

Safal Partners | NCSRC Webinar Consultancy Call on Peer Reviews

ALEX MEDLER: Hello, this Alex Medler with Safal Partners at the National Charter Schools Resource Center. It's 10 o'clock, and we are going to be starting our webinar, on Peer Reviews for Grant Competitions, in a couple of minutes. I think we will wait two more minutes and see if other people are logging on, and then we will get started. So we'll plan to start at about 10:02. And we'll dive right in at that point.

And if anybody has any technical questions, if you can't see on screen or hear what we're saying, you can contact Sarah. I'm sorry, if you are looking-- if you're in and can't hear, you can use the chat function to communicate with Sarah as well with any technical problems during the call.

And as long as we are waiting another minute or so and we have a fairly small group of people on the phone, how about if people go ahead and announce who's on the call and where they're from. This is Alex Medler with Safal Partners. Let's just do a round and let everybody who's on and listening go ahead and announce themselves. Anybody else?

STEFAN HUH: Stephan Huh, US Department of Education, director of the Charter Schools Program.

MUKTA PANDIT: This is Mukta, Mukta Pandit with Safal Partners.

ALEX MEDLER: Oh, and if you've recently joined, we have all the speakers working to be able to talk on the phone. And so please mute your phone while you're not talking because otherwise we'll get background noise.

LESLIE HANKERSON: Hi, this is Leslie Hankerson from the US Department of Ed, Charter Schools Program.

ASHLEY GARDNER: This is Ashley Gardner from the US Department of Ed, Charter Schools Program.

KATE MEELEY: This is Kate Meeley, US Department of Ed.

ERIC DOSS: This is Eric Doss. I'm with the Oklahoma Public School Resource Center.

SARAH HAMSHARI: This is Sarah Hamshari from Safal Partners.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, well, let's go ahead and get started. I think there's a few more people who are listening who maybe are muted. But we'll go ahead and dive in. This is a webinar for the SE grantees for the US Department of Education, hosted by the National Charter Schools Resource Center. My name is Alex Medler. I'll be the facilitator today.

This is a consultancy. We're hoping to mostly chat with each other in an interactive format. We'll be talking about peer reviews as part of grant competitions. We have Eric from Oklahoma, which has a new SE grant, who will be sharing his challenge today. Before we dive in, I'd like to give Stefan Huh from the US Department of Education a chance to welcome people. Stefan, you want to take it away?

STEFAN HUH: Great. Thanks, Alex. So, yeah, thanks again. And thank you anyone who's on this call and for joining the webinar hosted by our National Charter School Resource Center at Safal Partners. And the purpose of these webinars is to promote a community of practice among the grantees of our State Entities program. And a community of practice provides an opportunity to hear about the challenges other grantees are grappling with, to share solutions to common challenges, and to discover ways that other state entity grantees have overcome challenges to successful implementation of their CSP grant.

And so as Alex mentioned, the format of this webinar is a peer-to-peer consultancy, which is a format that we have found to be a great way to solicit feedback and to stimulate creative thinking. And a topic for today is one that we've heard from grantees to be one of great interest, and it's the sub-grant's peer review process. The peer review process is a requirement under the programs authorizing legislation.

But the statute is silent regarding what this should look like. So I'm really excited for this opportunity to hear from Oklahoma and the challenges they're facing and to provide our peers with input on how they may solve this issue. So now I'm going to turn it over back to our facilitator, Alex Medler, and the presenter, Eric Doss, who will walk us through this consultancy and webinar. Thank you.

ALEX MEDLER: Thanks, Stefan. All right, so we're going to dive right in. That's the introductions. I'd also just make sure that you're aware this is from the National Resource Center. At the end of the webinar, we will be sending out a survey for the evaluation, which is always really important to us. And this is in a series of webinars. So there will be some other ones coming up on charter management organizations and governance and other topics in the next few months. So we

look forward to having you join us for the future ones.

Let me now turn it over to-- or first let me explain how the consultancy format works. So first, Eric is going to share the challenge they have with the peer review process. And we also have some folks who are also new to running an SE grant program that may also share their versions of the problems, from like New Mexico or Maryland. Then we'll have questions from everybody else to clarify what's going on in their context.

And then we turn it over to all the participants on the phone to talk through what they think would be good strategies or things they observe or ideas sort of as the states with the challenges listen. And then we reconvene with everybody together and share ideas and feedback with Oklahoma and the other new states. And they also give their feedback and how they think that would work.

So the idea is sort of first hear from Oklahoma. Then we probe and find out details. Then we discuss how we might solve that problem. Then we share those recommendations and get feedback. So that's the plan for now. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Eric to explain his context and his challenge. Eric, take it away.

