



NLPES News

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Chair's Corner Martha Carter (Nebraska)



Over 4,000 people attended the NCSL Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah this summer. The last day of the meeting officially kicked off the new year for the 2004-2005 NLPES Executive Committee officers and

members. So, it's my turn to lead the cause for a year, and it looks to be a busy year. I look forward to serving as your chair and hope you will join me in welcoming new members to the Committee: Priscilla Anderson from South Carolina, Rakesh Mohan from Idaho, and Jan Yamane from Hawaii. I also want to offer a special word of thanks to Kate Wade of Wisconsin for her accomplishments as NLPES chair during the past year.

One initiative with the potential to significantly affect our offices is an effort by the Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee, which coordinates the activities of all the staff sections, to encourage staff sections to combine our fall training conferences. (NLPES is joining forces with the Legislative Reference Librarians this year in Tallahassee and has, in previous years, coordinated with other staff sections.) In fact, LSCC is asking staff sections to pay for some of the administrative costs relating to these conferences, which would be lessened if the sections coordinate their conferences. LSCC will be encouraging staff sections to meet jointly in 2006, which could reduce overhead costs and provide new opportunities for networking and programming.

The Executive Committee will be discussing these ideas extensively, and we welcome your input on what you see as advantages and disadvantages of combining our fall training conference with those of the other staff sections.

Our 2004 training conference will be hosted by the Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. The conference will feature David Walker, Comptroller General of the United States, as its keynote speaker. In addition, the conference will feature a variety of workshops and breakout sessions in the areas of Skills Development, Office Management Issues, and Hot Topics that should be of interest to all states. These hot topics will include sessions on Education, Economic Development, Corrections, and Health and Human Services. And, as always, there will be many opportunities to network with colleagues from across the country. I want to thank Gary VanLandingham, Flora Caruthers and Wade Melton for putting together what promises to be an excellent conference.

Another important initiative this year is revising our audit-reports database. This database has the potential to be an invaluable tool for our offices, but lately has failed to live up to its potential. The Executive Committee is working with NCSL to make the database more accurate and more user-friendly.

In closing, the Executive Committee welcomes your ideas on how to make this a prosperous year—please don't hesitate to contact me or other members of the committee to share your thoughts and suggestions.

Inside the NEWS

Learning Opportunities at the 2004 NCSL Annual Meeting ... 2	The Yoga of Auditing 6
John Turcotte Recognized for Contributions 2	QOTM—Almost 5, and Going Strong!..... 7
Arizona and Minnesota Offices Receive Excellence Awards. 3	Small Shops: Wanted: Small Shop Stories..... 8
Ensuring the Public Trust: 2004 Edition 3	How to Get Maximum Exposure for Your Office and Reports..... 9
State Profile: Maryland..... 4	The Adventures of Aldric of York: Medieval Auditor 10
Liaison's Corner: Networking With Others..... 5	Office Happenings 11

Learning Opportunities at the 2004 NCSL Annual Meeting

Bob Boerner (NLPES Liaison, NCSL)

Picturesque Wasatch Mountains, beautiful summer evenings, and informative training sessions. This year's NCSL Annual Meeting and Exhibition, held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from July 19 – 23, offered all of these treats for meeting participants. The NCSL Annual Meeting gathered together over 4,000 legislative leaders, lawmakers, staff members and policy experts. NCSL's "The New Legislative Reality" offered over 140 sessions on the hottest topics presented by the foremost experts.

The NLPES Executive Committee met twice during the week to discuss upcoming events for the staff section, including planning of the NLPES/LRL Fall Training Conference. Martha Carter, Performance Auditor, Performance Audit Section, Legislative Research Division, Nebraska, was named the new Chair of NLPES on July 22.

Janice Mueller, Wisconsin State Auditor, was one of the featured speakers on the "Checking the Big Gamble—Legislative Oversight of State Lotteries"

session held on July 22. Other speakers at the session were Joey Longley, Director, Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, and Wade Melton, Staff Director, Chair of the Team Support Council, Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. The staff section also offered two other sessions, "Ensuring the Payment Integrity of the Medicaid Program" and "Federal Oversight of No Child Left Behind." John Turcotte, President, Turcotte Public Administration Consulting and Training, was the panelist on the NLPES Roundtable Discussion.

At the NLPES Annual Business Meeting and Luncheon, Martha Carter, Chair of the NLPES Awards Committee, presented awards to the Arizona Office of the Auditor General for Excellence in Program Evaluation and to the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor for Excellence in Research Methods. A total of 22 offices were presented Recognition of Impact certificates. Max Arinder—from Mississippi—NCSL Staff Chair, thanked NLPES members for their contributions to NCSL and discussed NCSL's legislative staff agenda.

