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Implementing the Recovery Act: Report Gives Nine Action Steps Based on Federal Case Studies

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**The Rise of Partisan Hybrids 3**

At a national level, those Americans who say they are independent (38 percent) now outnumber Democrats (32 percent) and Republicans (24 percent). As a 2009 Pew People and Press report relates, independents have begun to take "center stage" in the United States, creating a new field of political action, one that is incredibly more competitive given the diversity of those who find themselves in the messy middle.—Catherine E. Wilson

Silver Lining to Recalls: Electorate has Re-discovered Government 5

It's been an amazing year and a half to live in Wisconsin. From February 2011, when Governor Walker introduced a proposal to eliminate virtually all collective bargaining by public sector labor unions, to the June 2012 gubernatorial recall election which he won, I've watched what can only be described as revolutionary changes in public affairs in my state.—Mordecai Lee

Do Voter Photo ID Requirements Unduly Burden Citizens? 6

Despite our lengthy constitutional history, the privilege of voting continues to be a topic of national debate. Today's issue centers on two opposing arguments: Stricter identification laws are needed to ensure elections are fair and reduce potential voter fraud.—Chester Robinson

The Truth about Voter Fraud in the U.S. (it's really not a problem) 7

Some will claim that voter photo identification is needed to prevent voter impersonation and fraud at the polls. The reality is that in-person voter fraud is so insignificant around the country that one has a better chance of being struck by lightning than having such fraud affect the outcome of an election.—David Schultz

Legacy of HAVA: How to Avoid a Repeat of the 2000 Presidential Election 8

The transition mandated by HAVA (Help America Vote Act of 2002) alleviated major issues related to election administration and facilitation, but created additional issues that burdened election municipalities with added cost to upgrade equipment and a workforce sorely needing more extensive training.—Edward J. Hebbert

Insights on HR Mgmt. 10**Emerging Issues 11****ASPA TIMES****ASPA Launches Memos to National Leaders 17****Yearwood Leaves ASPA 18****President's Column 29****Chapter News 29****Recruiter 30**

PA TIMES

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Implementing the Recovery Act

Report Gives Nine Action Steps Based on Federal Case Studies

Rich Callahan, Kay Sterner

An underappreciated aspect of the recent American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) is the leadership of federal executives across various agencies in meeting the challenge of implementing the

largest outlay of funds since World War II. Recently, a team of researchers across three universities recently released "Key Actions That Contribute to Successful Program Implementation: Lessons from the Recovery Act" through the IBM Center on the Business of Government on the action steps fed-

eral executives took across nine different case studies. Sandra Archibald, dean of the Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington, led the research team with Rich Callahan of the University of San

See RECOVERY ACT, pg. 2



Downtown Livingston, MT. Livingston is the county seat of Park County, MT.

Two Montana Counties Revisit Economic Development

Northern Rocky Mountain Economic Development District Comes Out of Hibernation

Earl Mathers

Until recently, economic development efforts in the Gallatin-Park County region of Southwest Montana were fragmented and lacked intraregional coordination. Economic development activities failed to acquire broad support, particularly in Gallatin County, due in part to consistently strong growth and the general perception that additional stimulus was unnecessary.

At one time, unemployment in parts of the region dropped to under 2 percent and area employers had great difficulty in recruiting qualified applicants for a wide range of jobs. Planners and the elected officials that are statutorily mandated to consider growth and development issues struggled to keep pace with the volume of subdivision applications produced by developers and commercial space was at a premium. The recession that

See ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, pg. 13

Building Nonprofit Capacity, A Local Government Model

Catherine Raymond, Sue Gallagher, and K. Lori Hanson

Local government agencies have long contracted with nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to provide publicly funded human services. In many communities, the local NPO "market" is limited—comprised largely of community-based organizations that may have difficulty meeting increasingly rigorous government accountability and performance standards. To ensure responsible use of public funds and address gaps between NPO capacities and government standards, some local government agencies provide assistance to their contracted NPO service providers in an effort to improve contract performance. This type of assistance is also known as capacity building.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of guidance for public managers on what constitutes successful capacity building in a contracting context, what factors influence the capacity building process, and the resources required. This article provides such guidance by presenting a model for integrating capacity building into a typical local government contracting process and highlighting the findings of a study conducted at two county-level public funding agencies located in large, diverse South Florida counties.

See NONPROFIT CAPACITY, pg. 9

Report Offers Nine Action Steps for Implementing the Recovery Act

From RECOVERY ACT, pg. 1

Francisco, Brint Milward, Director of the National Institute for Civil Discourse and director of the School of Government and Public Policy at the University of Arizona, and Kay Sterner of the Evans School.