ERIC DOSS:

OK, so I'm with Oklahoma, as we said before. Currently in Oklahoma, we've had charter schools since 2001. We have a pretty small charter community, about 29 schools with just around 29,000 students. The majority of those students are in virtual charter schools. And those operate statewide under the Virtual Charter School Board.

We have a lot of different entities now that can be authorizers as of a new version of our law that came up in 2015. So any district in the state-- and there are 516 districts in the state, most of the universities, the public universities, career tech centers, Native American tribes. And then if a district rejects an application, the State Board of Education can appeal.

So we're seeing more of those entities start to authorize. We, the Oklahoma Public School Resource Center, is a nonprofit that supports both district schools-- we support about 150 district schools-- and the 29 charter schools across the state. And we're also one of the first entities not a state educational agency to receive the SE grant under the CSP. So that's new for us. So currently, we're in a point of getting ready to-- we just started our first grant process. And I guess, is that what you wanted me to do, Alex? Sorry.

ALEX MEDLER:

Yeah, go ahead and explain what the challenges are, challenges you have, with finding the

new reviewers, and we'll dive into that part.

ERIC DOSS: OK, great. So we're in our first grant process, grant-- I guess-- contest. And we have had some challenges finding reviewers because either people aren't very experienced in charter school operations, don't know anything about charter schools for the most part, or the people who do are pretty well-connected to one of the schools.

Probably a couple of our most knowledgeable people are consultants and work for multiple schools. And so they would obviously have conflicts of interest with this. We've reached out to some of the other school leaders who are not in the expansion. And we haven't really been able to tell them how much time and effort they're going to need to place into this.

So the questions that we've really put together, we've put in here. We do have a rubric that was developed with the RFA. But we don't know what other types of training or support materials that would be helpful for them, especially understanding that the end of the month-- we have basically a month. At the end of this month, we have to start that process. We have a month of review after that.

When we did the budgeting, we did not include a honorarium of any point. And I've noticed that in interesting conversations, that seems to be something people are doing. And so we want to know what does that look like, generally. And then what do I need to be doing as they're reviewing in order to kind of review what-- how much can I intervene in the process, especially if we have people who aren't really experienced in charter schools? And how do I support them if they need help? Basically, so those are my challenges and questions.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, and I think we have a few other people on the phone from states that are also new SE grantees. Do you have any additional challenges that you want to sort of bring to the table for your own grant competitions or peer reviews? Anybody else?

CAROL: Hi, this is Carol in Maryland. I don't think I would add. I think my two cents were sort of overlapped with these a great deal. One-- and I don't want to jump the gun. But I think-- are other sectors beyond sort of traditional education and even traditional charter school sectors where there is valuable expertise? And how do you find that?

And I think probing for the conflict of interest, that making a distinction between you might have a conflict if you're in this function relative to a school or you might not, you need to tell us. But that does not necessarily exclude you. You may have some connection that doesn't

exclude you. And that's a little challenging.

So I think the key challenge I want to sort of work through there is, once you make those determinations of a potential conflict that's not a deal breaker, how do you be the most transparent about what those are and how those judgments are made so that the process remains as transparent and fair as possible? Does that make--

ALEX MEDLER: And that's great. Yeah, so both how to handle perceived and real conflicts and how to disclose them after the fact. And also how to recruit people outside, maybe in the charter space or even the education space, because of the expertise that's relevant. Those are great additional questions. Anyone else from a state with a relatively new program, who's kind of on the receiving end of this advice today, who has anything else to clarify or add?

LATOYA HOLIDAY: Yes, hi. This is Latoya Holiday from Wisconsin. We're new. We have a new SE grant, but we have received SE grants in the past. But this year, we modified our reviewer selection and training process a little bit. Well, first, in terms of recruiting reviewers, we sent out sort of press releases when we received the grant. And then all of our press release and materials that went out all across the state, posted on our state agencies to-- I'm sorry, Facebook and Twitter. We recruited reviewers through those processes too.

So we noted in our press releases and in those polls that we're looking for reviewers, visit our website site if you're interested. We sent it out. We have state-wide charter organizations that work very closely with charter schools in our state. They posted to their website and to their newsletter.

So we distributed information about our recruitment process as widely as we possibly could, even amongst different teams here at the department. And they sent it out to their different lists and advisory council. So we just got it out as widely as we possibly could. And we did get a very robust group to sign up and that were interested in reviewing.