John Turcotte Recognized for Contributions



The 2004 recipient of the NLPES outstanding achievement award was John Turcotte, who has had a long, distinguished career in legislative program evaluation in both Mississippi and Florida as well as substantial leadership service in both NLPES and NCSL. John

started his career as a substitute teacher and soon became an instructor at Hinds Community College before joining the Mississippi Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review Committee (PEER) in 1973. While at PEER, John served as an analyst, project manager, and acting director before being appointed as Executive Director in 1978. He retired from PEER in January 1996 to become Director of the Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. He retired from OPPAGA in 2003, after leading the office for seven years.

John was a founding member in 1974 of the National Legislative Program Evaluation Society and served as Society Chair in 1979. He served on the NCSL Executive Committee, as Chair of the Assembly on State Issues, and in 1994 served as NCSL Staff Chair.

While staff chair, he instituted a code of ethics for legislative staff and began a multi-year project to boost civics education in America. John has been a leader in promoting professional development opportunities for legislative staff. John was instrumental in the creation of the Legislative Staff Management Institute, NCSL's premier training program for senior legislative staff. John also has provided numerous training programs to legislative staff nationwide over the years in areas such as making legislative presentations, project management, and performance measurement.

John Turcotte holds a BA with an MA degree in political science from the University of Southern Mississippi. He is a graduate of the U.S. Federal Executive Institute and the Legislative Staff Management Institute. He was also a member of the first group of *Henry Toll Fellows* of the Council of State Governments in 1983. Both the Mississippi and North Florida Chapters of the American Society for Public Administration named him *Public Administrator of the Year*.

NLPES thanks John for his past leadership and wishes him well in his retirement.

Arizona Office of the Auditor General and Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Receive Excellence Awards

During the 2004 NCSL Annual Meeting, NLPES recognized two offices for their outstanding work. The Arizona Office of the Auditor General received the NLPES Excellence in Evaluation award. The awards committee noted that a significant portion of the office's report recommendations have been implemented by the Arizona Legislature and/or state agencies over the last several years, providing Arizona citizens with cost savings and improved government operations. The Arizona Auditor General's office has also shown significant support for NLPES and the advancement of program evaluation, including hosting the 2002 fall training conference and providing speakers and panelists for other NLPES functions. NLPES congratulates the Arizona Auditor General's office for a job well done!

The Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor received the NLPES Excellence in Research Methods award for its report "MinnesotaCare" [report 03-03]. This report examines the accuracy of MinnesotaCare eligibility determinations and the efficiency of case processing by the Department of Human Services. Good methodology requires a strong design, reliable data and appropriate methods to draw general conclusions. Minnesota's report clearly contains all of these elements and more. As a result, this report will be used by other states that face similar issues. The Minnesota Legislature can take pride in knowing that the work of the Office of the Legislative Auditor is a model for other states examining eligibility determination in any type of state program. NLPES congratulates the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor for a job well done!

Twenty-Two Offices Awarded Certificates of Impact

During the NCSL Annual Meeting, NLPES awarded Certificates of Impact to the evaluation/audit offices in the following states: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (Auditor), Texas (Sunset Commission), Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Ensuring the Public Trust: 2004 Edition

Earlier this year, NLPES sent a survey to all member offices to collect information on a wide variety of issues affecting the field of legislative program evaluation. This effort has now been completed, and the report on the survey results "Ensuring the Public Trust-2004-Legislative Program Evaluation's Role in Serving State Legislatures" is being finalized. It will be distributed at the NLPES conference later this month, and copies will be sent to all member offices. In total, thirty-seven members responded to the survey- if you returned a survey, thanks! If you didn't, you should feel really, really guilty!

The survey updates and expands information from the prior survey, which was compiled in 2000. It includes both summary information on the offices' responses to over sixty questions as well as profiles of individual offices. In addition to descriptive information about the offices (organizational placement, staffing, reporting relationships, research standards used, and products), the report provides data on the various methods that the offices use to interact with their legislatures, other governmental stakeholders, and the

media. The report also includes assessments of the offices' use of various NCSL and NLPES services. Watch for your copy! It is sure to be a bestseller.