The practices and behaviors described in the report reflect insights that emerged from a research partnership between academics and practitioners that began with four experienced faculty traveling to Washington, DC, in August 2010, at the invitation of Ed DeSeve, who served in the Office of Vice President Biden. The team worked with federal executives in writing case studies of varied federal agencies' experiences with implementing the Recovery Act. Over 20 federal agencies sent representatives to the two-day workshop.

The case writers engaged the participating federal managers in a structured experience of reflective practice. Each of the case writers were, at the time of writing, federal managers who interviewed their peers, gathering real-time perspective on the daily ins and outs of realizing the Recovery Act.

The recently released study draws on nine published case studies written by federal agency executives based on interviews with federal agency staff involved in implementing the Recovery Act.

As the cases emerged the research team found that the Recovery Act appeared to change the norms for how a number of government agencies operate. For example, there seemed to be a greater use of transparency and accountability, especially in better managing programmatic risks, due in no small part to President Obama's demands that Recovery Act money be watched with more rigor than ever before.

In addition, efforts to streamline grant and contract processes under the Recovery Act, due to the need to allocate more money in less time than ever before, may well become models for the broader grant and contract systems. Likewise, the use of real-time learning and collaborative networks could be adapted more widely as ways to cope with tighter budgets, as the efficiency displayed by those federal executives will no doubt be compatible with constrained conditions.

In some cases the new approaches developed to manage Recovery Act implementation were temporary, and agencies returned to their standard operating procedures. In a majority of cases, agencies adopted the newly developed processes as their standard way of doing business. Examples include the streamlined contracting processes developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the place-based reporting system developed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The case studies and interviews undertaken for this report revealed shared practices in how federal career executives responded to the myriad challenges imposed by the the Recovery Act's requirements. The following action steps could serve as future guides for executives who find themselves facing similar challenges:

- **Action Step One:** Set deadlines to create a sense of urgency. Statutory deadlines focused agency leadership on key priorities and fostered entrepreneurial behaviors to find ways around traditional operating practices. Self-imposed interim deadlines maintained momentum.
- **Action Step Two:** Create dedicated project teams. Most agencies created project offices

so senior executives could devote full-time attention to meeting program demands.

- **Action Step Three:** Use technology to track progress. Off-the-shelf technology provided departmental secretaries and program managers in the field access to real-time data that had never before been available.
- **Action Step Four:** Anticipate bottlenecks and streamline processes. Existing processes would not work because they were too slow. Agency executives quickly identified potential bottlenecks and re-designed processes, often by centralizing efforts in the project leadership offices.
- **Action Step Five:** Build in transparency and accountability. The Recovery Act created new expectations, governance structures, and tools. It also provided significant funding to track spending and progress. These were largely web-enabled approaches not used on this scale before.
- **Action Step Six:** Identify risks and manage them. The law explicitly required risk identification and risk management techniques with a focus on prevention of fraud and abuse, rather than the traditional approach of catching malfeasance after the fact. This was made possible by the transparency tools noted in Action Step Five.
- **Action Step Seven:** Foster real-time learning. As implemented, the Recovery Act placed a strong emphasis on sharing experiences across programs and levels of government to spur real-time learning. Although not a statutory element, this was a basic operating premise adopted by the Vice President's Recovery Implementation Office and replicated across agencies.
- **Action Step Eight:** Create horizontal networks. Cross-agency networks were a hall-

mark of the Recovery Act's implementation, again fostered by the operating premises embraced by the Recovery Implementation Office.

- **Action Step Nine:** Embrace adaptation as a mindset. Agency career executives found themselves largely on their own, given that only a few political appointees were in place. The Recovery Act's urgency encouraged career executives to innovate and improve in ways that ran counter to traditional operations, but were appropriate given the circumstances.

Notably, agencies did not apply these action steps individually. Their strength came from being used in combination. Viewing these nine action steps as linear—one occurring after another—underestimates the iterative process of how they were actually applied. Only when taken together did they advance the chances of successful program implementation.

While the case studies and action steps observed were in the context of the urgency of the Recovery Act's deadlines, they do offer federal executives fresh insights into approaching their regular missions. They offer the potential to serve as both a checklist for public managers and executives to assess current efforts, as well as a map to navigate uncertain terrain in launching future initiatives.

Read the full report at www.businessofgovernment.org/report/key-actions-contribute-successful-program-implementation-lessons-recovery-act.

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