

OASH Insular Areas Improvement Initiatives
Task 1: Assessment of the Grants Management Process
Program Management Interviews—Federal Employees
Guidance Interview Protocol

Welcome/Introduction

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview. As I mentioned earlier, my name is _____. I work for Insight Policy Research, a consulting firm working with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, known as OASH. We have been hired by OASH to talk to you and other stakeholders; the purpose of the initiative is to assess the root causes of challenges associated with the United States Insular Areas grants management process. We'd like to identify what some of those challenges are as well as hear your suggestions as to what could be done to address those challenges. The ultimate goal is to develop a set of actionable, sustainable recommendations for initiatives that would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the federally-funded programs and in turn improve health and human service outcomes in the US Insular areas.

We'll be talking to a number of grant stakeholders on both the federal side and in the Insular Areas to hear about experiences and suggestions about the grants process. We've asked to speak with you because you are the project manager for _____. We'll be travelling to _____ in _____ to talk to the project officers there about their views on how the grant is going (or went) and what obstacles they face, but we wanted to talk to you first to get your perspective—this will help to inform our discussions with them.

We'll synthesize the information we gather to create recommendations for the HHS and Insular Areas grants management processes overall. No names will be mentioned in our report and no quotes will be attributed to you, though they may be attributed to a position, such as "Federal Program Officer." This interview should take approximately an hour.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do I have your permission to record this interview? The recording will only be used in the preparation of your report.

Start recording and verify permission to record.

Let's go ahead and get started.

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Interviewee Role

- Could you tell me what your role is in the grants process to the Insular Areas?
- How long have you been in that role?
 - o What were your previous roles in the grants process?
- (If it doesn't come up in the previous answers): In which geographic area do you primarily work?
Probe—Pacific/Caribbean
 - If Pacific, what area of the Pacific? (*Probe for CNMI, American Samoa, Guam, FAS*)
 - Have you ever been involved in grants to (other major geographic area in which they are not currently working)

Grants Process

I'm going to ask you some questions about process. I know a lot of work happens even before the FOA is released, so let's start there.

Pre-release

- Can you walk me through the process for developing a grant program? I'd like you to start at the very beginning. Please tell me very briefly what the various steps are and who the decision-makers are up to the point where the FOA is released.
 - o *Probe for: appropriation of funds, funding opportunity announcement (FOA) design and release, developing the FOA, etc.*
 - o *Probe for: Who decides/how is it decided to create a grant program? Who decides what mechanism to use? How do people hear about it? How does this compare or contrast with grants to CONUS recipients?*
- What are some of the challenges HHS faces in this pre-funding stage?
 - o What has been done to minimize those challenges?

Application

Let's talk about the application process itself next. I'd like you to think about your responses to my questions in terms of the _____ grant, but I would also like to know if, from your experience, what you are telling me about _____ is fairly typical of this type of grant and grantee. We certainly want to know things that are specific to this particular grant to inform our visit with them, but in the end we'll be writing recommendations that will apply to the grants program overall.

- From your perspective, what are the steps in the application process?
 - o *Probe for application development, submission, review, award.*

- What do you see as some of the challenges faced by HHS agencies during the application stage [or sub-processes mentioned above] regarding the Insular Areas?
 - From what you have seen, what are some of the challenges faced by insular area grantees (or prospective grantees) during the application process?
 - *Probe:* Anything notable about this grantee?
 - *Probe:* Any challenges submitting applications online?
- What do you think is the root cause or some of the factors feeding into [List first challenge. Repeat for other challenges.]?
- From your experience, what have you seen that works best at minimizing [List first challenge. Repeat for other challenges.]?
 - *Probe if necessary:* What recommendations do you have for addressing this challenge?
- From your experience, what intervention or interventions have been tried to address [first challenge] that do not work?
 - *Probe:* What are some reasons those approaches did not work? What changes could be made that could help that approach or approaches be more successful?

Implementation Stage

What happens next after the grant is awarded?

I'd like to break this down a little further into Program Management and Financial Management. Let's start with Program Management.