In a related topic, NCSL has released the results of its 2004 survey of legislative staff regarding use and satisfaction with various NCSL services. NLPES members submitted 159 responses (15% of the total). Major findings of the survey were that staff were relatively satisfied with many of NCSL's services, but could not travel to many NCSL meetings and were not very familiar with some NCSL activities. The Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee (consisting of officers from each of the ten NCSL staff sections and legislative staff members of the NCSL Executive Committee) is using the survey responses as they work to improve NCSL's professional development, marketing, and communication efforts. You can find the survey responses on the NCSL website: <http://www.ncsl.org/legis/lsc/Blueprints.htm>. The survey results start on page 44 of this document; the rest summarizes the work of the LSCC during 2003/04.

State Profile

Maryland Department of Legislative Services

In Maryland, the responsibility for legislative program evaluation rests with the Office of Policy Analysis (OPA) and the Office of Legislative Audits (OLA), both of which are located within the nonpartisan Department of Legislative Services (DLS). Several units of DLS can trace their origins back to the early part of the last century, including OLA, which originated as the Examiner of Accounts in 1900. As the central professional staffing agency for the General Assembly, DLS has more than 350 employees who provide legal, fiscal, committee, research, reference, auditing, administrative, and technological support to the members of the legislature and its committees.

In accordance with requirements set out in the Maryland State law, the Office of Policy Analysis is responsible for budget and fiscal review, as well as performing related analysis, research, studies and reports. Responsibilities of the Office of Legislative Audits include conducting fiscal compliance, financial statement, fraud, performance and local school system audits. Frequently people confuse the two offices, with the “auditors” being habitually blamed for recommending budget cuts (actually done by a unit within the Office of Policy Analysis). There was a rumor that the “auditors” were spying on state buildings using cameras mounted atop the DLS headquarter building (a charge vehemently denied and never proven).

Office of Legislative Audits

Two of the five divisions within the Office of Legislative Audits perform various audits and special reviews, and except for certain management positions, generally share staffing resources. The Performance Audit Division consists of a director, two managers and twenty-two professional staff, while the Fiscal Compliance Audit Division has a director, eight managers and fifty-four professional staff. Most of the audit staff are CPAs, and some have advanced degrees and/or are Certified Fraud Examiners (the Fiscal Compliance Division also operates a fraud hotline and investigates allegations of state employee/contractor fraud).

Program evaluation responsibility primarily rests with the Performance Division, which specifically conducts audits to assess economy, efficiency, effectiveness and program results, as well as special requests from the

General Assembly. Routine audits include auditing state agencies’ performance measures. During this past legislative session, the Maryland Legislature enacted a law that makes the Office of Legislative Audits (OLA) responsible for conducting audits of local school systems’ financial management practices, including identification of best practices. The OLA found it gratifying that at one hearing on this legislation when local school system representatives were resisting the audit requirement, believing that they were subjected to too many audits already and questioning the need for the OLA audits, one legislator spoke up and responded, “We love our auditors!”

Some of the recent performance audits conducted included reviews of:

- the adequacy of services provided by the state to children in foster care;
- minority business enterprise contract participation and monitoring of state agency compliance with MBE participation requirements;
- the adequacy of oversight and usage of cell phones by state employees; and,
- the extent that the state’s performance measurement initiative had been integrated into the annual budget preparation process and agency decision-making processes.

The OLA takes a great deal of pride when audit results lead to significant changes in program operation (in the case of the foster care and cell phone reports) or the enactment of legislation to improve program effectiveness (in the case of MBE and performance measurement audits). As Mark Funkhouser (the city auditor of Kansas City, Missouri) noted in a past article in the *Local Government Auditing Quarterly*, “Good audit reports have impact. They provide information...that people care about and their recommendations lead to structural, institutional and cultural changes in the organizations audited. That’s why we are here, isn’t it?” We couldn’t say it any better ourselves.

Office of Policy Analysis

Since 1998, the Office of Policy Analysis has been working its way through the third cycle of evaluations required by the Maryland Program Evaluation Act. These evaluations are more commonly known as “sunset reviews” because all

but three of the almost seventy agencies currently subject to review automatically terminate unless legislative action is taken to reauthorize them, generally for a ten-year period. These agencies include professional and occupational licensing boards, other regulatory agencies and commissions such as the Insurance Administration and the Division of Labor and Industry, and advisory or special function agencies – the number of such agencies fluctuates due to consolidations, eliminations, and creations. The statutory process for sunset review requires a preliminary evaluation, with recommendations to the Legislative Policy Committee. That leadership body determines whether the agency should undergo further or “full” evaluation, with specific legislative committees designated to review these evaluations. In this third cycle, only about 60 percent of the preliminary evaluations have resulted in full evaluations, down significantly from the two previous cycles when almost all did so. However, preliminary evaluations done in the current cycle incorporate more specific (recently mandated) information and compel the agencies to provide status reports as appropriate.