In terms of the conflict of interest, we sort of have a two-prong conflict policy whereby we define directly affiliated with a grant application or indirectly affiliated. And I'm happy to share our materials with Oklahoma and others if they're interested. But basically, direct affiliation is that a reviewer is involved, the individual is involved, with the writing or the putting together of the grant application. And folks with direct affiliations will be excluded from our process, would not be able to review any grants.

And then we sort of have a second level of indirect affiliation, meaning I work for an agency that may be an authorizer of a charter school that submitted a grant. In that case, then I would not be able to-- I'm sorry. I'm confusing the two. That would be a direct affiliation.

But an indirect affiliation is I have a family member or someone who may work for a school that submitted a grant. In that case, I would not be able to review that particular grant. But I may be able to review other grants. So we have that conflict of interest policy.

In terms of training, we did almost 2 and 1/2 hour webinar training with our reviewers. We trained them on just general, what is a charter school? And what is the federal definition of a charter school? We trained them on Wisconsin charter law in our specific landscape.

And then we really drilled down into our charter application using the rubric, what the rubric means, what the scoring means, what types of things we're looking for with the questions and indicated that we have on the application. So we have a very detailed training. I also have Nico Mittnacht here, my colleague, who probably wants to chime in as well.

NICO
MITTNACHT: Yeah, just to add to what Latoya said and a couple other bullet point questions up there. We do offer honorariums. \$300 is what the honorarium is. We have reviewers review about three to four applications each. Each application goes to a group of three reviewers. And as far as how much do we get involved with the review, we have sort of two points at which we get involved.

Initially, when we received the grant applications, we do a technical review. And that's going to be for identify any technical deficiencies with the grant application. But we also get a little bit involved with more-- there is some overlap with what the reviewers will be reviewing. And we just kind of prioritize a few areas to flag in advance. And in some cases, it would prevent the grant from even being sent to the reviewers, like if they didn't accurately demonstrate authorizer approval.

And in other cases, we're just flagging it for kind of closer scrutiny down the road, either because it's something that will need to be corrected. So just to give an example, we might have in a half a million dollar grant application, \$5,000 or \$10,000 of questionable costs. We would flag that because we want them to correct it down the road but still want the reviewers to review that. And they're going to be reviewing the budgets as well. So it just kind of gives us a double level of comfort.

And then we also look at things like whether or not they've got three years of proved academic results, and things like that, to make sure that [INAUDIBLE] replication and expansion grants. And then we also do each grant and sit down with the reviewers who reviewed [INAUDIBLE] the panel and talk about their process and how they reached their conclusions, just to make sure that what they did is aligned with how we trained them [INAUDIBLE] the grant.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, let me step in with a couple of things. Number one, we have about 20 people on the phone. So if you are not speaking, go ahead and mute your phone. But you can talk at any time. I want to open it up to other people with additional feedback.

And also I would note, I think people would really appreciate it if you from Wisconsin could upload some of those materials you're talking about, such as the conflict of interest forms you use and perhaps the materials you use in the training. Those would be great things to share electronically in our SEA exchange.

NICO
MITTNACHT: Sure. Nico from Wisconsin. I should also clarify, I think we borrowed heavily from some other states, I think, with our conflict of interest too. We look at a lot of different states, so giving credit where credit is due. I can't recall off the top of my head exactly what we lifted from where. But I'm sure there's some states out there that probably are thinking, hey, that's a lot like our form. And if so, thank you.

ALEX MEDLER: That sounds great. We will forevermore call it The Wisconsin Approach. All right, other people with feedback on the call or probing questions, as well, for the group?

MUKTA PANDIT: This is Mukta. I don't know if that--

ALEX MEDLER: Go ahead, Mukta.

MUKTA PANDIT: I was just going to say, I'm not sure if Texas is on the call. But we did organize a school review for their sort of transformation grants. We organized a school review process. And they used about \$300 for the reviewer honorarium. But they only paid that for reviewers, sort of expert reviewers, that they recruited. So they had a combination of expert reviewers and peer reviewers that were submitted by the person who's applying.

So they didn't compensate the peer reviewers. But they compensated the expert reviewers. And then they sort of did, like, five reviews. And then they would pick the three and then drop the two outliers. It's how they did their process. So I just wanted to share that as a Texas experience.

ALEX MEDLER: Very good, thank you. Other people on the phone, how many reviewers are people using? And how many people are offering honorariums for them? I guess there's some pretty concrete questions out there.

