

Planning Grant Project – Monthly TA Conference Call
January 12, 2006
3:00pm

Present: AoA, NASUA, all grantee states

Two tasks were identified for the agenda

- Review and discuss the draft survey to states
- Discuss content for project website

Survey Discussion:

The group was asked what would they like to learn from a survey of the 50 states. What would they like to accomplish through a survey? Several ideas and themes emerged from the discussion.

- To identify which states are innovative in specific planning areas and discover best practices so that grantees may learn what works and what does not work in developing state plans. It was suggested that the states be asked to identify their strengths and weaknesses, or what is the state most proud of just as the grantees did during their orientation meeting. This approach may address the problem raised below that not all states value planning.
- To gain an understanding of the states ability to implement “model plans.” A concern was raised that the project may create a “model” that the other states cannot implement.
- To understand the “state of affairs” in all 50 states, this will be used by the grantees in the development of a national model.
- To use the survey as a tool to get the other states thinking about these issues and planning.
- To obtain a baseline for evaluating the success of the over all project in moving state planning toward a coordinated and comprehensive process.

Specific topics to be included:

- Incorporation of Evidence-Based programs
- Coordination between state and AAA plans

Core Issues/Themes:

- How valuable is planning in your state or is the state plan considered a compliance document? Does it guide the states activities/work?
- How do states balance federal, state and local priorities?
- How are state and AAA plans coordinated?
- How are evidenced-based program incorporated into plans?
- How do states address uncertainty in planning? How do they take into consideration systems that they do not control (e.g. transportation, local development dollars...)?
- How do states involve and engage stakeholders?
- How is progress measured?

Two overarching themes:

- Who do you plan with?
- How do you plan?

Method issues:

- Use the grantee states to target questions that are the most relevant
- Use a multiple stage approach in which basic categorical questions are asked followed by in-depth questions to select states based on categorical responses.
- Use the survey like a gap analysis.
- The value of open-ended questions was mentioned

Concerns or potential problems with the survey were also voiced:

- Concern was raised about how a survey helps with the group's responsibilities in meeting the requirement of the grant. How will this be used?
- It was noted that the individual projects are diverse and that the survey may be more valuable to some grantees than others.
- Concern about data quality if the survey asks states to admit to violating OAA requirements in planning (e.g. do you use AAA plans as a basis for the State Plan).
- Terms and their meaning must be explicit. There may be multiple meanings for a term, such as logical model.
- Concern that the survey questions assume that other states share the grantees' interest in planning. The survey may not produce new information if the grantee states are the most progressive and the most interested in planning of all the 50 states?
- Concern that if the survey focuses on specific type of planning (e.g. logic modeling) they may inadvertently convey to the other states that this is the only planning method that AoA advocates. On the other hand it was pointed out that the survey may be a good tool for conveying the importance of certain elements in planning.
- It was noted that the current questions were written prior to the orientation meeting and therefore may not be topics of interest.
- Concern was voiced that this will become a long and drawn out process. An interest in finalizing the survey and gathering data soon was expressed.
- Survey questions should be ordered in a logical way to produce the most fruitful results.
- Concern was raised whether starting with a survey is the best means to our end. Data and information can be found in a variety of forms (text, websites, the current state plans). Perhaps a survey should be conducted after other information is gathered.
- Questions that the group seems interested in (themes) are difficult to answer.

Other issues raised include:

- Is this going to be used by AoA to guide the project? AoA stated that this survey is for the grantees and is not an AoA survey, although, the collection of baseline information that can be used to evaluate the success of the project would be a positive outcome.

Website Discussion:

The group was asked to discuss two topics regarding the website development:

- Content, what do they want the website to contain and do for them
- Public versus Private content. How much or which parts should be public and which parts should be private.

Public versus Private:

- The consensus appears to be a completely public website. The group would like transparency to characterize their work.

Content and Function:

- A desire to have a focused website with selected information was expressed.
- Interest in including PowerPoint presentations and other information on logic modeling from John McLaughlin was expressed.
- A wish to have the website function as both a resource and a communication tool was expressed.
- A place on the website for a discussion forum was recommended. Experts could be invited to respond to questions. Interactivity was a desired feature as well as the ability to archive meeting minutes and provide project updates.
- The ADRC technical assistance website was brought up as one example of a useful site. The website sends out reminders to members when new information is posted.

A desire to have an interactive web-based tool was expressed:

- NASUA expressed concern that they may not have the capability to provide an interactive website.
- Several programs, i.e. Caucus and Oncourse, that provide a forum for communication were discussed. Caucus was thought to be in the public domain and free to use. Indiana University is providing Oncourse to the Indiana team but its availability to the entire group is uncertain.

Miscellaneous topics:

- There was concern regarding motivating people to use the website.
- Is the website going to be a permanent part of AoA's website? The TASC stated that it will be part of NASUA's website and expect it to remain for the foreseeable future.
- The website can be one way to acknowledge good work. Other states that have innovative planning practices can have their work displayed.
- The Minnesota team is reviewing the information and resources on evidence-based programs from the orientation meeting and is willing to share their work.
- The group asked about the status of John McLaughlin's involvement in the project. NASUA's contract has ended although John has expressed an interest in the group.

Deliverables:

- NASUA will investigate web communication possibilities and re-envision the survey around core issues and the use of a staged approach.

Adjournment 4:10pm