This review activity is consolidated into the summer and fall months of our “interim” (when the General Assembly is not in session) so that policy analysts can accommodate the additional workload as they maintain their other duties associated with the budget, fiscal notes, committee staffing, bill drafting, code revision, and other special projects. Only one policy analyst has a permanent assignment, which includes coordination of the sunset review process; all other policy analysts are assigned based on availability and subject matter. The heaviest year for sunset review was 2001, when forty-two policy analysts helped staff the nineteen preliminary and thirteen full evaluations undertaken that interim. Consequently, most of the current staff have been involved in at least one evaluation.

Liaison’s Corner

Networking With Others

Over the last several years, NLPES has had an ongoing liaison program with professional organizations whose members work in fields similar to program evaluation and auditing. Presently, NLPES actively maintains contact with the following organizations: American Evaluation Association; American Society for Public Administration; American Statistical Association; Association of Certified Fraud Examiners; Association of Government Accountants; Government Accounting Standards Board; Institute of

These evaluations generally focus on improving management, but occasionally more far-reaching, often controversial, recommendations are made. Even so, the General Assembly usually implements our recommendations or a variation of them. For example,

- The 2001 full evaluation of the State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Commission found that the commission had met its original intent, its statute was outdated, and there was a clear overlap of commission activities with those of other state entities. We recommended that the commission be allowed to sunset. The General Assembly took no action, with the result that on July 1, 2003, the commission became defunct.
- The 2001 full evaluation of the State Board of Physician Quality Assurance (BPQA) made such extensive recommendations related to the complaint resolution and peer review process that debate stalled in the 2002 session. Fortunately, the sunset review schedule in Maryland provides for two legislative sessions during which action may be taken to reauthorize agencies before they automatically terminate. During the 2003 session, several bills were introduced to extend the board temporarily, but by session-end, a comprehensive bill had been adopted to rename the board as well as make most of our recommended changes.

If you need any additional information please visit the DLS website at <http://www.dls.state.md.us> (including a link to the OLA under “AUDITS”) and for more information on Maryland, the state government website is <http://www.maryland.gov>. Finally, call toll-free 1-866-MD-Welcome, ext 11, for a free Maryland travel guide.

The Yoga of Auditing

Heather Moritz (Former Colorado Managing Legislative Auditor)



Almost a year ago, I made what some folks deemed to be a fairly significant change in lifestyle by quitting my position as a Managing Legislative Auditor at the Colorado Office of the State Auditor, ending a 14-year career in performance auditing. Although it isn't especially bizarre to leave a long career in government service to pursue other interests, I daresay that my particular path has been a bit more unusual than most. I'm currently living in Sydney, Australia and working on a MA in Creative Writing at the University of New South Wales...and, oh yeah, I'm now teaching yoga.

The creative writing thing didn't surprise most of my friends and colleagues who were aware of my lifelong interest in literature, as well as my tendencies toward pedantic adherence to the rules of good grammar and punctuation. Certain long-term auditees were also less than shocked, pointing out that my audit reports always had a certain 'creative' component. The yoga thing, however, surprised nearly everyone, including me. After quitting my job in September I had allotted three months to tie up loose ends (e.g., stuffing all my worldly goods in an 8'x10' storage space) before leaving for Sydney in early December. For reasons too strange and complicated to relate here, I also used this time to complete a nine-week vinyasa yoga instructor course. So you're probably wondering what this all has to do with auditing...I'm getting there, I promise.

Several months back, the esteemed editor of the NLPES Newsletter asked me if I would submit a piece about my post-auditing Australian adventures. After hiding for a while (it is much easier to avoid deadlines when you're living in a different hemisphere) and discarding several truly bad ideas, it occurred to me that my yoga-related experiences might provide some relevant insight into the practice of auditing. Specifically, it seems to me that the three key components found in a good yoga practice—i.e., balance, flexibility, and strength—are also the main ingredients for a well-crafted audit recommendation. Let me elaborate:

Balance

Equanimity is a key ingredient in any good audit recommendation. Establishing a balanced tone, freely

offering credit where credit is due, and setting reasonable expectations for improvement are all factors to consider when crafting balanced recommendations. Achieving balance both on and off the mat is also one of the key goals of yoga. Yogis stress the importance of establishing *drishti*, or a soft yogic gaze, when attempting balancing poses. This advice also applies to finding balance in your auditing practice. Balance is achieved through focus, but if your gaze is too hard or overly narrow, your equanimity will fail, and you'll fall over.

