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# Administrative Review & Training Grants Final Study Report



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## About This Report

This study provides FNS with formative research on the Child Nutrition (CN) Administrative Review and Training (ART) grants. The data collected during the study aim to help FNS understand any effects of the ART grantees' interventions on administrative processes, examine the potential for long-term sustainability of grant-funded activities, and describe challenges to ART grant implementation and sustainability.

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## Introduction

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### *Study Purpose and Background*

#### *Study Purpose*

This study provides FNS with formative research on the Child Nutrition (CN) Administrative Review and Training (ART) grants. The data collected during the study aim to help FNS understand any effects of the ART grantees' interventions on administrative processes, examine the potential long-term sustainability of grant-funded activities, and describe challenges to ART grant implementation and sustainability.

#### *Background of Administrative Review and Training Grants*

Federal legislation in 2004 and 2010 amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (P.L. 79-396, 60 Stat. 230) to require State agencies (SAs) to conduct additional reviews of selected Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and provide annual funding to SAs to use for oversight and training of LEA staff, with a focus on LEAs that demonstrate high levels of or a high risk for administrative errors, as identified by SAs. The amended legislation also required SAs to implement a more robust and unified accountability system.

Following changes from the 2010 legislation via the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) (P.L. 111-296), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the **Administrative Review (AR)**, a new process for LEA reviews. Changes implemented under this new process are illustrated in Exhibit 1. SAs must review all their LEAs' National School Lunch Program (NSLP) at least once during the three-year review cycle.

#### **Exhibit 1: Changes to LEA Reviews under the New Administrative Review Process**

- New supplemental forms to standardize the review process that include the Off-site Assessment and Risk Assessment Tools
- Increased focus on the overall financial health of a Local Education Agency's nonprofit school food service account and the addition of a Resource Management section to AR



To assist SAs in meeting these new AR requirements and per the HHFKA legislation, FNS funded the ART grants, which allowed SAs to fund administrative oversight and AR training for LEAs. The ART grants is a competitive grant available to all State agencies administering the school meal programs. FNS awarded ART grants to 30 States between 2009 and the end of fiscal year in 2017.

The focus of the ART grants is threefold: (1) oversight and training of LEA administrative personnel in school meal operations; (2) modifications to update processes and systems to comply with AR; and (3) implementing technology improvements to address administrative errors in error-prone LEAs.

The *ART Grant Summary of Best Practices* provided FNS with an initial glimpse of the promising practices and lessons learned from ART grantees that implemented technology-related projects and completed or closed out their grants by May 2015. FNS's interest in bolstering initial findings from the *ART Grant Summary of Best Practices*, which was created from FNS supported technical assistance provided to ART grantees, resulted in the commission of this study.

### Study Objectives

The formative research ART study focused on a comprehensive set of research questions, grouped within three study objectives:

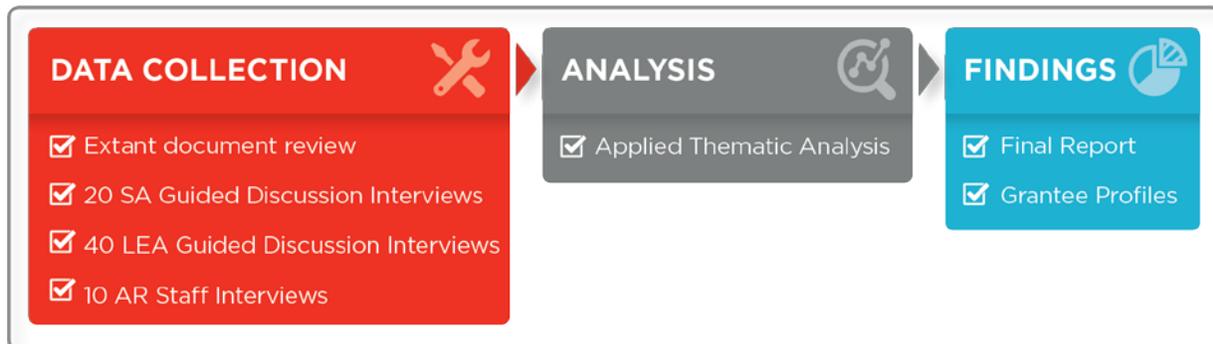
1. describe how interventions supported by ART grants intended to improve grantee administrative processes;
2. examine how ART grantees sustain their activities after their FNS funding has ended;
3. describe challenges to implementation and sustainability of ART grant interventions and how those challenges may be overcome.

### Study Methods

Of 30 ART grants awarded, 20 States completed/closed out their grants in time for inclusion in this study (by the end of fiscal year 2017). ART grants included both planning and implementation grants, this study only included implementation grants.

The study used a qualitative approach to address the three objectives. The approach included a review of existing documents, such as grantee monthly progress reports and final reports, telephone interviews with SA and LEA staff from the 20 targeted ART grantees, and additional follow-up telephone interviews with 10 State AR staff to gather more detail about their AR processes. Exhibit 2 provides an overview of the study approach.

#### Exhibit 2: Study Process



See Appendix A for a profile of each grantee and its project. See Appendix B for the research questions the study addressed. See Appendix C for the protocol used to review extant data and Appendix D for the protocols used in the interviews.

## ART Grant Projects Overview

### Grantees and Award Amount

The study examined 20 States grantees with 22 ART grant projects. Grantees included U.S. States and Guam. The grantees were clustered in the Midwest, Mountain Plains and Western FNS regions; however, grants were also awarded to some grantees in the Northeast and South. More than \$23 million was awarded between 2009 and 2016, with grant amounts ranging from \$251,655 to \$1,960,526. In total, \$2,127,274.11 (9.1%) of all money awarded was returned (see Exhibit 3). The amount of money returned ranged from 0% to up to 53% returned. The reasons for returning funds varied, but many grantees attributed it to changes in their implementation plans. For example New Hampshire originally proposed to contract an outside vendor to develop a new automated system. However, once awarded, the State decided to save costs it would develop the system in-house.

### Length of Grant Period

Initial grant periods ranged from one to three years as per the ART grant application. However, actual grant periods ranged from two to six years, depending on the grantee and scope of its project. Six grantees completed their projects during their intended grant period, but 15 required no-cost extensions. The majority of grantees received at least one no-cost extension; however, in some cases, up to four such extensions were awarded.

Among the issues to which grantees attributed their need for a no-cost extension were delays in implementation, changes in scope of work, changes in partners, project management challenges, and staff turnover. Also cited was USDA’s implementation of the AR process mid-grant, which affected grantees’ implementation plans.

Exhibit 3: Percentage Returned

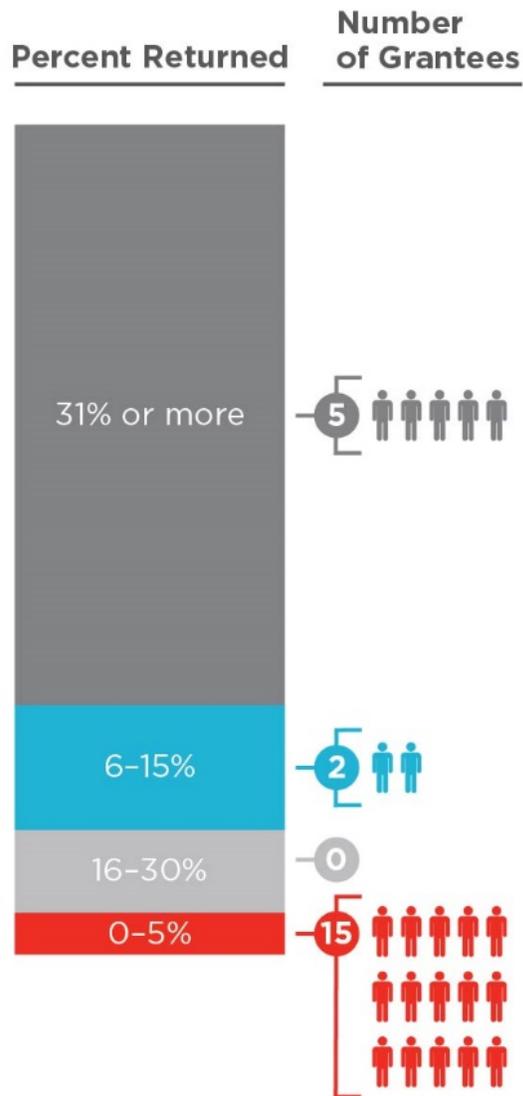
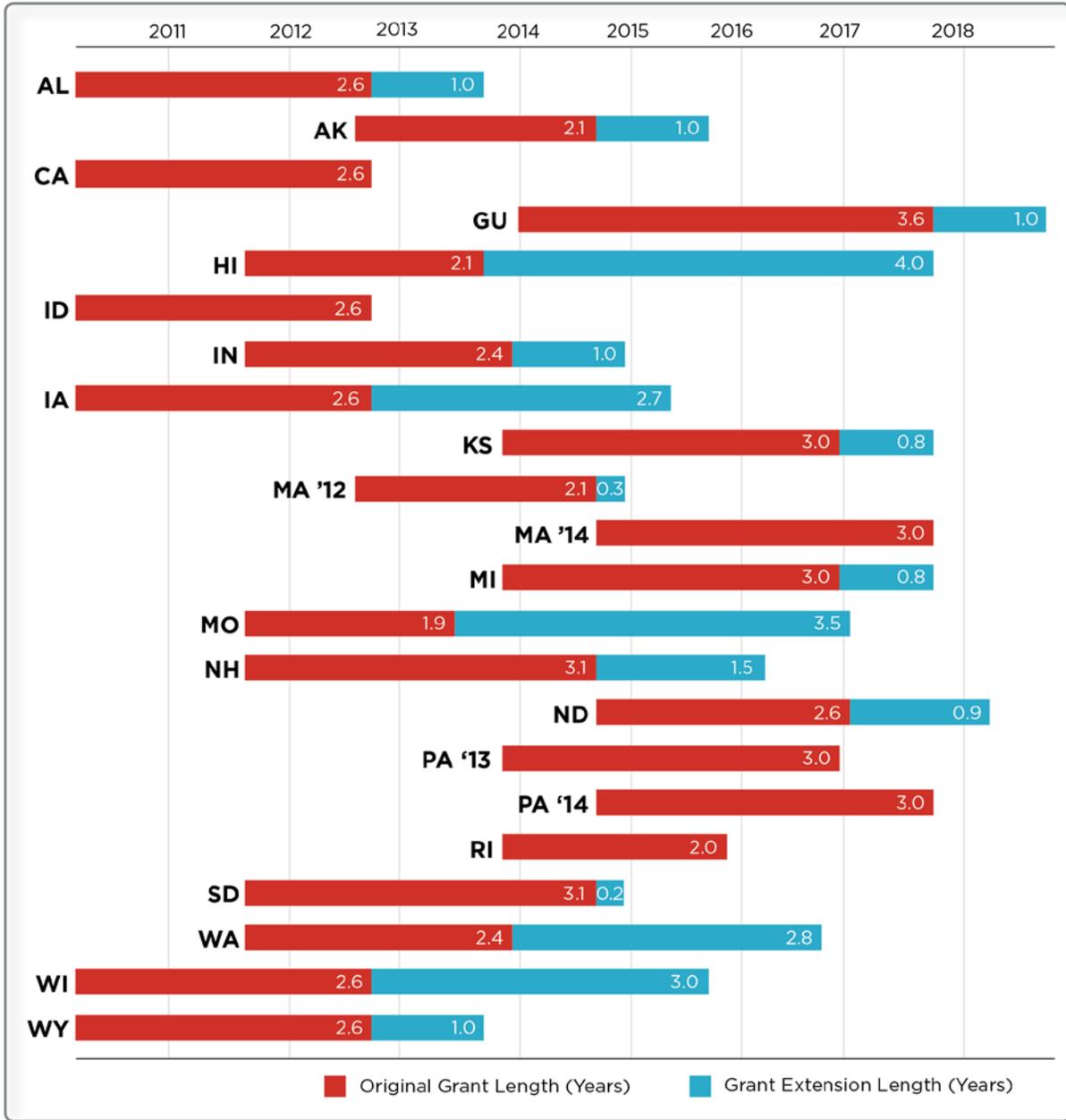


Exhibit 4: Grant Period, by Grantee



**Grantee Goals**

The goals of the funded projects can be summarized in three overarching categories: (1) reducing errors; (2) improving compliance with the new AR process; and (3) targeting error-prone LEAs. Several grantees addressed all three goals in their intervention; other grantees such as Alabama took a more targeted approach, identifying just one goal for their project. Exhibit 5 demonstrates the expressed goals, by grantee.

