory requirements for a peer review, the review also provided suggestions on the supervision of projects, project management and the quality control process. Overall, the external review affirmed the offices' credibility and validated their ability to meet the needs of their legislatures and legislative committees.

The NLPES peer reviewers also benefited from the reviews. Similarly to the reviewed organizations, the peer reviewers had the opportunity to see how other states' legislative program evaluation and audit agencies were organized and brought back ideas from these states to their own offices. These ideas were used to improve processes of the reviewers' home offices. The interaction between the peer review team members and the reviewed offices provided a learning experience and training to the external peer review teams.

Future Peer Reviews of NLPES Member Offices

For the past several years, there has been interest among NLPES member offices for the NLPES Executive Committee to establish a peer review process that is similar in design and implementation to the NCSL-coordinated peer reviews. Because NLPES members understand the unique nature of the work completed by state legislative performance evaluation and audit offices, these offices could receive peer reviews that more specifically address improvements for performing qualitative-oriented work. The Professional Development and Training Subcommittee of the NLPES Executive Committee is currently in the process of researching and designing a peer review process for member offices. The Executive Committee plans on having the NLPES-authorized peer review process finalized and available for use by member offices in the very near future.



Top Ten Peer Review Findings

Tom Surpitski (District of Columbia Office of Inspector General)

Editor's Note: The website for the Association of Local Government Auditors contains an article written by Tom Surpitski entitled "Top Ten

N.A.L.G.A. Peer Review Findings-June 2003." In his article Mr. Surpitski stated that his office—the District of Columbia Inspector General, Audit Division—

requested NALGA members to share their management letters from past peer reviews. The office received thirty-nine reports from twenty-five local, county, and state member organizations. The purpose of the exercise was to determine the nature and frequency of “suggestions for improvement” made by the peer review teams. The office complied and distributed to its staff the “Top 10 N.A.L.G.A. Peer Review Findings.”

Although these findings resulted from peer reviews of offices that were primarily financial in nature, similar weaknesses could exist in NLPES member offices also.

1. Auditor Independence Not Assured

- Need to have auditors sign statement of independence for each audit engagement assigned.

2. Inadequate Cross-Referencing

- Survey and audit programs to workpapers.
- Conclusions to workpapers.
- Summary workpapers to workpapers.
- Reports (draft and final) to workpapers.
- Report schedules to workpapers.
- Finding sheets to workpapers.
- Audit guide to workpapers.

3. Audit Programs

- Survey and audit programs not approved prior to fieldwork.
- Inadequate detail to determine work to be performed.
- Audit objective not supported by evidence collected.
- Objective change not documented.

4. Workpapers

- Missing final report and/or client’s response.
- Missing exit conference.
- Missing summary workpapers.
- Basis for sampling not documented; judgmental sampling only, use statistical sampling.
- Workpapers contain documents with no cross-referencing or any reason why they exist (use it or lose it, but account for it if removed, and listed on the table of contents).

5. Supervision

- Adequacy and timeliness of review needs improvement.

- Deviation from audit program not approved.
- Partial workpaper review.
- Supervisory review completed after final report issue.
- No evidence in workpapers supporting supervisory review.
- Audit staff meetings not documented.
- Supervisory checklists attesting to completion of workpapers missing.
- Workpapers missing elements (objectives, scope, and methodology, sampling criteria).

6. Reliability of Data from Computer-Based Systems

- A lack of evidence or documentation supporting verification of the reliability of computerized data used during the audit.
- No evidence in workpapers that steps taken to determine validity and reliability of the computer-processed data used in auditor’s findings.
- Workpapers did not identify computer-processed data that may be significant to the audit.
- Reliance on computer-generated information was not always documented.

7. Management Controls

- Limited reviews of internal controls performed.
- Separately identifying and analyzing the management controls significant to the audit objectives could improve audits.
- When deficiencies were noted auditors failed to examine management controls to determine if that was the cause.

8. Required Report Language

- The statement required by GAS or qualified statement missing from report, such as: “The audit was made in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.”

9. Noteworthy Accomplishments

- Reports did not mention management accomplishments and therefore failed to give the report balance and the appearance of objective assessment.

10. Continuing Professional Education

- CPE requirements not met (80 hours every 2 years; at least 20 hours in any one of the 2 years; 24-hour government related training)



Don't Cry for Me Argentina

Dr. Gary VanLandingham (Florida OPPAGA)

Last summer, I had the privilege of being part of a NCSL delegation of legislators and staff to Argentina. The trip provided great insight into the workings of another system of government as well as the opportunity to see the U.S. through others' eyes.