Flexibility

Did you ever write an audit recommendation and come back later to conduct a follow-up review only to realize that your original audit recommendation was seriously flawed? Even in the best of circumstances, this can happen and experience tells me that it is usually related to inflexibility. Just like perpetually tight hamstrings and squeaky hips, an inflexible recommendation is more likely to cause trouble down the road. The fast pace at which most reviews are now conducted means that auditors are always balancing the competing needs of performing thorough research while still producing a timely and relevant product. Recommendations that concentrate on improved outcomes tend to be more flexible than those centered on tweaking processes. Flexible recommendations also provide agency managers with the discretion they need and deserve to seek operational improvements in times of shifting objectives and elusive resources. Yogic philosophy asserts that the only constant in life is change. As such, crafting recommendations that anticipate this inevitable condition is, in the end, the only sensible path.

Strength

As a yoga instructor, I occasionally meet students who, while quite fit, struggle to achieve challenging poses, frustrated that their well-honed muscles aren't cooperating with their mind's desire. Some physical strength is needed for a good yoga practice; however, big biceps are no substitute for a more fundamental type of strength, one that lies deep within the body's core. A good audit recommendation also relies on a strong inner foundation. Let this be your mantra: condition, cause, criteria, and effect. I know, you've all heard it a thousand times but frankly, it works. Skimping on these fundamentals is like hoping that your arms will support you in a handstand when you haven't developed sufficient abdominal strength to get your body safely in and out of

the pose. At best, the result will be graceless and unstable; at worst, you'll represent a danger to yourself and others.

In closing I'd like to share one more tidbit of wisdom from my experiences on the yoga mat. There is a Sanskrit word—namaste—that is traditionally spoken at the end of every yoga practice. I've heard many translations for this word but I think the one I like best is, 'the good in me sees the good in you.' At times, the practice of auditing may feel like stepping into a parallel universe ruled by incompetence, negativity, and worst of all, indifference. Developing

a regular yoga practice can help dispel these feelings and the stress they cause. However, if this isn't an option for you, it may help to remember that people make up governments and ultimately, governments serve only one purpose—helping people. A good yoga practice is centered on compassion—a deep, endless compassion directed both inward toward yourself and outward toward others. It is my belief that the practice of auditing is most successful when it also privileges this end above all others.

G'day and namaste.

Question of the Month—Almost 5, and Going Strong!

Joel Alter (*Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor*)



Who is the crankiest legislator you've ever dealt with? Why did the program evaluator cross the road? What do you get when you cross a program evaluator with a rhinoceros? All of these are questions that

have NOT been posed as an NLPES Question of the Month (but perhaps they should be at a future date).

The NLPES Question of the Month is now in its fifth year, and I'm hoping that you've found occasion to make use of it during that time. NLPES listserve subscribers receive notification about newly posed Questions of the Month, and they're invited to e-mail responses to me. Later, the responses to a given question are posted on the NLPES website. The website has an archive of the past questions and the responses received.

A total of 28 questions have been posed since the Question of the Month started in 2000. The questions have addressed widely varying topics—such as the traits of a good program evaluator, teamwork, staff recruitment, the impact of budget cuts, and survey practices, to name a few.

One of the original goals of the Question of the Month was to create a venue for exchange of information among NLPES members, and I think it has succeeded. Since starting the Question of the Month, we've received responses from 110 separate individuals (including lots of people who've sent in responses on multiple occasions). We've heard from staff in 34 different legislative program evaluation offices. We've also received occasional responses from people in state executive branch agencies and the U.S. GAO.

Although NLPES offices share common purposes, it's always interesting to me to see the ways in which we differ—for example, in our organizational structures, our day-to-day research practices, and in the ways we distribute information. There are a lot of things we can learn from each other, and the Question of the Month provides a window into the worlds of our member agencies.

Occasionally, I'm even surprised by Question of the Month responses. Earlier this year, we posed a Question of the Month regarding the confidentiality of agency work papers. I had previously assumed that most offices operated like Minnesota's—that work papers were presumed to be public, except in instances where they were specially classified pursuant to state law (e.g., to protect release of confidential data on individuals or to allow us to protect the identity of persons providing us with sensitive information). I was intrigued to learn that the work papers of quite a few NLPES agencies are presumed to be confidential, or can be released only with the approval of an oversight body—which seemed odd to me for agencies in the business of public accountability. While the Question of the Month didn't provide a forum for debating this point, it helped me recognize some differences among NLPES agencies that I didn't fully appreciate previously.