**Intervention Types**

The strategies ART grantees selected for reducing administrative errors varied widely within the requirements set by FNS in the Request for Applications. For example, some grantees implemented direct ART grant-funded services and trainings for LEAs, and these trainings varied in duration, scope, and intensity. Other grantees implemented updates to technologies that affected LEAs statewide. In some States where service-oriented or training interventions were implemented, specific LEAs or types of LEAs were sometimes targeted, whereas in States where technology-based interventions were implemented, all LEAs within the State could be affected.

**Technology.** The technology interventions included creating new technology systems for conducting ARs, working with a technology solutions provider to customize an off-the-shelf model, and updating and integrating the new AR process into an existing child nutrition platform. Through the technological updates grantees were able to automate the ARs, communicate more seamlessly with LEAs, and provide real-time monitoring of the AR process.

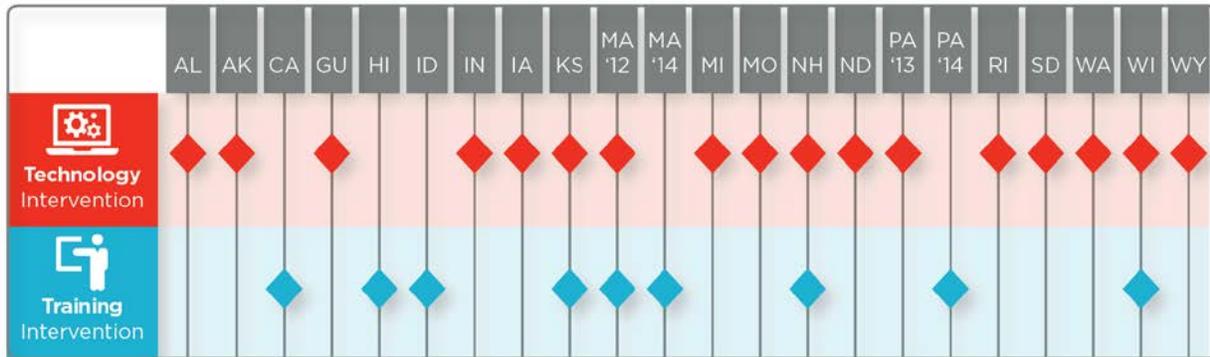
**Training.** Given the changes to the AR process, many grantees used funds to provide training to LEAs. These trainings included, but were not limited to, producing online modules to assist in corrective action, training on using the new systems for the automated reviews, and training on compliance with meal counting or nutritional quality of school meals.

Exhibit 6 demonstrates the breadth of the interventions, highlighting the diversity in approaches grantees took to achieving their stated goals.

**Exhibit 5: Expressed Goals, by Grantee**

TARGET ERROR-PRONE LEAS			
IMPROVE COMPLIANCE			
REDUCE ERRORS			
Alabama	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alaska	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
California	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Guam	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hawaii	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Idaho	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indiana	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Iowa	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Kansas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Massachusetts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michigan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Missouri	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
New Hampshire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
North Dakota	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pennsylvania	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rhode Island	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
South Dakota	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Washington	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wisconsin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wyoming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Exhibit 6: Intervention Type, by Grantee



### Organizational Structure

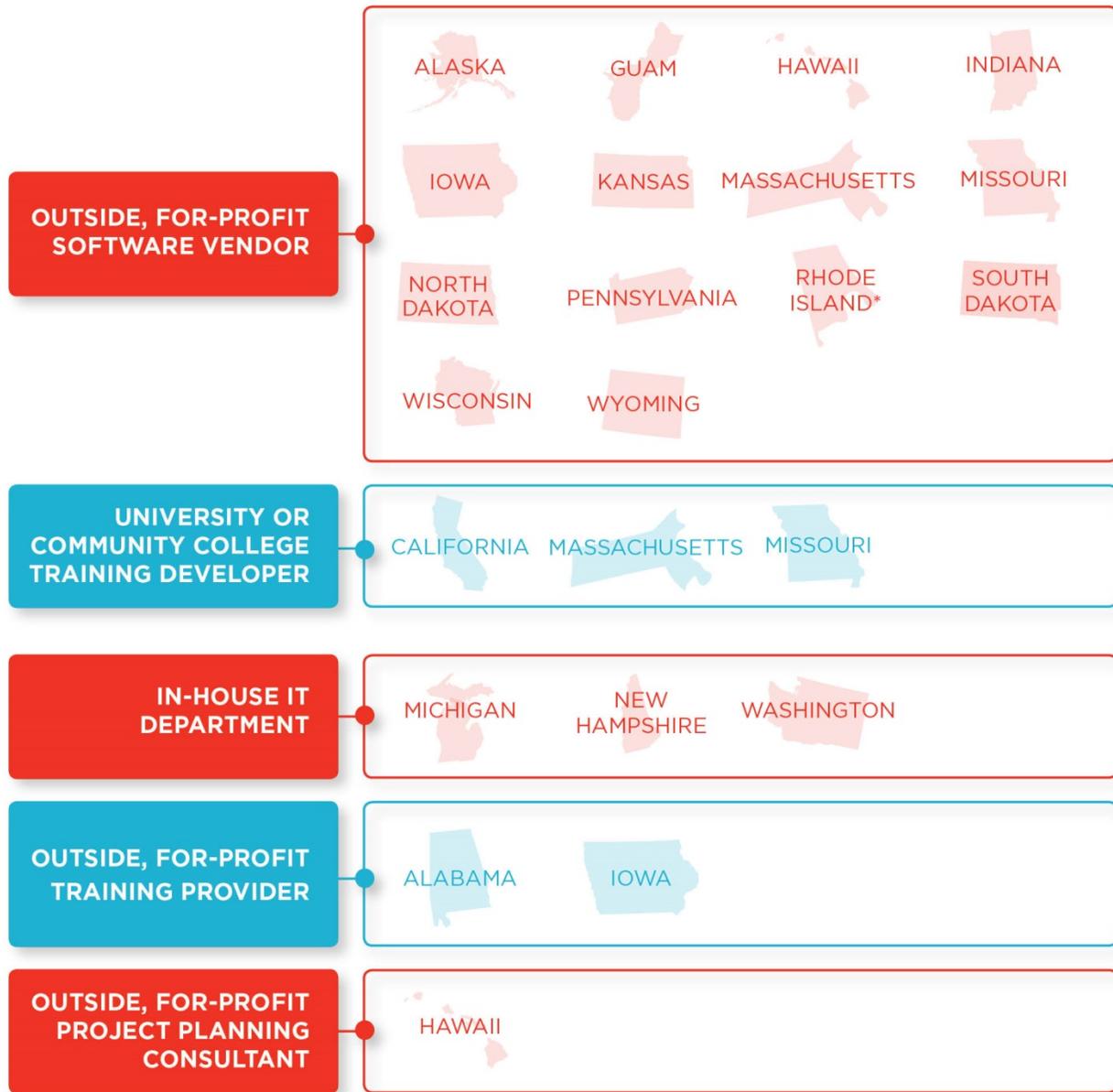
Grantees had full discretion over their organizational structures. Some grantees opted to manage their project internally with State staff, whereas others opted to contract out their project management. Many interviewees emphasized the role of the project manager as being critical to the success of the project. Some grantees had a single project manager who managed the budget, timeline, and progress; other grantees, such as Kansas, opted to have multiple program managers: one who focused on IT and another Child Nutrition project manager who oversaw tasks outside of IT-specific activities.

The grantees also partnered with a wide variety of organizations, see Exhibit 7. These included local institutions, such as universities or consultants, to develop systems or curricula for trainings. Some grantees also worked with other agencies within their State. For example, New Hampshire, Washington and Michigan opted to have their in-house State IT departments develop their technology solutions.

As a provision to receiving the ART grant, States with a technology-related grant project received technical assistance. FNS contracted with an organization to provide grantees with this technical assistance. The contractor assisted grantees on project management tasks, including providing grantees with templates, examples, and hosting webinars on basic project management principals. The intent of the technical assistance was to aid the States’ management of their grant project to stay within scope, schedule and budget.

Of particular note is the role of software vendors. Within the 20 grantees, 14 used software vendors to implement their interventions. The role of the vendors varied depending on the grantee. Three vendors were used by multiple grantees. Five contracted with the same company to customize an off-the-shelf AR module for each State. Five additional grantees also had some overlap in vendors used (three used one, two used another). Other outside vendors were used but were not found to be duplicative among the State agencies involved in this study.

Exhibit 7: Vendor Types, by Grantee



## Planning and Implementation of ART Grant Projects

The SAs, LEAs, and Administrative Reviewers identified successes and challenges in planning and implementing their ART grants. Perceived successes included improvements to the review process and to the quality of reviews. To achieve these successes, grantees overcame challenges to managing and implementing their grants within budget, timing and staffing constraints, and challenges related to designing and deploying new technology systems. Grantees also shared whether they plan to apply for another grant in the future, and they reported some lessons learned for future efforts.

### Successes

#### Improvements to the Administrative Review Process

Most of the grantees reported that the efforts funded through their ART grant led to improvements in their AR process. Specifically, many of the grantees described their post-grant AR process as *more streamlined, more concise, simpler, or faster* than their processes in place prior to implementing the new AR systems and receiving their ART grants. One grantee estimated a time savings of 85% when producing summaries of review results previously.