CAROL: Maryland's plan-- this is Carol again-- is it do the stipend for the peer reviewers at \$300, as I heard mentioned. I must have read that in another state application-- and also to get at least three on each application. And similarly, looking at the technical review and the peer review-- and perhaps a subject for another day-- is having the peer review rubric score create a ranking but also to keep the option of having an interview step to probe a little bit, which, again, is that's another phase of applications so might not be appropriate to add to this discussion.

Although, if I'm a peer reviewer, I think I would want to know that that's the case because sometimes a great paper application is covering up a lack of strong leadership that comes through in an interview team. And the reverse, an application might not score so high but end of the interview needs a rubric, as well, and some consistency and quality control. But nonetheless, it can help balance out and be almost, maybe, a quality control on each side of that process. I don't know if that makes sense. It's a little far afield.

ALEX MEDLER: There's multiple parts that are also part of the peer review process that we can talk to. So that's helpful. Other comments and questions or suggestions from people in the field? In particular, would like to get more sense if whether people have different or no honorariums out in the field and how many reviewers.

And then I'd like to probably turn to other strategies for recruitment. So first, how many people do you have? And how much do they get paid? And I don't know if we got some of the other call-in users. You can also post answers to the Q&A and the chat.

LATOYA HOLIDAY: This is Wisconsin. We're going to do two rounds of grant reviews. So in both rounds, we'll have each about 15 reviewers. And we have reviewers looking at four applications each.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, other states?

SPEAKER 1: I have a follow-up question for Wisconsin. How many hours do you tell your reviewers that they need to dedicate to their review?

LATOYA I think we said 10 hours total because we're giving them two-- and I would have to look back at

HOLIDAY: our material-- we're giving them two weeks to review the applications. And I think we told them to count on between 10 to 12 hours total.

ALEX MEDLER: So five or six hours per application.

LATOYA Yeah.

HOLIDAY:

NICO But built into that too is the panel discussion with us talking about how they reviewed the application. And part of that too is training too, which is we do a little over two hours of training.

MITTNACHT:

ALEX MEDLER: So 10 or 12 includes training.

LATOYA Yeah, I don't think training was built in to that.

HOLIDAY:

NICO Yeah, I don't think the training was.

MITTNACHT:

LATOYA But the review and the panel meeting is built in.

HOLIDAY:

ALEX MEDLER: OK, other state estimates of the time commitment? Anybody think it's more or less?

CARL: This is Carl from Ohio. For our peer review training, we have a minimum of a 10-hour training that any of our peer reviewers would have to consent to be a part of. And then for the review process, we give them a period of three weeks because they will be able to review the applications using our electronic system.

ALEX MEDLER: And how many applications are you dealing with? And how many reviewers do you get for that?

CARL: We have anywhere from-- we're anticipating and hope we'll have up to 30 this year. And we'll have four reviewers per application.

ALEX MEDLER: Sounds good. And can you share a little bit of how you recruit those reviewers and whether you compensate them?

CARL: We put out a pretty wide net in terms of recruiting. Someone from Wisconsin had mentioned,

we do publish through our EDconnect. We use social media. We send out a peer review notice. And we have a pretty wide pool of reviewers that we use within the agency for other grant opportunities. And they are compensated for both the training and for the application. We compensate them for the training at \$400 to participate in the training and then \$200 per application.

ALEX MEDLER: Thank you. Other states? Other states, someone? Go ahead. I just cut somebody else off. Who else wanted to share?

ERIC DOSS: I just had a question about, on that training, the 10 hours of training. What all is in that 10 hours of training-- for Ohio, I guess?

CARL: So there is a four-hour webinar training that we have to kind of go through the grant process to lay out the expectations of the RFA for our reviewers. There is four hours built into that training for them to actually score a calibration application and go through, essentially, our sample. And then we have a two-hour consensus call with the reviewers to go over the results of their peer-reviewed scoring calibration. And that's where we land on the 10 hours.

ERIC DOSS: OK, thanks.

ALEX MEDLER: Other states with suggestions for the amount of time that takes for the training and the norming?

CARL: Oh, this is Carl again. I would like to clarify. It's not 10 hours in one day. We have it chunked out on a four-hour training on one day. And then we give them a period of time to review the application. We give them about four days. And then we schedule a two-hour consensus call five days after the initial training. So that may be helpful to know.

ALEX MEDLER: So four of that hours is them scoring a model one that you can norm with them and debrief and one that's just a model.

CARL: Yeah, because you hear 10 hours, it's like that's a long day for anybody. So I thought I would clarify that.

ALEX MEDLER: That sounds good. And have you found reviewers come back with that kind of commitment? Do they come back for year two?