To help sustain the relevance and usefulness of the Question of the Month, I have a few requests for NLPES members. First, please feel free to send me ideas for new questions to pose. If you've been assuming that there is a Question of the Month Committee that meets several times a year at lavish resorts to deliberate over a lengthy list of suggested topics... nope! I welcome any and all suggestions for new questions, and I'm very easy to reach! (joel.alter@state.mn.us).

Second, please keep responding to the questions that are posed. If your agency prefers to send in a single response on behalf of the agency, that's fine. But I also like to periodically pose questions that call for more individualized responses—and the more responses, the better!

Third, when your office is facing a vexing issue, take a look at the archive of Question of the Month topics to see if someone has posted wise words on this topic in the past. If not, maybe you've got a good candidate for a new Question of the Month—so feel free to let me know.

Finally, if you haven't subscribed to the NLPES listserve, I encourage you to do so. It's a good way for all of us to stay "in the loop"—not only by seeing new postings for the Question of the Month, but also by seeing notices about newly-released reports or questions posed by individual offices.

Five years ago, I wasn't sure whether the Question of the Month idea was really going to work—but I think it's been a good way for "rank and file" members of NLPES to stay connected with their peers. Thanks for your participation—and let's hope we don't run out of good questions to ask anytime soon!

Small Shops

Wanted: Small Shop Stories

(Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the May 1998 issue of the *NLPES News*. Since that time, several NLPES members have graciously authored articles regarding issues facing small shops. In an effort to explain the purpose of this important feature of our newsletter [and hopefully to entice others into volunteering to write articles], I am reprinting this article authored by Nancy Van Maren, former director of the Idaho Office of Performance Evaluation.)

Small Shop Issues Are Large

Why a column on "small shops"? Well, for one reason, survey results printed in the September 1997 *NLPES News* (A View From the States) showed that 10 of the 47 NLPES member organizations that responded to the survey had 10 or fewer staff. That's at least one-fifth of survey respondents that must deal with certain common issues whose impact is magnified due to the small size of the office. Other evaluation shops with more staff may also be "small" in their states, and they too face some of these same issues, although perhaps to a lesser degree. Then, too, efficient ways of exchanging information are especially important in small shops. When resource pressures are acute, new and better ways of doing what we do become a matter of survival, not only improvement

Small Shop Distinctions

So what are the issues that set small shops apart from big or medium-sized shops? Here is a taste of the differences to be explored:

Requirements of Staff. Evaluations are conducted with fewer total resources. With a small number, staff typically cannot specialize in a given policy area,

increasing evaluation "start up" time. Also, staff must fulfill a number of different responsibilities—from interviewing to legal research, quantitative analysis to writing—during the course of a single evaluation. Managers in these offices often must contribute materially to the evaluation process in addition to fulfilling administrative responsibilities.

Relations with Outside Resources. Because fewer staff translates into fewer skills in-house, small shops may be more reliant on outside expertise, adding a unique element of instability. Assistance in methodological design, editing, legal analysis, as well as project-specific expertise are all needed at times. However, staff can expend an extraordinary amount of effort in recruiting, orienting and managing short-term resources. A seemingly constant "training mode" taxes permanent office staff as they revisit office standard operating procedures with each new "expert".

Types and Levels of Pressure. Small evaluation offices may experience some forms of work pressure more acutely than larger offices, including the following:

Increased pressure to produce. With limited staff, small offices produce fewer evaluation products in any given period. If legislators do not understand the resource requirements of evaluative work, their quest to ensure staff productivity may be translated into more evaluations per staff member, in a given time frame, than in larger offices.

Staff turnover vulnerability. The loss of one trained staff member can put the whole office behind, literally, by months.

Less flexibility with resources. Fewer total staff are available to shift onto or off a project based on project needs.

Fewer resources for long-term development. With resources continuously stretched, small shops may find it impractical to devote sufficient resources to conducting their work in a manner acceptable to peer review.

Personnel Growth. How may a staff be structured to provide the opportunity for growth and promote teamwork in a small and flat organization? How do managers counter “interpersonal burnout” when staff must work with the same people on each project?

Expectations of the Legislature. In some ways, small shops face increased pressure to demonstrate the

value of their work. The legislature is less likely to see a small evaluation shop as a critical function of government. After all, wouldn't the office be larger if it were really necessary?