Besides saving time, many grantees also described their new AR system as more *accurate, cleaned up, organized, and of much better quality*. In particular, grantees reported the improvements to the AR process as giving them more flexibility, especially when it came to the ability to add data throughout the year and update data “on the fly” when corrections were needed. That is, having a streamlined process and more accurate data allowed grantees to monitor and track across multiple programs and to pull data that could identify a multitude of issues. For example, one grantee described implementing a new report that identifies anomalies that could indicate a data entry issue on the LEA level that needs correction, outside of the formal review process.

#### State Director

Discussing the impact of the project on the administrative review process

“[Local staff] can look at everything as the review progresses, as opposed to waiting until the very end and then you get a paper copy at some point. There’s a dashboard so you can see what’s complete. There’s an off-site and an on-site portion and they complete the off-site, so our consultants know when that’s done. I mean, it just really helps the communication with the review process, it streamlines that.”

#### State Director

Talking about positive results of the new MIS funded through the ART Grant

“I think again, having those visual checklists has made it much easier for me to keep track of where I am and so, I think there’s much less risk of me accidentally missing something, by getting something turned in [when] I’m supposed to or [not] missing a deadline.”

#### Improved Quality of Administrative Reviews

Besides increasing flexibility, improvements to the AR process also yielded what grantees perceived as successes in *improving the quality of the reviews*. Grantees identified improvements in *communication between the SA and LEAs* as a sometimes unexpected benefit of organizing and streamlining policies, procedures, and data collection related to the ARs. For example, some grantees reported the new system made it easier for reviewers and LEAs to understand what was expected of them and to document progress throughout the review. One grantee remarked on one particular aspect of its new system—visual checklists—as having improved communication in this way. Another reported that ART-funded training helped to improve communication between the SA and LEAs because LEAs

felt more supported, whereas the previous process, in its focus on the audit sections, sometimes led to adversarial relationships.

**Expanded Access to Training and Technical Assistance**

Grantees also reported successes in expanding access to training. Some grantees reported that the time savings and more accurate and timely data let their reviewers devote more of their time to providing in-depth technical assistance and training on the particular issues identified in the course of a review. Additionally, grantees perceived that online training modules led to more knowledgeable Child Nutrition staff. Specifically, grantees cited the ability of staff to access training 24/7 and from remote locations as a major contributor to their increased professional development and mastery of policies and procedures.

**State Director**  
*When asked what was most helpful about the new training initiative*

“The accessibility 24/7, being able to send the staff on their merry way and say, ‘Do this and get back to me’ rather than me having to physically do it, training them on it.”

**Challenges**

Grantees identified a range of challenges<sup>1</sup> that arose during the planning and implementation of their ART grants. Broadly, the four most commonly cited challenges had to do with staffing, project management, rollout of new AR requirements, and technology.

**Staffing**

More than half of grantees pointed to challenges in meeting project goals and timelines due to lack of staff availability. Some grantees with small teams, or staff who managed several projects at once, reported the amount and/or complexity of the work was overwhelming.

Grantees also reported staff turnover as an issue, at both the SA and LEA level. Employee turnover often made it difficult for grantees to keep up with training new staff (both in the program requirements and in using the new technology). One State saw a 25% staff turnover rate at the LEA level, reporting the turnover, and the need to train new LEA staff, interrupted the grantee’s progress on its ART project. Another State reported its high turnover rate at SA and LEA levels resulted in a general lack of institutional knowledge that made it especially difficult to test new systems to ensure they met the project’s needs.

At least two grantees reported that their new systems built with grant funds are not being used to their full potential because their staff do not have the time to load required information and configure the systems.

**Project Management**

Some grantees reported high turnover in the project manager role—one grantee had at least four project managers over its ART grant period—stalling progress on the project. High staff turnover with some grantees made it challenging to maintain institutional knowledge. One grantee reported its project manager did not know the program well enough to effectively manage the project. Two grantees discussed a need for a formal project management plan, to help ensure a smoother transition when staff turned over and “alleviate some of the stops and starts.”

**SA Director**  
*In response to implementing new training program*

“For anybody wanting to hire a project manager, just from what I’ve seen, you need to have a person hired that has both [project management and people] skills.”

<sup>1</sup> Individual grantee challenges are highlighted in the Grantee Profiles (see Appendix A).

At least five grantees reported that their project manager lacked communication skills, which strained relationships among the project team members or between the project team and partners. Two grantees specifically mentioned the challenge of facilitating communication between program staff and technology staff. Both grantees expressed the need for a project manager who understood the program and could effectively communicate the needs of the program to partners, programmers, and IT staff.

Aside from issues with project managers, several grantees reported challenges with planning for and prioritizing the sometimes competing requirements of the grant project with other work. For example, several grantees highlighted how difficult it was to move forward with developing new systems for the grant when they were still awaiting or receiving guidance from USDA on new program guidelines. Such programmatic demands required staff and resources to be pulled away from ongoing ART grant efforts, and that led to some confusion with what activities had yet to be completed. Grantees expressed the need for a dedicated project manager with experience managing a federal grant and could handle tasks like building and tracking timelines and budgets, and fulfilling reporting requirements. Preferably, this would be someone other than a program director who is also juggling the technical implementation of the intervention and program office management.

Hiring and procurement processes presented another challenge for effective project management. One grantee reported it took nearly seven months to finish hiring key project staff, which led to significant delays at the beginning of the grant period. Other grantees reported delays related to the multiple layers of review required for procurement (especially for contracting with software vendors) and issues drafting security plans for IT projects, which they had not anticipated before the ART project began. At least two grantees reported that a lengthy and complex procurement process (within their own State administrations) was why they needed grant extensions.

Four grantees reported that FNS' technical assistance came too late and created more work for them. At least two grantees suggested it might have benefited them more to have received training or technical assistance prior to applying for the grant, or at the grant planning stage. Assistance earlier in the process might have helped them to better understand the grant's project management requirements and possibly set up a more formal, more effective project plan at the onset. At least one grantee reported that by the time it received assistance, the assistance felt like added burden due to micromanagement and requirements that overwhelmed them.

Despite inclusion in the Request for Application for the grants, several grantees reported they were not aware that various aspects of project administration were allowable costs (e.g., travel for required FNS meetings and staff salaries) until after the grant had closed.

Other grantees were unfamiliar with grant administration requirements such as monthly progress reporting and annual FNS-required reports. This made project management more challenging, as they experienced that learning curve concurrent with implementing their intervention.

**Rollout of New AR Requirements**

As noted above, during the CN ART grant period USDA switched from Coordinated Review Efforts (CREs) to Administrative Reviews (ARs). Many grantees reported challenges as a result of the new, more detailed AR requirements from FNS. The Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 created a new AR process, which did not replace the CREs until School Year 2013-14, well after the start of many of the ART grants (ART grants begun in 2009). About one third of grantees reported USDA's policy changes during the grant period delayed or otherwise adversely affected implementation of their grant projects, and noted staff would have benefited from additional guidance

**State Director**  
*Discussing lingering challenges to implementation*

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**“States need to have changes that are going to be occurring to the review tool well ahead of the implementation phase of the program year, in order to get their tools up to date.”**

about the new requirements. Additionally grantees reported challenges stemming from staff not fully understanding the functionality needed to address the new AR requirements.

**Technology**

Most of the grantees’ ART grant projects included a technology component, with some projects making a major shift from paper-based to electronic processes. In the course of implementing new systems, grantees found LEAs varied in their degrees of computer literacy and use. Seven grantees reported that in addition to training on their new systems, they had to provide basic computer skills training, from turning on a computer and using a mouse, to creating a secure password, to setting up Internet access. At least two grantees reported a challenge setting up and maintaining access levels for LEA staff who would be using the computers and high rates of staff turnover demanded frequent updates and changes to the security framework.

Besides issues of computer literacy, several grantees reported challenges related to data systems and infrastructure. Several grantees had issues getting their new systems to interface and work with their existing systems, including their financial systems, direct certification systems, local systems, and point-of-sale systems at the LEA level.

At least five grantees reported that one of their greatest challenges was working with software vendors to get the right balance of standardization and customization. That is, the grantees reported that their

**State Director**  
Talking about working with their software vendor

“I think the vendor went on the assumption that we were going to go with the way that they did it for the first State that they worked in, and that wasn’t what we wanted to do.”

understanding at the onset of the grant project was that vendors would start with off-the-shelf systems and then provide minor tweaks to make the systems work in their States. Instead, grantees found that their needs and requirements led to vendors making many more modifications than anticipated. This sometimes caused a breakdown in grantees’ relationships with vendors. A few grantees also reported difficulty in getting vendors to respond. In particular, at least five grantees reported that their IT vendors were working multiple projects at once and were unable to provide dedicated staff or sufficient time to

**State Director**  
Discussing challenges with their vendor

“There were points where our vendor, without saying a word to us, just stopped working on our project for months at a time.”

keep the grantees’ projects on schedule. For most of the grantees that reported this as an issue, it seemed they learned of their vendor’s shortcomings *after* the contract was signed. One grantee reported that customization led to a higher-than-anticipated cost for updating and maintaining the system<sup>2</sup>.

Customization aside, even when a new USDA regulation or policy requires multiple grantees to make the same change (e.g., update a nondiscrimination notice) and those grantees share a single vendor, each grantee still pays the full cost of updating the code needed to implement the change within the parameters of its unique system.

**Program Specialist**  
Noting that states using the same vendor sometimes have different versions of program letters

“You would think that if they would do an update, they would send the update out to all of their users.”

<sup>2</sup> Additional funding sources used are highlighted in the Grantee Profiles (see Appendix A).

*Timing of Challenges*

Grantees reported challenges throughout the planning, implementation, and maintenance phases of their ART projects. In general, early challenges centered on project management, procurement, hiring, and competing demands for staff availability. Technology and vendor challenges tended to linger throughout the project. Later in project timelines, staff turnover became a greater challenge due to the loss of institutional and project knowledge.

*Overcoming Challenges*

Grantees used a number of methods to overcome challenges faced during their grant projects. One grantee reported that developing training, funded by the ART grant, helped it overcome the challenge of onboarding new staff when there was turnover. Another approach to staff turnover is to build in some redundancy. One grantee reported it helped to have two project managers, so when one left the project, there was still someone who knew what was going on.

In dealing with challenges related to project management, grantees pointed to a combination of effective communication and monitoring/accountability. For example, two grantees reported conducting group calls that involved multiple stakeholders in order to get their projects back on track after a delay or problem (rather than multiple one-on-one meetings among different members of the team). Three more grantees reported the usefulness of holding regular check-in meetings and other accountability measures (such as demanding satisfaction with IT system changes prior to payment) in getting or keeping their projects moving forward.

In dealing with technology challenges, grantees also reported maintaining communication and holding people accountable as useful. Five grantees also pointed to the importance of training—both in frequency (holding more trainings) and in access (bringing training to those who cannot come to a central location, or providing it online).