Program Management

- How do you monitor the day-to-day operations of the grantees?
 - *Probe for:* Frequency of site visits, phone calls, travel to a mainland meeting
- From your perspective, what are some of the challenges this grantee faces related to managing program operations on a day-to-day basis?
 - *Probe for:* Receiving funding, regular reporting requirements, monitoring, communication with HHS, staffing, general language challenges.
- What do you think is the root cause or some of the factors feeding into these challenges?
- From your experience, what would you recommend as best practices for minimizing these challenges or the effects of these challenges?
- What are some things you have seen or tried that do NOT work for addressing these challenges?
 - *Probe:* What are some reasons those approaches did not work? What changes could be made that could help that approach or approaches be more successful?
- How would you say the challenges we just discussed are the same or different from those faced by other Insular Area grantees?
- What challenges do you or others here at HHS face in monitoring the program management of Insular Area grantees?
 - *Probe for:* within their agency and with the islands

- What types of technical support do you provide for the Insular Areas personnel managing this project?
- What types of technical support or training do you think this grantee could benefit from but is not currently receiving?

Financial Management

Let's move on to Financial Management.

- *[If not already answered:]* How do you monitor the financial operations of the grantees?
- From your perspective, what are some of the challenges this grantee faces during the implementation process—specifically related to managing finances?
 - *Probe for: Receiving funding, burn rate, auditing processes.*
- What do you think is the root cause or some of the factors feeding into these challenges?
- From your experience, what would you recommend as best practices for minimizing these challenges or the effects of these challenges?
- What are some things you have seen or tried that do NOT work for addressing these challenges?
 - *Probe: What are some reasons those approaches did not work? What changes could be made that could help that approach or approaches be more successful?*
- How would you say the challenges we just discussed are the same or different from those faced by other Insular Area grantees?
- What challenges do you or others here at HHS face in monitoring the financial management of Insular Area grantees?

Reporting

- *[If not already covered:]* What are the reporting requirements of grantees during the life of the grant?
 - What about this specific grantee?
 - *Probe: How well has this grantee complied with reporting requirements to date? Any challenges?*
- From your perspective, what are some of the challenges Insular Area grantees face with reporting and complying with reporting requirements?
 - *Probe for: challenges to submitting mid-term or final reports, draw-down of funds.*
- What do you think is the root cause or some of the factors feeding into these challenges?
- From your experience, what have you seen that works best at these challenges?
 - *Probe: What recommendations do you have, if any, for addressing these challenges?*
 - What intervention or interventions have been tried to address these challenges that do not work?
 - *Probe: What are some reasons those approaches did not work? What changes could be made that could help that approach or approaches be more successful?*

Closeout

- At the end of the grant cycle, how does the closeout process work?

- o [If not already covered:] What are the closeout requirements of grantees during the life of the grant?
 - o What about this specific grantee?
- From your perspective, what are some of the challenges Insular Area grantees face with closeout requirements?
- What do you think is the root cause or some of the factors feeding into these challenges?
- From your experience, what have you seen that works best at minimizing these challenges?
 - o Probe: What recommendations do you have, if any, for addressing these challenges?
- What intervention or interventions have been tried that DID NOT work in addressing these challenges?
 - o Probe: What are some reasons those approaches did not work? What changes could be made that could help that approach or approaches be more successful?

Insular Area Grants—Big Picture and Positives

Let's not talk a little bit about the way this grant is performing.

- How well are the outcome targets for this grant being met?
 - o How are those outcomes measured?
 - o Other than what we have already discussed, what are some reasons this grant is not meeting its outcome targets?
- We've talked about a lot of different challenges. If you had to pick one thing that is the absolute biggest challenge, what would it be?
 - o What are some of the reasons you selected that as the biggest challenge?
- Let's switch gears a bit and talk about positives. In your experience, which parts of the grants to the Insular areas are working best? I'm looking for successes or best practices in any of the phases we have discussed. *Probe for geographic area and time (a decade ago v. present)*
- What are some of the factors that made _____ a success?
- How transferrable are the factors you just described?
 - What are some reasons those factors are or are not transferrable?
- If you had to choose one "biggest bang for the buck" intervention or approach to these grants, what would that be?

Changes to Grants Management

Other than what we have already discussed, what changes to the Federal grants management process itself would be helpful in making these grants either more successful or easier for the recipients to comply with the requirements of the grants?

- *Probe:* What more could HHS or [insert agency name] be doing to assist Insular Area grantees?

Wrap-up

What other recommendations or comments do you have regarding challenges or factors related to the success of HHS grants to the United States Insular Areas?

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me. If you have other ideas about what we've discussed that we didn't touch on here, please feel free to contact Subroto. He can be reached at Subroto.Banerji@hhs.gov.