Your “Small Shop” Stories

Do any of these issues ring true for you? Do they spark other ideas about challenges you face or, even better, ways you have successfully addressed them? If so, please consider writing a “small shops” newsletter article. Contact me (the newsletter editor) at (601) 359-1226—before I contact you!

How to Get Maximum Exposure for Your Office and Reports

Gene Rose (NCSL Public Affairs Director)

With more than 20 years of working for and with state legislatures, I am often amazed at the quantity and quality of work produced by state legislative staff. What equally amazes me is that so much of it goes unnoticed by the general public and the media. But the public and the media aren't to blame. Respected pollster Peter Hart summed it up best when he said, "Part of the problem is that government doesn't tell its story very well."

To consumers, government is just one more entity trying to get attention. State legislatures are competing for message time with multi-national corporations, adroit public relations firms and the well-funded entertainment industry. Even though what you have to say is important, there's no guarantee that anyone will listen. Trying to find a way to rise above the crowd with a limited staff and budget is difficult.

Express Yourself

Issuing press releases is just one form of expression that can help you communicate with the public and bring more attention to your office. Press releases help frame a report's contents, give reporters a way to judge its news value, and provide legislators with a concise summary they can forward to their constituents. They also can serve as a historical record of your work. If you don't have a media relations staff to work with, but are interested in issuing news releases with your reports, here are some general guidelines on writing and distributing your releases.

Structure

Format. Create a stationery (both electronic and hard copy) that includes your office name and logo. The heading should clearly state "News Release." Under the heading should be a contact name, phone number and/or email address and the date. The end of the release should be obvious. Most press offices use "###" or "-30-" to end the releases.

Length. Try to limit the release to one page. Anything longer than two standard pages is begging to be thrown away.

Headline. Try to sum up your release in one line. Use exciting words to attract attention. Your headline should never start with the name of your organization. Focus on the "news."

Dateline. In the first sentence, write the name in capital letters of the city where the report is being issued, followed by a dash.

The Lead. The first sentence should be short, ideally one sentence that generates reader interest.

Content. Determine the message of the report. Boil the report down to three key topics that you believe will have the most interest to the most people. Use the "inverted pyramid" style that places the most important information first. Answer the five Ws—who, what, when, where and why. Pay attention to language and choose words that are objective. Avoid hype, it undermines your credibility. Include a quote to identify a key principle in the project. The last paragraph of your release should be a boilerplate description of your office.

Proof. Have at least two others read your release before it goes out. Double-check the information for accuracy and look for spelling and grammar errors.

Distribution

Make your releases newsworthy and timely. As the saying goes: old news is no news. Target the distribution of your release. Compile lists of local newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations that are likely to be interested in your work product. If possible, group reporters by the topic that they cover (e.g., education, health, politics) and develop personal relationships with them. You can distribute your release by fax, e-mail, distribution services or hand delivery.

Reach Out. Remember that by making it as easy as possible for the media to do their job, you increase your chances of waking up to a favorable story. If a reporter or editor decides not to use your news release, you have not failed. At the least, you initiated awareness or nurtured your relationship with the media simply by writing and distributing the release.

While press releases are said to have been part of the communication culture since 1906, even the most seasoned public information officer keeps learning new ways to write and distribute them. You can always learn more by talking with others, monitoring what other similar organizations are doing and paying more attention to how reporters write their stories.

The Adventures of Aldric of York: Medieval Auditor

(Editor's Note: This is an excerpt of a recently discovered scroll detailing the apprenticeship of Aldric of York, one of the first program auditors.)

In the Spring of 1156, Aldric of York, then in the first year of his apprenticeship, received a commission to "Go forth and determine if the King's servants are properly regulating makers of armor." Aldric noted that the decree establishing the Royal Blacksmith Guild Regulatory Program provided several punishments to be levied upon "unfit or possessed practitioners of the arcane art."

These included fines of 80 gold pieces, public flogging and /or reading English census reports until death. (Editor's Note: The reason these reports were later known as the Doomsday Book.)

After spending many months examining the Guild records, Aldric disclosed that, although many complaints of poor craftsmanship had been made to the Blacksmith Guild, no guild member had been sanctioned in the past 20 years. Some of the complaints were grievous indeed – in one case noted by the Guild bard, 17 knights had been killed in battle after their armor had been destroyed by accidentally spilled headcheese.