CARL: We'll let you know. We're in the process of recruiting for our round two. We're going to put out

this call relatively soon.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, so this is the first year for that as well, right?

CARL: This is our second year following this process. But we're in the process of recruiting for our round-two review.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, other states with input? Does anybody else have any guidance on how to handle the conflicts, whether perceived or real, and the disclosure? And we can share the forms from some of the states that have done it. But I am curious to know whether people have had problems with people that have connections participating but using sort of just disclosure and transparency when people are involved with the sector otherwise. Any states with advice on how to handle that, please?

CAROL: Hi, this is Carol. No advice, of course, but I think recognizing the potential for conflicts, Maryland is in some ways like a new state. And so the sector is not that large. It's a lot of usual suspects, as somebody else mentioned, people who are more than likely to be connected to schools. So that's why the conflict issue is important.

And one thing that's good I think, in general, and good in dealing with that issue will be looking at not necessarily that sector alone. But maybe that's a segue. I mean, that's one reason recruiting farther afield, I think, is an important strategy for us to consider. And I'd love to hear if others have done that.

ALEX MEDLER: And Carol, can you give a little bit of detail on other sectors or other fields where you think there might be potential recruitment that would work?

CAROL: Yes. And I would say from-- most of our charter schools are in Baltimore City. And from helping with some of those reviews, I would reach out to nonprofit management folks because we do not have national-- well, we have one KIPP school-- but we don't have national operators coming in here. So most of our charter schools are nonprofits created for the express purpose of doing this. So new nonprofit management, strategic planning, that kind of area of consultancy, or nonprofit association is someplace I hope to go.

I think just looking at Central Maryland, I think we have a very strong philanthropic community. And while a foundation program officer might not know specifically about charters, they do have a very good generalist kind of eye on strategic planning. Are you asking for the amount of resources you need to get the job done? Are you asking for too much? The sort of general

management, will this work kind of thing.

So I would hope to find some of that in the foundation community. And even within the broad education world, I would look to some of the special education and other education-related advocacy groups who will bring sort of their passion for that sector to this work as well. So that's off the top of my head.

ALEX MEDLER: OK. Anybody else, speaking about fruitful areas for where to recruit new people? Or experience they've had with the other charter school leaders that don't really have a conflict with other, let's say, competitors for schools? Any other comments from the more experienced states?

OK, well, let me move on to another area raised by Eric, and that's sort of the interaction between the program staff and the review while it's going on. I was wondering if some of the states might be able to share their experience or how much they separate their role in reviewing allowability and eligibility from questions the reviewers might have during the review process, from training versus answering questions on a per case basis.

How did the program staff view their role during the peer review? Was it very hands-off? Are they partnering and answering questions? Or really, what does your role turn into once you're involved in the review process? Anybody, Wisconsin, Ohio?

LATOYA HOLIDAY: Hi, this is Wisconsin. So as Nico had mentioned, our reviewers will have the two weeks to review. And then we will have a one-hour panel meeting with each team where they will be given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the reviews, talk with us and the rest of the team to reach consensus-- not on the score per se, but we have a cut off of 35 out of 50 points to be fundable.

And so we are asking that each team which consensus on whether or not an application is fundable or not fundable but not consensus on the amount of points per se. So they'll be given an opportunity to interact with program staff and ask questions during the review panel.

But during the review itself, unless they're the technical-- within that two-week period, unless there's a technical question, you know, I can't open the app, or the form isn't working, or something of that nature, we don't anticipate answering questions during that period. And we're going to have all those discussions during the panel meeting.

ALEX MEDLER: All right. Carl or anybody else? OK, well, let's open it back up to Eric and other folks. Hearing what people had to say so far, what are your reactions or questions back to the group for lessons you can take? And I guess that would open up to both Eric and Carol from New Mexico. What are you taking away from the conversation so far?

ERIC DOSS: Well, I think it helped me to hear some of the ways in which the training was being done. And Ohio has a pretty rigorous training in some of the others. So I think that's very helpful. Also, hearing that-- we only have, probably will have, five applicants this year.

So I kind of assumed that the same reviewers would review all five of them. And so to think about that maybe it would be possible for a reviewer to have less and have more reviewers, that actually may be helpful because it may be a lot of time commitment to say, will you please review five of these applications? So that may actually help out a little.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, and Carol, any observations on your part from Maryland?

CAROL: Well, I think the thing I appreciate most about this whole process is the opportunity to hear about what's going on in other states. So I really thank you, everyone, who participates in this and other calls like it.