*Lessons Learned*

Several grantees reported they would consider applying for or had received another ART grant or a Child Nutrition Technology Innovation Grant (TIG). About half of those considering potential grant applications, were leaning towards the TIG because they needed to fund improvements to their whole system (across multiple nutrition programs), and ART only funds system improvements directly tied to the school meal programs. Four of those grantees reported that the next time around, they would hire a project manager or make a project management plan mandatory. In response to IT and vendor challenges, one grantee reported it would involve its IT team at the beginning of the project. Another grantee reported it would include specific system and business rule requirements in the procurement process, rather than after a vendor was selected.

One grantee reported it wished it had factored in IT staff billable hours that could be charged to the grant. At least two grantees reported they had not realized until later in their projects they could ask for an extension, rather than having to return unused funds.

**State Director**  
*When asked about lessons learned*

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“One of the major lessons learned from my perspective is that pre-planning stage and doing your research, talking to the other states and not just focusing on the system, but what are the time commitments, the costs? What were the unexpected challenges setting up? What about maintaining IT with the user ID and the security and all that work that we have to go through to add a new sponsor. And then on the end of it, after it’s installed, what kind of work or funding goes into that maintenance?”

Regarding implementing a technology project, several grantees reported they had underestimated how extensive, lengthy, and cost-intensive testing would be. At least two grantees reported they had not factored in how expensive maintenance costs would be for a vendor to continually update the system once it was in place.

One grantee recommended doing research ahead of time, asking other grantees specific questions about their experiences with vendors, about the costs, challenges, and maintenance.

## Findings Regarding the Effects of ART Grant Projects

Grantees set out to use ART grant funds to make improvements in their programs in a number of areas. Some grantees identified effects of their interventions on specific objectives or goals, and others alluded to unexpected results in areas that were more difficult to measure. For example, grantees reported online training led to greater transparency in the AR process and provided clearer expectations and better communication between the State reviewers and the LEAs. Other, more measureable findings, are discussed below.

### *Changes to AR Process (Including Data Reporting/Collecting)*

Grantees noted their AR reports were more accurate, which improved the quality and speed of their AR processes. Those improvements led to consolidated data that provided more detail for every level of the review—State, LEA and Administrative Reviewer.

### *Administrative Error Rates*

Overall, 11 grantees reported their ART grant projects reduced error rates, whereas seven said there were too many variables to comment on the impact on error rates. Grantees specifically mentioned having better controls in place and more accurate nutrient analysis contributed to the reductions. No grantees reported that administrative error rates increased.

### *Administrative Costs*

Overall, six grantees reported their ART grant projects reduced administrative costs, by reducing paperwork and the time and effort required to conduct the AR. Three grantees reported their costs increased, including costs for more training over time, added costs for maintenance and updates to new systems, and increased staff time spent on ARs. Six grantees reported no perceived impact on administrative costs.

### *Direct Certification*

Improvements to direct certification were reported among the greatest successes of the ART grants. Grantees highlighted how much easier it is to identify eligible families, and how much more secure that process is. One grantee specifically mentioned that better direct certification allows the State to confirm eligibility for families more quickly.

### *Other School Nutrition Programs*

Grantees acknowledged that funds from the ART grants were restricted to efforts targeted to the school meal programs, but some grantees reported other Child Nutrition Programs had benefited from system-wide improvements, increased eligibility matching, and training. One grantee mentioned the crossover benefits for foundational skills such as leadership, communication, and team building that came about through the ART grant for staff who work across multiple programs. Another grantee mentioned the benefits of having built-in data entry checks, which improved the quality of data entry and eligibility screening for students and families across multiple programs.

### *Staff Burden*

Following implementation of their ART projects, 14 grantees reported staff spend less time on the AR process. Several grantees mentioned the time savings is partly due to a new system with centralized data entry, which reduces the time of both submission and review. One grantee mentioned data entry is more convenient and less disruptive to the regular work schedule for staff.

**State Director**  
Reporting feedback  
on the new system

“Some of the comments were ‘This is the first Labor Day weekend that I didn’t have to come in and work all weekend and have my staff put in overtime’ because the system saved them that much time with processing applications.”

## Post-Grant Activities/Efforts

### Sustainability

For the most part, grantees planned to continue the initiatives they developed under their ART grants.

Many reported they rely heavily on State Administrative Expense (SAE) funds, their own in-house operating budgets, or in-kind resources to maintain and update their IT systems, training modules, and other activities developed under the ART grant (Exhibit 8). For example, several grantees use SAE funds for annual maintenance agreements with software vendors (i.e., annual software license fees).

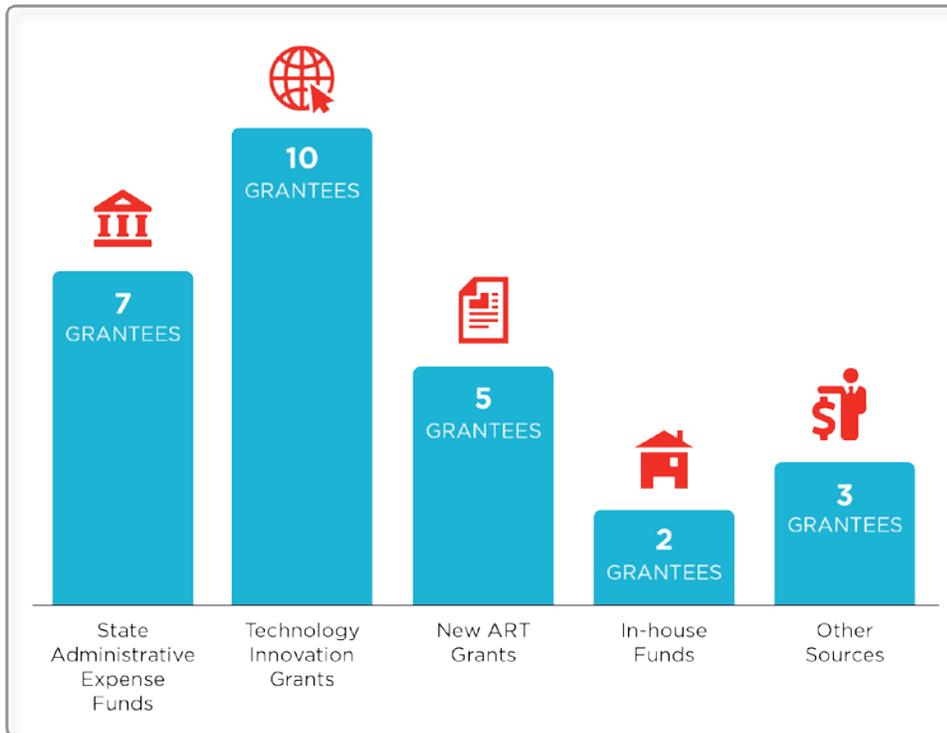
Grantees also relied on, or were applying for, other FNS funding streams to maintain and enhance their activities. As described in the previous section, at least half had received or were considering applying for TIGs. One grantee, for example, applied for a TIG and then issued a request for proposals for software vendors to make changes to its system that would require additional technical assistance and planning. Its contract award is contingent upon the State receiving TIG funds.

Grantees also supplemented SAE funds with operating and State technology funding to support annual maintenance of their purchased AR system. One grantee reported relying on in-kind support from a university to continue hosting its web server.

**State Director**  
*Discussing changes since the grant implementation*

“Since the ART grant, we have [developed] an entirely different type of training system. The training system we have now [includes] several online courses. We also still do face-to-face, of course, and we still [do] regional [training].”

**Exhibit 8: Potential Post-ART Grant Funding**



Note: Total does not add to 20 because grantees reported considering multiple funding sources to sustain their initiatives.

Sustaining ART grant initiatives has not been without challenges. One grantee reported not realizing it would need to maintain the system developed under the grant and had not set aside resources for doing so. Another grantee reported key IT staff left the State, and nobody else knew the programming code for its system.

At least one grantee discontinued some of the training developed under its ART grant, reporting it was too expensive to replicate statewide. It had been beneficial for the LEAs that participated during the grant period, but it was not feasible to expand the foundational skills workshops statewide. Another grantee reported it would be challenging for it to find resources to support staff time to apply for new grants.

### ***Expansion and Modification, Including Updates***

Several grantees continued to enhance and expand activities originally funded by the ART grants. For example, one grantee is planning to add a function that allows LEAs to enter their corrective actions within the online review tool. Other expansions included developing additional training modules and system-generated reports.

One grantee is considering expanding its new system to incorporate other Child Nutrition Programs administered by the SA. Another grantee reported investigating advancements made by other grantees for solutions that might more comprehensively address its short-term needs and adapt to its longer-term needs.

#### **State Director**

*Discussing funding sources to support the project after the grant ended*

“Any time we have a system update, the regulations in School Lunch continue to change and get adjusted ever since the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, so the only way that we’re able to afford modifying and updating the system to address those changing requirements is to request SAE reallocated funds, so we’ve done that a handful of times.”

## Considerations for FNS

Grantees reported many challenges and lessons learned based on their experiences planning for and implementing initiatives funded by the CN ART grants. Based on these experiences, FNS may want to consider the following when funding future ART grants:

- **If possible, avoid implementing major policy changes during the grant period.** Many grantees reported challenges related to rollout of new AR requirements during the grant period. Allowing sites adequate time to develop and implement new policies and regulations, including guidance to grant applicants, prior to grant award will eliminate later confusion among grantees and help ensure their interventions are fully compliant with FNS requirements.
- **Provide clear grant administration guidance.** FNS should ensure grantees are aware of various aspects of grant administration, including allowable costs and reporting requirements. FNS provides training to ART grantees on required reports and grant administration, however, several of the interviewees were new to grant administration and were unclear regarding what were allowable costs and how often FNS expected progress reports and in-person meetings/conferences. The trainings for the grantees may not be clear or may need to be done more frequently due to State staff turnover.
- **Provide technical assistance related to IT procurement.** Grantees may not have experience procuring IT services. Grantees not familiar with sourcing and scoping out specific work requirements for IT systems would benefit from early guidance on the following:
  - costs related to design and ongoing maintenance;
  - drafting systems specifications and other technical requirements; and
  - setting realistic schedules for design, implementation, and testing prior to selecting software vendors or working with in-house IT staff.
- **Help grantees share information with one another and leverage their collective buying power.** Designing and implementing new systems is expensive and time-consuming. FNS could facilitate information sharing across grantees, allowing them to benefit from one another's developments and advancements in implementing similar systems. Some grantees recommended that FNS create a single AR tool, rather than having grantees develop their own systems. Another option would be for FNS to negotiate with software vendors on behalf of the grantees to leverage their purchasing power for systems development.
- **Expand the scope of ART grants beyond the school meal programs.** Grantees and LEAs manage multiple Child Nutrition Programs, including the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program, and it is not efficient nor cost-effective for them to develop initiatives for single programs. Expanding the scope of the ART grant to multiple programs will allow grantees to upgrade their entire systems with its funds.
- **Customize the role of the FNS technical assistance contractor to grantees' specific needs.** Some grantees appreciated the technical assistance support, whereas others found it diverted their efforts and implementing their interventions. FNS should encourage its contractor to assess each grantee's individual needs and tailor its support accordingly and as soon as possible in the grant's cycle.

