

**Office of the Comptroller of Public Accounts
Texas**

Fiscal Officers' Academy

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2002 FOA Inaugural Class

Please respond to the following questions in a total of no more than three pages (1500 or fewer words). The questions should guide but not limit your response, and you should feel free to include any pertinent information. Do not attach any supplemental material to your response, and **do not mention the name of your state on this page or in any of the responses to the eight questions.** Please include the text of each question immediately before each response.

Please attach your responses to the above questions to this page. Also, please submit five copies (if mailing hard copy) of this package (the PROJECT DESCRIPTION PAGE plus your responses). Each set should be stapled and three-hole punched. If sending via e-mail, send one copy of this package.

Fiscal Officers' Academy

1. Provide a brief description of the project, including project objectives.

The Fiscal Officers' Academy (FOA) is a collaborative training effort sponsored by the Comptroller's office in partnership with other state agencies. It is designed to recruit and prepare future state agency chief financial officers. Participants receive training in the state's budget process, fiscal management and accounting procedures and reporting and auditing topics, through a curriculum developed and presented by seasoned agency financial practitioners.

2. What improvement(s), new functionality or business application did the project address?

The state's work force has been aging steadily in recent years. As more employees become eligible to retire, state government faces a serious "brain drain"; a significant portion of the state's most knowledgeable and experienced fiscal employees may leave within the next four years. Agency fiscal officers, in particular, possess technical expertise, experience and knowledge that are proving difficult to replace. The FOA provides a mechanism for sharing and institutionalizing such technical expertise and knowledge, to ensure the continued quality of state financial management.

3. Describe the schedule of the project's design, development and implementation.

During summer 2001, the Governor's Office of Budget and Planning, Legislative Budget Board, Comptroller of Public Accounts, State Auditor's Office and Employees Retirement System first met to discuss creating a training program to prepare future state agency chief financial officers. The Comptroller's office agreed to sponsor and house the FOA and to convene a group of fiscal and executive officers to plan and develop the curriculum.

In fall 2001, a committee of 25 chief fiscal and executive officers from 20 different state agencies developed a curriculum offering training based on real-life situations and involving extensive interaction among participants. The curriculum is offered for one week in each of three successive months. It includes the following topics:

| Week One The Art of the Budget Process | Week Two Fiscal Management | Week Three Accounting, Reporting, & Auditing |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State Demographics ▪ The Economy and State Government ▪ Forecasting Tools ▪ Communicating your Agency's Budget ▪ Budget Mechanics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Procurement Rules ▪ E-Procurement ▪ Contract Management ▪ Negotiations ▪ Asset Management ▪ Federal Funding Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accounting, Reporting and Auditing Responsibilities ▪ Risk Overview ▪ Managing Reports ▪ Payroll Systems ▪ Internal/Cost Accounting |

A team of more than 80 practitioners was selected to deliver the curriculum. Although the curriculum is primarily technical in nature, it also addresses other important skills, such as negotiation and working with the Legislature and the media.

The sponsoring agencies sent nomination materials to state agency executives and chief financial officers in December 2001. In the following month, the steering committee selected 30 participants from a pool of 70 nominees to form the inaugural class. The steering committee has chosen to limit FOA class sizes to 30 to ensure a meaningful learning environment and encourage participant networking over the course of the training period.

These participants represented both large and small agencies and were selected on the basis of demonstrated leadership skills; experience as accountants, auditors, economists, budget and purchasing officers; and interest in serving as chief fiscal officers in state government. The inaugural FOA class began in February 2002 and graduated April 26, 2002.

4. What did the project accomplish? Who are the current and potential beneficiaries? Were other public sector entities, like component units or local governmental entities, or private sector entities able to participate and, if so, how did this add value to the development and outcome of the project?

Our state, like many others, is in a severe fiscal crisis. Yet it is forced to face this challenge with a diminishing supply of experienced managers who understand the state's complex financial structure and the dynamics involved in working successfully with the Legislature. The FOA is helping today's top fiscal practitioners shape the next generation of such leaders. Participants are receiving valuable assistance in shaping and advancing their personal careers. The ultimate beneficiaries, however, are our state's government and the taxpayers it serves.