I mostly feel a little comforted that what my guesstimate of how this will work is sort of in the ballpark of what is working elsewhere. So that's helpful too. I would like to see, learn more about the more in-depth training model. I don't think I could implement such a thing in the next few months while we prepare for our first round.

But the idea of a more in-depth education of anybody who's touching/want any aspect of this project is just good in general because it deepens the knowledge of those professionals about the charter sector and what the state's role is. I mean that's good knowledge to send people out into the world with in addition to increasing the quality of the peer review. So I would like to give that some thought.

ALEX MEDLER: I might add, one of the things you might think about when you're doing the recruitment of peer reviewers is to include the kind of leaders in the nonprofit or philanthropic profit community who will be involved with future charter school applicants so that they end up with more deep, committed knowledge about how your grant-making process works.

Because then they will become experts. They'll come back and review for you, but they will also advise future people on how to design strong schools or eligible programs and say, hey,

this is what will come up in the review. So they become useful people to the rest of the sector because they've been involved. That's another way to recruit, recruit people and interest them in how they can help the sector.

Any other? I know we have two other new states on the phone. Anything here that-- any questions for application in New Mexico? Or any advice coming from Arizona or other people on the call who can help us out with what to take away from this?

MARK:

This is Arizona. And I'm not exactly sure-- because I apologize for coming in late-- what has already been covered. But I will say is, I'm looking at the slide right now about the rubric that was developed with the RFA. And the more thorough your rubric is, the more helpful it is to the evaluators.

We literally built our rubric around a FAME-type program of what it looks like if it falls far below, what does it look like if it approaches, what does it look like if it meets, and what does it look like if it exceeds. And that has served them pretty well.

And then when questions do come up in regards to an application or from an evaluator, basically we'll just take them back to the rubric so that we don't personalize anything, in any way, to make sure that everybody has a fair shot at everything. And then if we discover over a year that particular area in the rubric was weak, well, we'll alter it for the next time. And that's been the best.

ALEX MEDLER:

Can you give any examples of areas in your rubric where you ended up needing to strengthen it afterwards?

MARK:

In the last couple of years, we haven't. It was in our transition. We were given a grant in 2009. And that was open to any and all charter schools in Arizona. And those not familiar with Arizona, it's a very vibrant, wide-open authorization process that depends primarily on parent choice for which schools are successful and which schools are not. Although, the authorization over the years has gotten a lot more effective.

So when we changed the emphasis of our grant in the second award, that's where it was-- we changed things in our definition of schools that were trying to serve beyond the old ESEA 5210 definitions of a charter school because we were more focused on our grants. And since then, we haven't made any significant changes in the last two-- we haven't made any changes in the last two years to the rubric.

ALEX MEDLER: Sounds good. And do your reviewers come back in Arizona? Do you get them year after year?

MARK: You know, what we also did in-- the simple answer is yes, somewhat. We actually started doing compensation a few years ago. And that allowed us to attract out-of-state people. And we've received some people from some education departments and some nonprofits. And they've just been excellent. And two of them that participated two years ago participated last year.

And the only reason that we didn't have more was kind of our state procurement department wanted to take the advertisement and selection of these evaluators over. And anyone who has a procurement department like Arizona's would say, oops. But we're going to straighten that out this year. But that's not about the application. That was better understanding how stringent Arizona procurement is in terms of exact language.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, so you're hoping to recover more control over the process, especially to get out-of-state people who've been helpful.

MARK: Yes. I mean, there are a lot of very talented people out there that really understand charters. The ones that we have are kind of more technocrats and not just nonprofit managers. But the description of the nonprofit managers bringing a unique set of eyes to this strikes me as a very good resource.

ALEX MEDLER: And so the technocrats are more coming from other state departments of education or authorizing offices and stuff like that?

MARK: We haven't had anybody from an authorizing office. But we've had a Florida university person who's very much involved with charter research and evaluation independent of applications, one from the New York City Department of Education and another person from a Pittsburgh nonprofit involved with this. And if they apply again, they would be strongly considered.

ALEX MEDLER: OK, as long as I have a few of the states on the phone, one of the questions I have is what do you do for expertise in serving particular disadvantaged students? So do you make sure you have special education expertise or English language expertise amongst your reviewers? And how do you achieve that? Anybody from the states with experience. Wisconsin or Arizona or Ohio, any advice on how to handle disadvantaged student issues on the process?

NICO This is Nico from Wisconsin. So we don't in our-- we do make it clear in our recruitments what

MITTNACHT: it is that we're looking for in our reviewers. And they send in their resumes, and we look at their resumes. And that's part of our selection process. But really as far as sort of targeting some of these subgroups of students, we try to address them through our training.