### SA Director

*Talking about things they would do differently*

“Everybody uses different software developers and has different web collecting data tools ... but it just seems like there was a lot of money spent on this. If they would have developed one tool that everybody used, that might have been a simpler fix to the whole process.”

## Appendix A. Grantee Profiles

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The following appendix includes detailed profiles for each grantee. Each profile presents an overview of the grantee's project(s) along with highlights related to planning and implementation, successes and challenges, and lessons learned. The information provided is drawn from both the extant data and qualitative interviews.



# ALABAMA



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2009	Grant End Year: 2013
Purpose: Reducing errors and implementing trainings	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Alabama ART	Vendor: Outside, for-profit training provider
Grant Funds Awarded: \$494,769	Grant Funds Returned: \$217,491

Alabama received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant in FY 2009 to improve its technology systems, particularly related to its administrative review (AR) and verification processes. Its goal was to improve the IT systems to reduce errors. With the improvements, Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff are able to use the verification summary tool to randomly select which households should be verified and to confirm the number of verifications staff need to collect and process, which was not possible prior to the ART grant. Additionally, parts of the AR process have been automated, requiring significantly fewer paper-and-pencil processes, thus reducing errors. The State director estimated that grant activities led to a 25-40% reduction in the error rate.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation Updates
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training LEA administrative staff on application certification, verification, meal counting, and meal claiming procedures in order to reduce errors and increase the maximum meals claimed.</li> <li>• Technology improvements to address administrative errors including the development of a new system to identify and monitor error-prone sites and computerization of verification submission.</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Though the interviewees confirmed the goals and objectives were not changed from those stated in the application, the interviews focused mostly on the technology improvements, including the verification summary report and the automation of the AR auditing process.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

## Highlights

Alabama applied for an ART grant in 2009 to implement new online training modules, improve the AR system, and simplify the verification process. Activities funded through the ART grant achieved the following:

- Nine online training modules were created to focus on meal counting and claiming, error rate reduction, and administrative reviews.
- The State moved its administrative reviews from a paper-and-pencil process onto a newly implemented software system.

- The new verification tool tells LEAs how many applications need to be reviewed for verification and how many have already been verified, tracks the verification progress, reduces error rates, and works with existing point-of-sale software.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

At the State level, an education specialist who was involved with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was primarily responsible for managing the grant application. School Food Authorities were not directly involved in grant planning or application, though their feedback was solicited to inform what would make the AR process more seamless for them. After the grant was awarded, the SA involved administrators from each of its four sections (Child and Adult Care, NSLP, Food Distribution, and Audit) in grant management. Though the project manager left the team in the middle of the project, the State's IT person was able to provide continuity throughout the grant period.

#### **Funding**

The State returned a significant portion (44%) of the ART funds at the end of the grant period. This return was attributed to an overestimation of the budget expenditures, lack of knowledge regarding what were allowable grant costs, and that the majority of staff time was not charged to the project (e.g. billable hours for internal IT staff were not charged to the grant).

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$494,769.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Creation of online trainings, an audit tool, and verification summary report.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expenses were used to sustain grant activities past the grant end date.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$217,491.

### *Successes*

The grant activities were successful overall, as they effectively reduced administrative costs and error rates. The verification tool, which randomly selects households to be verified and provides relevant information to LEA staff, has been particularly helpful to LEAs and is still in use.

- **Administrative Costs:** This intervention saved administrative costs, mostly through staff time. Once LEAs learned the new system, the process was faster for them. The audit manager spent 50% less time (estimated) on verification processing following the rollout of the new system.
- **Error Rates:** The grant activities successfully lowered the number of administrative errors in meal counting and claiming. There are fewer errors found at the LEA level during the administrative reviews; a 25-40% reduction in error rate was estimated.
- **Data Systems:** The verification system developed through the ART grant works well and is still in use. Additionally, an AR tool was created to select districts to participate in the reviews and collect data on error rates.

### *Challenges*

Though the goals of the project were achieved, there were challenges, including staffing and misunderstanding grant requirements.

- **Project Management:** Project coordination strategies were inconsistent due to staff turnover at the SA. The lack of consistency in oversight from the beginning to the end of the project created some disorganization and lack of continuity/progress in grant activities. Additionally, State staff reported it would have been helpful to have an IT person who was dedicated to working on Child Nutrition projects, instead of spreading time across projects.
- **Staff Turnover:** During the time the new AR/verification systems were being implemented, there was turnover among Child Nutrition directors at the LEAs. This particularly affected the smaller school districts, as the Child Nutrition director was often the only person familiar with the program or the submitted data.
- **Buy-in from State Staff:** It was difficult at times to get buy-in from State staff. Interviewed staff reported the lack of project leadership continuity may have contributed to the issue.
- **Understanding Grant Requirements:** Staff at the State level were not fully aware of USDA's policies and procedures or what costs were allowable within grant funding. For example, the initial budget did not account for travel expenses to attend grantee meetings in Washington, DC.

### *Lessons Learned*

After completing this ART grant project, State staff realized having a dedicated project manager is imperative for organization and communication. The ART project led to a better understanding of future grant requirements and the flexibility that exists to change the scope of work and project deadlines.



### Overview

Grant Start Year: 2012	Grant End Year: 2015
Purpose: Technology improvements to address admin errors through the use of targeted monitoring and increased training	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Alaska ART	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,058,915.00	Grant Funds Returned: \$3,751.98

Alaska chose an intervention strategy to address administrative errors through the use of targeted monitoring and increased training. Specifically, the Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant was used to design a software solution to improve program integrity in the administration of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). The State purchased and customized software. The software solution automated systems to gather data and provide real-time monitoring and benchmarking. These functions were previously completed manually. The new system identifies errors and provides specific corrective action. The State is able to systematically and consistently measure the impact and success of the corrective action taken.

### Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce application errors.</li> <li>• Improve Integrity of Benefit Issuance Document.</li> <li>• Improve menu compliance.</li> <li>• Production record compliance.</li> <li>• Improve coordinated review efforts (CRE).</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals 1-4 remained the same</li> <li>• Goal 5 changed to “improve administrative review tools,” consistent with FNS’s change from CRE to AR.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### Highlights

The SA was particularly interested in developing a system and the processes to work with schools experiencing significant problems, particularly the most error-prone schools. The software intervention was selected as a means for the SA to support smaller districts lacking the infrastructure and resources to afford automated systems. Additionally, the system implemented needed to allow the SA to provide support from its “home base” because travel in Alaska is expensive and takes significant time. The ART grant-funded activities achieved the following:

- Eligibility errors have decreased significantly.

- The direct certification rate has improved (94% or higher), and the direct certification process is completed through the new system. This is particularly noteworthy as it eliminated the time to send individual, encrypted emails for each student, and the SA has been able to add direct certification of foster children and migrant children. The State is also able to operationalize the Food Distribution Program for Indian Reservation (FDPIR) children with the new system.
- Staff and travel costs have decreased. Applications are entered at the local level and reviewed and approved at the SA level (in Juneau).
- LEAs are able to see immediate technical assistance from SA staff.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

Alaska contracted with a local IT company as the project manager (with approval from the overall State Administration). The contracted project manager worked through issues with negotiating IT security plans between the State and the new software vendor. The project manager also oversaw the project implementation, made decisions about the “look and feel” of the online program, and coordinated technical assistance as needed.

#### **Funding**

Alaska was awarded \$1,058,915 to complete its 2012 ART grant, and used 99% of the total award. State Administrative Expense (SAE) funding was used to cover staff time. One no-cost extension was granted due to delays encountered with negotiating acceptable security plans between the State and the software vendor; working with the internal IT department for a mutually acceptable “look and feel” to the new online system; and working through the State system to finalize procurements with the contracted project manager and the software vendor.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,058,915.00.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** IT software, hardware such as dedicated servers and scanners, and a contract for an external project manager.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** SAE funds were used for internal staffing costs, which were not included in the ART grant budget.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$3,751.98.

### *Successes*

The grant achieved the goals of streamlining and automating the administrative review process, improving the application and claiming processes, and improving menu and production record compliance.

- **Administrative Costs:** The amount of staff time and travel costs required for administrative processes has significantly decreased. Most of the AR process formerly done in person may now be monitored by SA staff off-site.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** After the initial implementation year (where error rates were at 45%), the State began seeing rates significantly reduced in the second and third years.
- **Training:** The new system allows SA staff to conduct real-time training and technical assistance with LEAs. For example, SA staff are able to walk through a menu planning module (on-screen) and assist the LEA with completing the task.
- **Data Systems:** All school districts in Alaska use the new system.

- **Direct Certification:** Though not an original goal of the grant, the State has increased direct certification to 94-96% over the last couple of years, and 100% of the LEAs use the new online system for direct certification.
- **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP):** The decreased error rates allowed a number of schools to qualify for CEP. The SA is thrilled with this unanticipated benefit of the grant project intervention.

### *Challenges*

A no-cost extension was required due to unanticipated delays with procurement processes, the need for mutually acceptable IT security plans, and the State IT department’s other requirements.

- **Administrative Costs:** The SA did not account for the ongoing, annual cost of the software license.
- **Data Systems:** The SA found testing the new system to be the most time-consuming and frustrating part of implementing the new software. The lack of a dedicated IT team further complicated the process.
- **Adapting Implementation to AR:** The State struggled to adjust its implementation plans to the new AR process, since the original plans were written to align with the Coordinated Review Effort. Due to this challenge and technical issues with data systems discussed above, as of March 2019 the software vendor’s module for the AR was not yet completed, but the State is able to use the software vendors system for other aspects of program implementation. AR staff continues to use spreadsheets to conduct reviews.
- **Internal IT Administration:** Limited IT staffing puts larger demands on SA staff to conduct their own testing and review. Also, the State IT department required that the “look and feel” of the new system resemble that of other State programs.
- **Procurement Process:** The mandates with the State of Alaska regarding procurement processes increased the time it took to purchase the software, hardware, and project management resources needed to successfully implement the interventions.

### *Lessons Learned*

Applying for an ART planning grant, before attempting to implement a new technology through an ART implementation grant, would have helped the SA better understand what it would need in a new system to resolve the challenges it faced. It also would have assisted with implementing the new system more efficiently and effectively.

The SA would contract out testing of future technology solutions. Relatedly, AR staff said it would have been helpful to draw on the experience that other states had with implementation of similar systems. Alaska might have been able to avoid some of the technical issues with rolling out new systems if it could have taken advantage of knowledge from other states.



# CALIFORNIA



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2010	Grant End Year: 2012
Purpose: Creating and delivering training materials	Extension(s): No
Project Name: School Meal Program Integrity (SMPI) Training	Vendor(s): University or Community College training developer
Grant Funds Awarded: \$500,000	Grant Funds Returned: \$159,942.09

In 2009, California received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to train school nutrition professionals in error prone agencies on how to administer high-quality nutrition programs in compliance with federal regulations on meal claiming, menu patterns, and nutrition standard requirements. The Nutrition Services Division (NSD) targeted agencies using Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP) to help them transition to the new Food-Based Menu Planning (FBMP) requirements.