During the trip we visited Buenos Aires, the national capital city, as well as several capitals of Argentine states. These ranged from the state capital of Santa Fe, a wonderful old building with Spanish and French architectural elements that they repainted just for our visit (well, at least that's what they said), to the ultra-modern capital of Neuquén state, which was still being finished when we visited and was the largest government building in the city (they obviously know which branch of government is most important!). A unique attribute to the Neuquén legislature is that staff wore uniforms based on their function, kind of like on Star Trek. For example, administrative staff all wore yellow, while technology staff wore blue. They didn't have audit/evaluation staff; if they did I imagine they would have dressed like the Grim Reaper.

We were in the midst of the Argentine presidential campaign while we were in the country, which differs in many ways from U.S. elections. A primary difference is that they manage to complete their election in a lot less time than our 2+ year cycle, which is a good thing. There are a lot of 'favorite son' candidates such as the Speaker of various state legislatures. As in the U.S., one of the front runners was the wife of a former president.

Legislative oversight in Argentina is generally weak, reflecting the country's history of regular military coups and a strong presidential system (somehow the generals didn't welcome oversight studies by legislative staff). However, legislators recognize the importance of the issue, and there are some preliminary efforts to build this capacity. There are also efforts to build an organization of state legislatures similar to NCSL. There is also now a passionate belief in the importance of having everyone vote, something that we could use more of here.

Argentina is a country of great promise, a tragic political history, and huge contrasts. Buenos Aires is a beautiful city with huge, ornate 'town homes' for the elite but also terrible poverty and slums. It has majestic cathedrals that are defaced with graffiti (even the capital building and national monuments are covered with graffiti). The city has a very European feel and is definitely a place for night owls (restaurants don't really get going until 9 PM, and you are lucky if dinner is done by midnight). The U.S. Embassy building has all the style and grace of a bunker (I asked if they had bought it from East Germany, but they hadn't). Every other person in the commercial district really, really wants to sell you a leather jacket. There are few traffic signals or signs at any intersection, and crossing streets is a religious experience. It takes two to tango, but you can watch street performers demonstrate it at any time (no, we didn't try). Argentines, like all of us, want effective government that meets public needs in an efficient and transparent manner. Like all trips, it is great to visit other places but also really, really nice to get back home.



Office Happenings

Maryland

The Maryland Office of Legislative Audits (OLA) will host the 2008 National State Auditors' Association's annual conference in Baltimore, Maryland on June 4-6, 2008. The conference is scheduled to include a number of topics of interest to the state audit community, including information security, forensic auditing and discussions of emerging issues. There will also be presentations by representatives from the U.S. Government Accountability Office and the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Notable speakers include David M. Walker, Comptroller General of the United States; Alan Paller, Director of Research for the SysAdmin, Audit Network, Security

(SANS) Institute; Robert H. Attmore, Chairman of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board; and Dr. Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, author, consultant to the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, and President of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. For more information contact the OLA at 1-877-486-9964 or visit www.nasact.org/conferences.

Mississippi

The Joint Legislative PEER Committee recently welcomed Charles (Ted) Sledge as a methodologist/evaluator.

New Hampshire

The Office of Legislative Budget Assistant, Audit Division, has two new hires—David Craig and Michelle Bohler. David has a MPA from the University of Illinois at

Springfield and Michelle has a MPA from Bridgewater State University (Massachusetts).

More From Tennessee



Staff of the Tennessee Offices of Research and Education Accountability

From the Editor

If your state is like mine—Mississippi—your Legislature is presently in session or will be soon. Although session time tends to be busy (and hopefully productive with many of your report recommendations being enacted into law), it is still an interesting time if you're a student of government and politics, which we all are due to our profession.

There is a famous quote of Eleanor Roosevelt that says, "Our children should learn the general framework of their government and then they should know where they come in contact with the government, where it touches their daily lives and where their influence is exerted on the government. It must not be a distant thing, someone else's business, but they must see how every cog in the wheel of a democracy is important and bears its share of responsibility for the smooth running of the entire machine." As a "cog in the wheel of democracy" our work as legislative program evaluators and auditors enables our legislatures to enact good public policy for the benefit of our states' citizens. Good luck with your legislative sessions!

James Barber

NLPES-NEWS is published three times a year by the National Legislative Program Evaluation Society, a staff section of the National Conference of State Legislatures. NLPES serves the professionals of state legislative agencies engaged in government program evaluation. The purposes of NLPES are:

- To promote the art and science of legislative program evaluation.
- To enhance professionalism and training in legislative program evaluation.
- To promote the exchange of ideas and information about legislative program evaluation.

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