And so we really just try to get reviewers to understand what it is we would be looking for in these sub-grant apps as far as addressing needs of educationally disadvantaged students. And that's really kind of where we try and hit it. And so I don't know if Latoya has anything to add to that.

LATOYA HOLIDAY: Yeah, no, what Nico said, one of our objectives, explicit objectives, is serving educationally disadvantaged kids in the state of Wisconsin. And so that's something that is a theme throughout our training. It's something that all of the grant proposals must write to. And so in our training, we partly address that and train our reviewers on those priority areas.

MARK: This is Arizona. When I talked about the change in rubric, one of the things is that we changed our application with our second award. And the way we wrote it to the feds back in 2015 was that there were certain eligibility benchmarks that had to be met. And for disadvantaged, we look at free or reduced lunch, minority, ethnic minority, ELL, or special education.

And we used that Title I rubric of 40%. And you couldn't combine them. You couldn't have like 20% of this and 20% of that and put them together. It had to be demonstrated that you were really serving a targeted population. And we also built into the application, well, what is your previous experience in this particular area? And you could use a variety of like the Arizona State assessment or benchmark assessments or something that were independent to demonstrate that you had some sort of experience. This is our risk management

ALEX MEDLER: Anything else, Mark?

MARK: No. I was just curious to hear what other states are doing.

ALEX MEDLER: All right. Any other input on this before I move on to the next question? I think we'll have time for about one more, and then we'll be wrapping up. Eric and Carol, any other particular areas where you would most like to focus the remainder of the time, have a discussion on, in terms of your needs?

CAROL: Nothing is jumping out at me, sorry.

ALEX MEDLER: All right, Eric?

ERIC DOSS: I don't think so. I'm looking over what I wrote down here, which is a lot. I've gotten a lot out of it so far.

ALEX MEDLER: All right. And any clarifying points from the department? I don't mean to put you on the spot. But if you had any feedback or ideas, happy to hear them.

STEFAN HUH: I just wanted to kind of follow up on Mark's last comment. He seemed to be alluding to risk management as one of the objectives of their process. And I don't want to put words in your mouth, Mark. And maybe you can describe, but I think-- that's, I think, a notion that I'm interested in is how is the design of your sub-grantee, peer application, peer review process designed to mitigate risk-- and the risk that is unique to your state context and the landscape of chartering.

And so I guess I'd be interested in hearing Mark just kind of, maybe, briefly elaborate on that. But that's just maybe some food for thought to reflect on when thinking about the purpose and objectives of the process and its efficacy towards risk mitigation.

MARK: Well, there are two guiding principles that we had and our grants were done under, were awarded under, the old ESEA Part B 5201 through 5210. And there's the one question-- I can't remember which section it is-- but it refers to the likelihood that the school will be able to meet its goals. And then when uniform guidance came out a couple of years ago, there's the 2 CFR 200.205, which is really kind of designed for the feds.

But we get our guidance from the feds to go into our practice. And so risk management has been pretty much at the forefront of a lot of our thinking and a lot of our documents. Now that being said, while we haven't had, necessarily, special education people that came up in the early question, we usually have at least one or two people with strong financial backgrounds. And we spent a lot of time looking at not just the budget but their budget narrative.

Anybody who's been doing this for a while, there are a lot of very well-meaning people who are applying. But they don't really have a fully worked-out plan. They have an idea. And I don't mean to be insouciant or pejorative. But for so many, it's just like, well, give us the money, and we'll figure it out. We really want to see something that comes out. And that budget narrative and how it relates to aspects of the application is very, very important to us.

And like I say, the other thing is is that what is your previous experience in regards to working with disadvantaged students? And do you have some sort of quantitative data that you can

share with us that students who have worked with you in the past have done well? While some people could say, well, that seems to cut out innovative new users-- you know, charter schools have been around almost 25 years now. And the federal and state government are asking us to look at these as state funds and to make the best judgment that we can. And we've found that this has served us. And it hasn't seemed to excluded anyone from applying.

ALEX MEDLER: Sounds good. Anybody else want to talk about the concern for risk and how that varies in your state? Or how you apply that into the process?

LATOYA HOLIDAY: Hi, this is Wisconsin. We do sort of a risk assessment at different points and levels of our process. First, our federal grants and audits team performs a risk assessment of all federal grantees, including a grantee that will apply for a CSP fund. And so part of that process is that if risk is found, there are special terms and conditions imposed upon that grantee during the grant process.