To accomplish this goal, the State developed School Meal Program Integrity (SMPI) training materials for food service professionals. A training developer was contracted to implement and create SMPI materials including a one-day FBMP course (*Successful Menu Planning: Transitioning to Current USDA Nutrition Standards*) and a companion train-the-trainer course, which included information on effective teaching strategies and classroom management. The grant also funded the creation and dissemination of five web-based trainings, which covered topics to assist agencies in decreasing administrative errors and improving compliance with School Nutrition Program (SNP) regulations. Lastly, the training developer created self-assessment tools for menu planning and meal counting. It also conducted an evaluation of all the grant activities, resulting in some modifications and improvements based on feedback from participants and trainers. As a result, the State Agency (SA) is able to provide easily accessible and comprehensive training materials to Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop School Meal Program Integrity (SMPI) training materials focused on ensuring that meals claimed for reimbursement contain meal elements (e.g. food components, menu items, portion sizes) and meet nutrition standards consistent with USDA requirements for Food-Based Menu Planning.</li> <li>Utilize a cadre of mentor instructors, with experience and expertise in meeting the USDA meal requirements, to provide the delivery of the SMPI training materials to the targeted at-risk school district directors, managers, and front-line personnel.</li> <li>Utilize Web-based or other technology to increase number of at-risk sponsors receiving training and instruction.</li> <li>Provide self-assessment tools to assist at-risk agencies in</li> </ul>	<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The State adjusted its goals after the grant was awarded (with approval from USDA) to focus on the FBMP course and webinars (developed in partnership with training developer), rather than produce two different courses (one for FBMP and another for Nutrient Standard Menu Planning), due to changes in USDA regulations (which required FBMP).</li> <li>Also the SA did not end up pursuing a partnership with the software developer to create the college course <i>Menu Management for Child Nutrition Programs</i>. California met its remaining goals of implementing a variety of training materials that used web-based technology, self-</li> </ul>

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p>monitoring their continuous improvement in meeting all requirements for meal claiming and improving compliance with nutrition standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure consistency among CDE staff conducting administrative reviews.</li> <li>• Provide ongoing oversight and evaluation of the effectiveness of the ART grant in decreasing administrative errors relating to meal claiming and nutrition standard requirements.</li> <li>• Develop a college-level course on <i>Menu Management for Child Nutrition Programs</i>.</li> </ul>	<p>assessment tools, and an evaluation of grant activities.</p>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### Highlights

California’s 2010 ART grant funded the implementation of multiple trainings for food service professionals aimed at improving compliance with federal regulations on meal claiming, menu patterns, and nutrition standard requirements. The activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- Taught a two-day train-the-trainer course on March 28-29, 2012, with a total of 23 participants.
- Offered the SMPI course *Successful Menu Planning: Transitioning to Current USDA Nutrition Standards* for at-risk agencies, and provided a companion Instructor Guide, course manual, and pre- and post-tests. From April 17, 2012, through September 13, 2012, some 301 participants attended the training.
- Developed and presented five webinars in 2012 that targeted the areas of meal counting, offer versus serve, salad bars, menu production records, and requirements for transporting meals. The number of attendees ranged from 147 to 237, and the information was later posted online.
- Developed self-assessment tools for menu planning, designed to assist in evaluating menus for compliance with meal patterns, as well as other features of menu designs.
- Conducted evaluations of all the grant activities, all of which received positive reviews along with suggestions on improvement that were incorporated into the final curriculum.

### Planning and Implementation

#### Management

Existing staff at the SA managed the budget, timeline, and progress of the ART grant. The SA contracted and worked closely with one of its existing partners to develop and implement all of the SMPI materials. In the original contract, a second training developer was also contracted to develop and teach a three-semester unit course for on-site school nutrition managers, an additional certification program for child nutrition managers, and obtain college approval to adopt the class into its curriculum and teach it for one semester. However, these activities were not realized. Initial delays and complications in the contract review process led to changes to the scope of the final project.

#### Funding

In 2010, California was awarded a \$500,000 ART grant to create training materials and presentations to deliver to the staff at at-risk schools throughout the State. To complete these activities, the State used 68% of the funds that it was awarded, returning \$159,942.09.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$500,000.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Creation and dissemination of a one-day FBMP course, a two-day train-the-trainer course, five web-based trainings or webinars, two self-assessment tools for menu planning and meal counting, and an evaluation of the grant activities.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense Funds.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$159,942.09.

## Successes

The grant achieved its goal of developing and disseminating training and technical assistance to help food service professionals in high-risk LEAs. With the ART grant, the State contracted with a training developer to create materials, conduct training, and present webinars on a variety of topics that presented challenges for LEAs.

- **Error Rates in Administrative Processing:** LEAs expressed that the online webinars and tools helped staff easily access information about meal planning, procurement, compliance, and direct certification. The accessibility of trainings then helped decrease administrative errors because staff were better prepared for activities such as procurement reviews.
- **Training and Professional Standards:**
  - With the assistance of this grant, at-risk LEAs received more detailed in-depth one-day training on the new lunch menu pattern than the California Department of Education (CDE) would have been able to provide otherwise. At-risk LEAs were identified as those that were using NSMP, those with new directors, and agencies with findings in prior Coordinated Review Efforts.
  - All LEAs (including at-risk agencies and those not identified as at-risk) were able to attend the webinars. Webinar materials and handouts were then posted on the training developer's university website for future use by food service professionals.
  - The menu planning self-assessment tool became part of the yearly CDE-required online training module for menu planning.
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** Approximately half of the attendees at the *Successful Menu Planning: Transitioning to Current USDA Nutrition Standards* courses were using NSMP prior to July 1, 2012. These eight food service directors in particular had no knowledge of how to determine the contribution to the meal pattern for recipes and purchased products. These trainings were very beneficial to these agencies to implement the FBMP standards.
- **Administrative Time:** LEAs noted that the training helped staff gather information and be more aware of what is needed for the administrative review. They noted that the training materials allowed everyone to acquire the same knowledge base. This saved administrative time because it allowed staff to avoid additional research on the administrative review process. SAs also explained that the trainings helped alleviate the administrative burden of staff turnover at the food director level because it helped the review/training process run more smoothly.
- **Improved Management Relationship:** SA staff reported that when they provide effective training such as the SMPI program, LEAs feel better supported and are therefore more open to the SA during reviews, rather than having an adversarial relationship.

## Challenges

- **Administrative Costs:** LEAs communicated that even though the training tools made information more readily available and provided a road map for the administrative review, they did not believe that the training reduced the amount of work required for staff.
- **IT Challenges:** The SA expressed that the State does not have a department-level learning management system, making it difficult to shift trainings to web formats. The State also had challenges ensuring materials met California's 508 Accessibility Standards (the State IT department disagreed that some of the materials from USDA met the standard). Also, the training developer experienced technical difficulties during the first two webinars, but offered the remaining webinars live, with no additional problems.
- **Sustainability:** The SA and LEAs mentioned some challenges related to keeping the training curriculum up-to-date. In particular, the LEAs expressed challenges in applying their training when their vendors don't use the same system, or if vendors are in a different state and are not up-to-date on California policies. The SA mentioned it has been a challenge to keep up with changing technology, and to keep all of the training materials in compliance with California's latest accessibility standards, which are sometimes higher than national standards.
- **Vendor Challenges:** The SA continues to value its relationship with community college partners, and stressed the importance of allowing a lot of time and flexibility to account for some of the typical restraints (i.e., tight budgets, sparse staffing, and limited resources) common to community colleges and might lead to unexpected changes in timeline or ability to fulfill grant requirements.

## Lessons Learned

Through the ART grant, California learned that providing web-based and accessible training materials is invaluable. The online materials can now reach a large number of participants in remote areas. Additionally, LEA staff and the SA noted that having access to training materials at a later time was helpful. The webinars, webinar handouts, and participant training manual are now accessible online for training new food service professionals and other staff at districts who are unable to attend in-person training. These training materials are also available to staff in other states and are flexible to be modified or developed into additional materials.

Other lessons included the importance of engaging Child Nutrition directors as trainers. They were seen as excellent trainers and inspirations to peers. The participants appreciated the information provided by current or recently retired food service directors, including examples of their experiences.



### Overview

Grant Start Year: 2014	Grant End Year: 2017
Purpose: Developing a new technology system to improve the error rate and the direct certification rate	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: CNP Statewide System	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,700,000	Grant Funds Returned: \$53,482.61

In 2014, Guam received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to improve its Child Nutrition Program (CNP) operations. Guam used the grant funding to move from a manual process to a technology-driven system, CNP Statewide System, which allowed the State Agency (SA) to better assess and monitor School Food Authorities’ (SFA) compliance with certification, verification, meal counting, and claiming and to allow for the establishment of performance benchmarks in financial management and meal planning. With these updates, the SA enhanced its ability to identify, review, oversee, and train high-risk SFAs in application processing and certification, verification, and meal counting. As a result, the SA was able to reduce error rates, improve communication with SFAs, and increase overall efficiency with the new CNP Statewide System.

### Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customize an off-the-shelf software to manage the CNP program. The system will improve the ability to use student, school, and financial data; help the SA reach the 90% direct certification benchmark; and improve the point of sale (POS) interface.</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application to implementation phase. Guam met these goals by implementing the CNP Statewide System, decreasing error rates, and increasing direct certification rates.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA and Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### Highlights

Guam’s 2014 ART grant funded the implementation of a customized technology-driven system to manage its CNP. The activities supported by the ART grant achieved the following:

- Centralized all information needed for meal applications based on categorical and income eligibility.
- Facilitated better monitoring and communication between SA and LEA staff.
- Improved efficiency by reducing calculation errors.
- Led to more accurate and efficient matching of student data (including matching with siblings) to meet direct certification benchmarks.

## Planning and Implementation

### Management

Staff from Guam's SA and LEAs were involved with the 2014 ART grant project. The senior State program officer and the superintendent decided to apply for the grant with the help of LEAs that helped gather information for the application, including information on what types of challenges they were experiencing. The State program officer oversaw all the grant activities and administrative reviews. Additionally, the State financial officer, who was also a State program officer, managed the financial monitoring of the grant accounts and supported grant activities.

### Funding

In 2014, Guam was awarded an ART grant for \$1,700,000. It used 97% of the allocated funds. The majority of ART funding was spent on vendor contracts. The grant also covered additional costs including travel, personnel, and supplies; in particular, the SA program officer's labor costs were funded by the grant. No other supplementary funding sources were used as a part of this project.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,700,000.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Development and implementation of the CNP Statewide System, travel costs, supplies, and labor costs for State program officer.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** None.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$53,482.61.

## Successes

The grant successfully achieved its goal of transitioning from a manual to an automated process by developing a software solution to manage the CNP operations in Guam. Additionally, the development of the new CNP Statewide System helped the SA achieve its objectives of decreasing verification and certification errors.