No legislation, executive order or regulation was required to start the FOA, but the state's legislative and executive leaders actively support the initiative. FOA's steering committee of fiscal and executive officers communicate the importance of the initiative to their agencies, encourage their participation and deliver some of the training.

The academy's first graduates returned to their state agencies with a greater awareness of their career opportunities and better preparation for the challenges they will face. They also became part of a network of persons with similar responsibilities and talents. State government as a whole will benefit whether the graduates choose to continue their careers with their sponsoring agencies or move to others.

5. What were the levels of personnel on the project team and how did participation on the team enhance the skills of those personnel?

Twenty-five financial officers and other state personnel serving on the FOA steering committee developed the academy's curriculum and, along with more than 60 other state practitioners, participated in its training sessions. The committee members have found that the process of creating and maintaining the academy has made them much more aware of issues and training needs common to their agencies, regardless of their overarching missions.

Too often, our state's agencies operate like isolated fiefdoms, each with its own organizational culture and business practices, and communicate little with other agencies. The FOA curriculum, as noted above, was designed to give its participants ample opportunity to share ideas and approaches. The FOA team has found that the initiative is producing similar benefits for its members.

6. List the funding source(s) (indicating those that would be innovative), costs incurred, benefits derived, and return on investment (factoring in hard and soft dollar savings).

No specific appropriation was required to start the FOA. State personnel who participate in FOA, as steering committee members, trainers and students, do so in addition to their normal duties. Their generous contributions of time and expertise greatly reduced the project's cost. In addition, the sponsoring agencies contributed personnel time involved in the creation and maintenance of an FOA Web site that lists key resources for agency fiscal officers and reports information about future FOA classes.

Agencies sponsoring participants pay \$200 for each employee's tuition as well as any additional travel and meal expenses. The tuition covers additional material and speaker costs beyond those defrayed by the sponsoring agencies.

The FOA's most important measure of return on investment will be the success of its graduates. Another measure is the response by applicants to the program. Both will be tracked over time as more classes move through the academy. To meet the demand for FOA training, the steering committee is considering expanding the program by offering more sessions rather than increasing individual class sizes.

7. What measurements have been established to monitor the continued success and benefits of the project?

The initial academy class members were asked to provide daily, weekly and final program evaluations. These evaluations were very positive and will serve as a basis for refining the curriculum and training materials for upcoming classes. Participants were particularly pleased by the opportunity to learn from seasoned state employees and officials, as well as from other participants in collaborative projects and case studies.

In addition, former FOA participants will be surveyed annually to assess their job advancement and the curriculum's continued relevance to their positions and responsibilities.

8. How replicable in other areas of the public sector or other states do you consider this project to be? In discussing replicability, please address the following questions. What obstacles or problems might other states encounter in trying to implement this or a similar project? Specifically, how was this project communicated statewide? Were there cultural business barriers to overcome? If yes, please elaborate. Was training involved from the central project team? Were consultants involved in the project? If yes, what was their role?

This program is easily replicable, given appropriate levels of commitment, vision and leadership. Although developed for a specific state government, the FOA curriculum could be adapted for other states, local governments and other public organizations. Factors required for the success of a similar program include:

- the active support and participation of agency fiscal officers and legislative and executive leaders.
- a curriculum based on "real-life" situations and taught by experienced practitioners.
- the use of available state resources with minimal additional costs to participating agencies.
- central coordination and administration of the program, including training and curriculum development, by a steering committee of sponsoring agencies and a curriculum focus group.
- appropriate publicity to alert potential candidates about the opportunity.

The Comptroller's office publicized the program by sending a letter describing the program to each state agency head. In addition, a statewide newsletter issued by the Comptroller's office profiled the FOA and presentations were made at statewide meetings and conferences. The Web site mentioned above also provides information on the project. Cultural barriers were not an issue, and no consultants were involved in the creation or execution of the initiative.