When Aldric discussed these cases with Festus, master of the Blacksmith Guild, Festus said, "What expects thou of me? Friends in high places these blacksmiths have. Elrond, maker of the 17 failed armor pieces, is the son of Bailus Out, master of the Saving and Loan Guild."

Aldric, filled with indignation, retired to his cell and produced a scalding report detailing the unclean practices of the Blacksmith Guild. A "preliminary and tentative" copy of the report was given to Festus to allow him to make retirement plans.

Forsooth, however, Festus' response contained not pleas for royal clemency, but instead accused Aldric of grievously misquoting the Guild's position. "Nor did I say that thou attributest to me," said Festus. "By contrast, I meant the cases were duly investigated and found to meet current standards as stated in Guild procedure 1.001.01.01 (a)." "Say what?" responded Aldric, "Thou never mentioned such a procedure in all our conversations. When were they developed?" 'Tis hard to say," responded Festus, an evil smirk on his face, "our scribe has not a calendar, and thus they are undated."

After consultation with his master, Aldric was forced to remove the finding from his report. "But he did sayeth these things!" cried Aldric, "And his procedures are new and a crock of corruption!" "That may be so," said the wise master, "but thou failed to specifically ask Festus about the existence of such procedures in your interviews, and you failed to document the contents of the Guild policy and procedure scrolls. Thus you cannot prove the vile deeds were done, and in the halls of the King, Festus' word is as valid as yours." Aldric, sadder but wiser, left to drown his sorrows in a cask of ale, resolved to commit this error no more.

Office Happenings

Arizona

The Performance Audit Division of the Arizona Auditor General's office promoted two employees recently—Jessica Tucker (Senior Auditor) and Nate Wayman (Auditor II). The director of the division, Melanie Chesney, traveled to Salt Lake City, Utah, in July to accept the 2004 Excellence in Evaluation award on behalf of the division. This award has brought much positive recognition to the division with several legislators sending congratulatory notes. While in Salt Lake City, Melanie also received a Certificate of Recognition of Impact for the division's report on the government information technology agency and the statewide technology contracting issues.

Kentucky

The staff of the Kentucky General Assembly's Program Review and Investigations Committee welcomes two new legislative analysts—Rick Graycarek and Van Knowles. The Committee also has two Graduate Fellows for 2004–2005—Jacob Fowles of the University of Louisville and Wayne Linscott of Eastern Kentucky University.

New Mexico

The Legislative Finance Committee recently hired two auditors: David Goodrich as an Information Technology auditor and Robert Behrendt as an Education Performance auditor.

In addition, Manu Patel will be retiring from his position with the Legislative Finance Committee in January 2005. Manu will become Vice President of Finance for the New Mexico Highlands University.

Tennessee

Tennessee's Office of Research and Education Accountability welcome four new analysts: Jessica King, Corey Chatis, Erin Lyttle, and Jessica Gibson.

Utah

Wayne Welsh, Utah's Legislative Auditor General since 1984, retired on September 10, 2004. Wayne was hired by the auditor's office in 1975, starting as a supervisor and working his way up to the top position. He has served as Utah's Auditor General for over twenty years. Marty Stephens, Speaker of the Utah House of Representatives, said, "Wayne has done an outstanding job managing one of the most important functions in state government. His office has a statewide reputation for being thorough and fearless. They are not afraid to investigate areas of controversy where taxpayer dollars are being misspent. Wayne's leadership will be missed." John Schaff, Deputy Auditor General, has been asked to be the acting Legislative Auditor General while a search is conducted for Wayne's replacement.

More From Maryland



State Office Building Number 1 in Baltimore (built in 1958) in which the headquarters of the Office of Legislative Audits are located. The building is described by Office of Policy Analysis staffers (who don't work there and seldom, if ever, visit) as "convenient and uniquely situated" and espousing the best attributes of "Stalinist architecture."



By way of contrast, this is the Department of Legislative Services' building in scenic Annapolis, with its idyllic setting, situated on Lawyer's Mall across from the historic Maryland Statehouse and Governor's Mansion. This neo-Georgian edifice is the home to all DLS staff, except for the Office of Legislative Audits (OLA). The building has been described by visiting OLA staff as "palatial."



View of the Governor's Mansion from the unconfirmed DLS "spy cam."

From the Editor

As usual, I need to express my appreciation to each of you who authored an article for this issue of the *NLPES News*. Now to the loyal readers of this newsletter—help!-- I need some new ideas for articles. Please e-mail me your ideas—the sooner, the better—the more, the merrier. Seriously, thanks in advance for your assistance.

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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