- **Administrative Costs:** The ART grant reduced the amount of time staff spent on the administrative reviews. Additionally, LEA staff noted that the new system's automatic calculations reduced staff time on related tasks.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** LEA and SA staff described decreased error rates in terms of meal claims and calculation errors due to the CNP Statewide System's automation of mealtime reports.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** LEAs reported that the vendor was quick to respond to any issues, and the SA provided readily available support to staff.
- **Data Systems:** The automation and centralization of program data helped the SA review ongoing applications, streamline administrative reviews, and improve the efficiency of audits. Additionally, the improved transfer and review of data facilitated better communication between LEAs and the SA, making it easier for the SA to address questions during the administrative review.
- **Improved Direct Certification Process:** SA staff saw an improvement in direct certification within a year of hiring the vendor. They reported that the system's improved matching algorithm led to an additional 2,000-3,000 matches and more potential matches including siblings. This greatly enhanced the previous system, which required that SA staff manually match children with similar names for approximately 30,000 students.

- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** LEAs explained that the new system helped with program management because the centralization of data made it easier for staff to review program metrics.

### *Challenges*

The Guam ART grant successfully improved efficiency and reduced errors in the Child Nutrition and Food Distribution programs; there were still challenges in implementing the CNP Statewide System. For example, one no-cost extension was granted due to delays with the procurement process and delays in finalizing data-sharing agreements for student data. Another significant challenge included a series of technical issues involved with developing and testing the system.

- **Administrative Delays:** The procurement process took longer than the SA expected and was delayed by about a year, necessitating a no-cost extension. Migrating data from military schools (overseen by the U.S. Department of Defense) to the statewide system also required a separate Memo of Understanding that took time to finalize, leading to overall delays in launching the CNP Statewide System.
- **Data Systems:** Issues arose in the development and testing phases of implementation, including challenges with data migration as the SA pilot tested various modules. In response to the delays, the SA scheduled additional calls with the vendor and performed live tests to help address immediate issues. Other noted technical issues included challenges with connection speeds in Guam. For instance, uploading large documents sometimes took up to a day and a half.

### *Lessons Learned*

Many of the State's challenges came from unexpected administrative and IT delays. The SA staff also described the need to leverage expertise from the various stakeholders (i.e., IT, LEAs, etc.) in the early phase of development, otherwise expectations can be unrealistic. Another lesson the SA learned is to be more specific about the types and sources of student data that are needed to make the system useful, and to allow sufficient time for MOUs to be developed before data can be shared.



# HAWAII



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2011	Grant End Year: 2013
Purpose: Creation of a new Child Nutrition IT system	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Hawaii Child Nutrition Program System (HCNP_S); Administrative Review (AR) Tool	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor; Outside, for-profit project planning consultant
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,499,385	Grant Funds Returned: \$46,613.71

In 2011, Hawaii received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to develop and implement a comprehensive Child Nutrition (CN) technology system called the Hawaii Child Nutrition Program System (HCNP\_S). The system aims to recognize at-risk schools through real-time data analysis and therefore ensure that corrective action as a result of administrative review (AR) of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) is being implemented and maintained. HCNP\_S allowed the State to reduce administrative errors and to improve program integrity and administrative accuracy.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project goal is to develop and implement a comprehensive CN technology system to enable the SA to recognize “at risk” schools through real-time data analysis to ensure that corrective action resulting from CRE reviews, FFVP, and SFSP reviews are being implemented and maintained to reduce administrative errors, improve program integrity, and administrative accuracy.</li> <li>The technology system will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have the ability to modify forms, reports, interfaces, and outputs as necessary, to improve program integrity and administrative accuracy especially targeted to schools/districts that are error prone.</li> <li>Collect benchmarking data to be used by the SA to establish a CN database to compare “at-risk” schools with peer schools.</li> <li>Provide appropriate training for sponsors/schools, SFAs, and organizations to prevent repeated administrative errors.</li> <li>Provide SA-level monitoring capability through proposed accountability software.</li> <li>Identify problems and take corrective action before they become long-term behaviors.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application to implementation phase. Hawaii met these goals by implementing a comprehensive Child Nutrition technology system.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### *Highlights*

Hawaii's 2011 ART grant funded the implementation of a State-hosted centralized Child Nutrition technology system and online administrative review tool. The technology system that the ART grant funded, HCNP\_S, was able to achieve the following:

- Modify forms, reports, interfaces, and outputs as necessary to improve program integrity and administrative accuracy especially targeted to schools and districts that are error prone.
- Collect benchmarking data to be used by the SA to establish a CN database to compare at-risk schools with peer schools.
- Identify problems and take corrective action before they become long-term behaviors.
- Provide appropriate training for sponsors/schools, School Food Authorities (SFAs), and organizations to prevent repeated administrative errors.
- Provide SA-level monitoring capability through accountability software.
- Improve the efficiency and accuracy of and reduce errors in the counting and claiming process.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### Management

A number of staff from Hawaii's SA, a software and vendor, and a project planning consultant, were involved with the 2011 ART grant project. The SA director decided to apply for the grant and managed the application process with the help of the Hawaii Department of Education's Office of Information Technology (OTIS). The initial ART grant coordinator oversaw all management of the grant project including monitoring tasks, schedules, and budgets for the first two years. Then there was a change in staffing, and a different grant coordinator monitored the project for the last year. Additionally, a project planning consultant was hired to help with project planning of the software vendor, which built the HCNP\_S system and AR tool.

#### Funding

In 2011, Hawaii was awarded \$1,499,385 to create a new Child Nutrition technology system and online administrative review tool. The State used 97% of the allocated funds, and requested and received no-cost extensions to finish the project.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,499,385.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Development of a CN technology system, training for LEAs on the new system, an ART grant coordinator, and part-time staff from the University of Hawaii.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense funds were used to fund staff salaries and to expand the new system to include the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$46,613.71.
- ❖

## Successes

- **Improved Efficiency:** LEA and SA staff reported that HCNP\_S helped save time and improve internal efficiency. The system allows the SA to retrieve LEA data automatically, replacing a paper-based system and drastically reducing the duration of administrative reviews. Specifically, prior to HCNP\_S, approvals for site-based attendance forms had to be signed in person. With HCNP\_S, the forms are uploaded to the system and can be approved electronically. Additionally, the State and SA staff reported significant time saved in the claims process. HCNP\_S keeps real-time data that is continuously available to sponsors and to the SA. As a result, fiscal SA staff reduced their time spent on monitoring claims by 70-75%.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** The centralization of the system allows the SA to monitor training and to address corrective actions. The SA can update annual mandatory trainings based on the previous year's common findings and new requirements. The SA also offered training on the new AR tool, including hands-on system-user training, technical assistance, and outreach strategies to educate SFAs on the effective and efficient use of HCNP\_S.
- **Administration Costs:** Aside from the savings realized by a significant reduction in staff time, administrative costs were also reduced by switching from a paper to a digital system. As an example, after HCNP\_S implementation, claims could be corrected online rather than in person, which cut mailing costs for SFAs and the SA.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** The State reported that HCNP\_S has led to a reduction in error rates. There are some built-in checks to detect common errors. Additionally, the new system led to a reduction in the number of over-claims and returned claims, and it eliminated late claims. SA staff noted that whereas prior to HCNP\_S it was easy to forget to follow up on the collection of certain forms, the new system streamlined the requirements and made it much easier to keep track of everything needed to complete the administrative review on time. The SA mentioned the process for addressing and correcting errors was greatly improved; whereas data entry errors prior to the HCNP\_S required multiple rounds of mailing corrected paper forms back and forth between the SFA and the SA, the new system made it possible to fix the data in real time.
- **Data Systems:** The automation, centralized organization, and streamlined administrative review system allowed Hawaii to collect timely and accurate source data. Some of the benefits include ease of data retrieval during audits and automatically transferring eligibility determinations into student records.
- **Improved Direct Certification:** SA staff explained that the HCNP\_S improved direct certification match percentages because the State-level and SFA-level files are now matched in the HCNP\_S.

## Challenges

- **Vendor Challenges:** The SA noted that the primary issue it faced during implementation of the grant was working with the software vendor. It was the SA's impression that the vendor had taken on too many contracts and could not keep up with the project timeline. Additionally, the vendor was working with a number of states and attempted to modify a common platform for each state. Some of the initial challenges SFAs experienced in using the AR tool had to do with questions in the system that were not relevant for Hawaii.
- **IT Challenges:** SA staff described multiple technical issues that arose with the system. These issues were addressed and often identified by SFA staff who had the most contact with the system. As an example, during the first year of implementation, LEA staff described that the system would automatically log out and not save data entered. This feature was fixed during the second year, but it was a significant challenge for staff during initial implementation.
- **Buy-in with SFAs:** SFAs initially were hesitant to switch from a paper-based to an online system, which created lack of buy-in. The State restated its expectation that in future the online AR tool

would exclusively be used for administrative reviews. It then focused on providing technical assistance to staff who needed help transitioning to the new system and AR process.

### *Lessons Learned*

Many of the State's challenges stemmed from communication issues with the vendor, initial bugs in the system, and a steep learning curve for SFA staff. To address these issues, SA staff recommended, when working with vendors, maintain a positive line of communication and focus on troubleshooting important and larger issues. Additionally, the SA found that providing consistent training and technical assistance to SFAs helps increase buy-in during the early stages of implementation. This sentiment was also expressed by SFA staff, who thought highly of the SA's efforts to provide training and ease the transition from a paper to an online system. SFA staff also noted how easy it was to contact a point-person at the State office, and expressed satisfaction for the available technical assistance.



# IDAHO



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2010	Grant End Year: 2012
Purpose: LEA trainings to reduce Coordinated Review Effort error findings	Extension(s): No
Project Name: Idaho ART	Vendor: [None, developed in-house]
Grant Funds Awarded: \$251,655.00	Grant Funds Returned: \$0

Idaho’s 2010-2012 Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant focused on improving National School Lunch Program (NSLP) integrity at the Local Educational Agency (LEA) by providing training to school food service directors, as measured by reduced error findings from the Administrative Review (AR) process. The ART grant enabled the State Agency (SA) to provide targeted training and technical support to school districts and schools to help improve the accountability of local programs and to educate NSLP sponsors on updated USDA nutrition standards and regulations. The training and technical assistance (TA) provided by the grant to the LEAs focused on the ABCs of USDA NSLP rules and regulations, implementing the new NSLP standards, School Meal Initiative (SMI) nutrient analysis, and transitioning to a Food-Based Menu Planning method.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve NSLP integrity at school district level through regional trainings and one-on-one TA.</li> <li>Improve NSLP integrity at charter schools through annual training and one-on-one TA.</li> <li>Supplementary training to Residential Child Care Institutions where SFAs obtain information that they need to avoid becoming error prone in the future.</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives for this project did not change from the application to the implementation phase.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

## Highlights

Idaho’s 2010 grant was focused on providing regional training on the new National School Meal Program menu requirements and providing additional one-on-one administrative and SMI TA and oversight to error-prone school districts, charter schools, and Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCI).