Additionally, my colleague Nico here spoke about our technical review process that happens before any grants are entered into the peer review process. And part of that is a review of their budget for allowable, allocable necessary costs to ensure that there are no red flags or points of concern within their budget. So those two things, again, happen prior to any funds being released or going out of the door.

ALEX MEDLER: Great. All right, anybody else have any comments on risk before we go on? Go ahead.

MARK: Only that Arizona on its website site has a page on its policies and procedures for risk management. And as an example of something that just happened, and I am sure that people involved in the grant have seen something like this in the past, there will be social service organizations that want a school to serve their particular kids. And these are honest and noble organizations that are trying to serve a problem within the community. But they're not educators themselves.

So they'll often partner with an educator. And we had an example of an outstanding educator that was going to get involved with this and run the program. And all the data that was submitted on that person's previous experience was all valid. It was verifiable. And this looked like a great thing.

And what happens sometimes with these things is a blow-up incurs, and the leader leaves. And now all of a sudden, we're stuck with just a board of people who don't know anything

[INAUDIBLE] application or [INAUDIBLE] and whatever. So after extensive discussions here at the highest levels of the Department of Education in Arizona, we decided to terminate the grant. We just thought [INAUDIBLE] was way too high.

ALEX MEDLER: Because they lost all their capacity with personnel that turned over, fascinating.

MARK: That is correct. That is correct. That's not to say that the social or service organization [INAUDIBLE] were awarding a school [INAUDIBLE] service organization.

ALEX MEDLER: All right. I think I have another question or another statement. Did someone else from Ed want to say something?

KATE MEELEY: Hi, this is Kate. I'm going to be incredibly selfish and do a selfish plug right now. As folks are looking, especially our '17 folks, our 2017 grantees are looking at their peer review process, by no means do we think our peer review process is perfect. We're always looking to process-improve on our end. But we do have an open call for peer reviewers and panel monitors. And we have received feedback in the past from some of our more seasoned project directors that participating in our reviews has been helpful in them reflecting on their program.

So I wanted to put it out there. If you are interested, please feel free to email me or Amy. And we're happy to take your resume and put you in the, kind of, bucket. We also do know that many of you are a lean and mean staff. And it is a pretty extensive time commitment. So putting that out there, but also just wanted to plug. If you are interested, some people have found it helpful to support a program by doing peer review or panel monitoring. Thanks.

ALEX MEDLER: Very fair. Also good to put in a plug for other states. They're always looking. And so if your reviewers helped with other states, you can also tap into their list and stuff. And these are also similar to the external peer reviews that actually go on by authorizer, so frequently have similar need to find peer reviewers for the actual charter applications.

So these are areas where collaboration in your state or region, or even nationally amongst other authorizers, other CSP administrators, could create opportunities that would be helpful. We are nearing the end of our time. So I just wanted to actually turn it back over to Eric and Carol and see if they have any other comments or questions before we wrap up.

ERIC DOSS: You know, I don't. I really appreciate all of the-- like I said, I was taking copious notes. I really appreciate all of the help from everybody and great ideas. I think that's going to-- it's really

very helpful.

ALEX MEDLER: Great. Carol, any other observations on anything from Maryland before we sign off?

CAROL: Can you hear me?

ALEX MEDLER: Yeah, go ahead.

CAROL: I wasn't sure if I had it on mute or not, sorry. Yeah, I agree totally with Eric. I very much appreciate there's several things from this conversation I can follow up in terms of more intensive training. And I appreciate-- is it-- Wisconsin, I think, has offered to post some of their documents. That will be very helpful. And I thank you, thank everyone for their time.

ALEX MEDLER: That's great. Well, I'd like to thank everybody who joined us today. We will be following up encouraging the states who have materials to go ahead and post things to the SE exchange. We will be having the in-person meeting amongst project directors in April. So there's more opportunity to follow up face-to-face with your colleagues and peers on this.

And we'll probably bring people's attention to the department's call for reviewers for their review process that's underway. But with that, I'd just like to close by letting you know that you will be receiving a follow-up email that asks you to evaluate this. And if you would like more webinars of this format, let us know-- or ways to adjust and improve it. We're always up for hearing your ideas.

And if you have particular technical assistance needs, we do have some resources that are already posted. And we can help you find them on the shared files within the exchange. So please don't be bashful. Reach out, and we can see what we can do to help. And be looking for our next webinars looking at charter management organizations and oversight and other issues coming up in the field. With that, I think we're going to sign off. And please respond to the evaluation. And our thanks to Eric and everybody else who participated in today's call. Thanks very much.

SPEAKER 2: Thank you.

SPEAKER 3: Thank you.

STEFAN HUH: Great, thank you.