- The SA held webinars, regional trainings, train-the-trainer sessions, and one-on one trainings on a variety of topics for local school nutrition directors and supervisors to prepare them to implement the new USDA standards and menu planning methods.
- Regional training and webinars improved job performance of LEA staff. According to the SA, many of the directors and supervisors found that staff training on USDA NSLP rules and regulations

resulted in improved proficiency and skill, reducing their administrative error rates (though error rate reduction was not formally evaluated).

- RCCI training prevalence increased as a result of the ART grant funding. During the first year of the grant, there was only one RCCI training location and 62% of the RCCIs attended. The second year, regional RCCI training was offered, resulting in an 83% attendance rate. Within the two years of the grant, 96% of all RCCIs were trained. This resulted in an improvement during the CREs.
- The State conducted 102 one-on-one TA visits during the life of the grant.
- Idaho has made all of the manuals, training materials, and other resources publicly available online to any state.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

Idaho's state nutrition director led the grant application process with the help of a grant coordinator. After the grant was awarded, the grant implementation process was managed by the coordinator with the support of the director and other SA staff. The Idaho SA was a small office, employing 15 people during the life of the grant, and all staff supported the grant activities. The grant coordinator was responsible for viewing USDA webinars and keeping abreast of all the guidance sent to the SA office on the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act to ensure the dissemination of current and accurate information to the State's sponsors.

#### **Funding**

Idaho was awarded a \$251,655 grant, and used 100% of the allocated funds. The majority of ART funding was spent on conducting LEA trainings. State Administrative Expenses (SAE) funds were used for SA staff time spent on ART grant activities. No other supplementary funding sources were used as a part of this project.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$251,655.00.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** The 2010-2012 ART grant funded regional and one-on-one training for local school nutrition directors and supervisors, to prepare them to implement the new USDA standards and menu planning methods. The major grant activities included preparing training materials for regional, one-on-one, and online training and TA; developing an Idaho School Food Service Manual; and delivering the training and TA.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** SAE funds were used for SA staff time spent on ART grant activities.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$0.

### *Successes*

Providing trainings via webinar and regional, in-person meetings increased access for the rural, at-risk directors and supervisors targeted by the grant and resulted in increased attendance.

- **Training and Professional Standards:** The State received positive feedback from LEAs and charter schools on the ART trainings. The grant provided resources that enabled the SA to create more robust training and TA support, in addition to mandated trainings, that Idaho would not have been able to offer otherwise. The SA observed that TA instills confidence in the directors and supervisors who need assistance. The benefits of the grant activities were highly visible in regards to RCCIs. Staff turnover in RCCIs is high, which can lead to high error rates because transfer of information is not

good. The SA noted that continued annual RCCI-focused training is needed to maintain the improvements.

- **Webinar Format:** More than 50 school districts signed up for any given webinar. All webinars are archived online and available for LEAs as needed. Webinars were organized into segments by topic/issue, allowing LEA staff to easily access targeted information, using their time efficiently. The SA noted that monthly webinars provide the ability to very quickly deliver the latest information on rules, regulations, and state guidance. Prior to the webinar implementation, the SA relied on a newsletter that took three months to plan, write, and distribute.
- **Regional/Rural Trainings:** Regional trainings provided the opportunity for increased numbers of rural at-risk directors and supervisors to attend.

### *Challenges*

Idaho reported few challenges in its reports and interviews. There was no measured decrease in administrative costs or error rates reported as a result of the training and TA provided by the State.

- **Administrative Costs:** The SA noted that no cost savings were observed as a result of the grant.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** The SA was not able to describe how the ART grant trainings affected error rates.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** The SA noted that because the 2010-2012 ART grant was concurrent with the USDA reauthorization, there were challenges related to changing regulations, which created confusion and necessitated some retraining. The State recalled an instance when the SA conducted a monthly webinar, and before the end of that day had received new guidance from the regional office.

### *Lessons Learned*

Idaho indicated that the trainings and one-on-one TA to LEAs were especially helpful for new LEA supervisors and supervisors with limited experience. Additionally, the SA noted that regional trainings and webinars were critical for increasing attendance at trainings, especially in rural states such as Idaho.



# INDIANA



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2011	Grant End Year: 2014
Purpose: Technology improvements to address administrative errors through the use of targeted monitoring, and increased training in error-prone LEAs	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Administrative Review Tool	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,017,920.00	Grant Funds Returned: \$45,901.65

In 2011, Indiana received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to develop a tool to automate the administrative review (AR) process in accordance with the revisions to the process detailed in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. The State designed the Administrative Review Tool to help School Food Authorities (SFAs) with data reporting and compliance problems, to identify fraudulent claiming patterns, and to automate both the review and corrective action processes. The Administrative Review Tool streamlines communication between State field specialists and SFAs by providing a platform through which field specialists can schedule on-site review dates and assign tasks to SFA staff before on-site review. It also generates automated findings reports after on-site reviews.

Prior to the changes implemented under the ART grant, the AR process was paper based and conducted primarily on-site. After on-site reviews, field specialists transferred their findings to an online system, answered remaining questions, and wrote final letters, which included corrective and fiscal actions. The old process took approximately a day to complete for each field specialist. The new system allows the SFAs to answer questions prior to on-site reviews. Field specialists use the Administrative Review Tool to enter information gathered during the AR, either on-site or once they return to their office. Reports are automatically generated based on findings. The tool tracks progress, turning green when questions are completed.

Additionally, Indiana used grant funding to train SFAs on the new Administrative Review Tool. During the in-person trainings, the software developers demonstrated how to use the tool to complete each step of the administrative review. Field specialists also provide refresher training at the beginning of the year for SFAs participating in ARs during the current year.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify SFA organizations with data reporting and compliance problems and potential fraudulent claiming patterns.</li> <li>Automate Coordinated Review Effort (became "Administrative Review" after award) and workflow tasks for the corrective action process.</li> <li>Leverage the existing CNPweb administrative application's capabilities and central Sponsor and Claims data repository.</li> <li>Improve SFA staff understanding of program operations and</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application to implementation phase.</li> </ul>

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
responsibilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve program reporting.</li> </ul>	

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### Highlights

Indiana’s 2011 ART grant was awarded to develop an automated tool for ARs, identify fraudulent claiming patterns, and automate workflow tasks for the corrective action process. The activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- The State developed an online Administrative Review Tool, which integrated the AR process into the existing CNPweb administrative systems central database. The automation streamlined workflow tasks and corrective action processes.
- The Administrative Review Tool allows access to SFA application data, site information, claimed meal counts, and claim payments.
- The State anticipates that the Administrative Review Tool will streamline the AR process, reduce errors, and improve the quality and timelines of reviews.
- The tool creates a single, organized platform for communication between State field staff and SFAs, simplifying the communication process and eliminating the need for continuous email communication between the State and SFAs.

### Planning and Implementation

#### Management

Over the course of this grant, Indiana’s project team included the SA director, a project specialist, a project coordinator, and a school monitoring coordinator. They worked with a team of developers from their software vendor to plan and implement this initiative.

#### Funding

Indiana was awarded \$1,017,920 to complete its 2011 ART grant, and it used 95% of the total award. The grant project was put on hold until FNS issued the final AR guidelines, allowed by a no-cost extension.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,017,920.00.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Funds were used to develop a new Administrative Review Tool that was integrated into the SA’s online database system.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense funds were used to fund additional components, such as Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program modules within the same platform.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$45,901.65.

### Successes

The grant achieved the goals of creating an automated tool for ARs built upon an existing platform and improving program reporting. The tool, in conjunction with new AR requirements, resulted in more thorough but less time-consuming audits.

- **Administrative Costs:** Though there has not been a significant change in State staff time spent on administrative review as a result of the Administrative Review Tool, it is difficult to disentangle any increased efficiency from the increased requirements related to FNS's new AR requirements. State staff spend less time on-site, which is less disruptive for SFAs. Post-visit activities have also been significantly reduced for State staff. SFA staff spend less time organizing their files after on-site reviews.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** Use of the Administrative Review Tool has resulted in more accurate reviews. Error rates have been reduced, as the tool accesses data from other systems, eliminating errors due to manual data entry. Embedded checks alert SFAs to correct or confirm items prior to the on-site review. With review data stored in the CNPweb database, the Indiana Department of Education can apply various analytical methods and tools to identify potential problem areas.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** State field staff have expedited the review process, thereby freeing up time to provide technical assistance to SFAs.
- **Data Systems:** The automation of the AR process using the Administrative Review Tool was successful in streamlining data collection, improving data quality.
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** Though the Administrative Review Tool is not intended to help with the local administration of school nutrition programs, it may help SFA staff understand the purpose of ongoing data collection.

### *Challenges*

Indiana experienced significant delays implementing the Administrative Review Tool while waiting for new AR guidelines from FNS.

- **Training and Professional Standards:** SFA training about the new AR process also addressed the Administrative Review Tool. However, SFA staff would benefit from additional training on the tool, including a visual step-by-step guide, particularly if training occurs well in advance of the AR.
- **Data Systems:** Varying degrees of technical skills among SFA staff affected comfort with the Administrative Review Tool. SFAs indicated additional response options are needed for some questions.
- **New Guidelines:** Indiana experienced delays in system development and implementation to address new AR guidelines received from FNS during the process.

### *Lessons Learned*

If Indiana were to apply for another grant, it would ensure the timeline accounted for the rollout of any new FNS policies and procedures and would allow more time for development of any online tools. The State noted it could have developed sections of the Administrative Review Tool that were not dependent on the new FNS forms while waiting for additional information from FNS. Budgeting for a full-time project manager would have been beneficial in keeping the plan on schedule and avoiding delays.



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2009	Grant End Year: 2015
Purpose: Update technology systems	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Iowa ART	Vendor: Outside, for-profit training provider; Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,700,000.00	Reported Grant Funds Returned: \$0

In 2009, Iowa received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to develop and implement an integrated process for accessing and reviewing Local Educational Agency (LEA) data; a web-based reference library; an integrated process for the State Agency (SA) to access and use financial data submitted by LEAs; and a USDA Foods Ordering System. Prior to the grant, many of the systems and tools used by the SA were outdated and did not allow the SA to directly interact with LEA data and systems. The new applications and tools allow SA staff to quickly identify potential issues and errors and address them effectively and efficiently.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative Oversight. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New tools/reports.</li> <li>○ Enhanced system functionality to monitor SFAs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reference Library and Tutorials. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Easily accessible and searchable repository of information for use by staff of SFAs participating in the NSLP/SBP.</li> <li>○ Develop 40 web-based tutorials.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Financial Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tools/reports to monitor SFAs for program viability.</li> <li>○ Support SA in providing TA for high-risk SFAs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Nutrient Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Monitor SMI data and SFA compliance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative Oversight. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New tools/reports.</li> <li>○ Enhanced system functionality to monitor SFAs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reference Library and Tutorials. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Easily accessible and searchable repository of information for use by staff of SFAs participating in the NSLP/SBP.</li> <li>○ Develop 40 web-based tutorials.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Financial Management. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tools/reports to monitor SFAs for program viability.</li> <li>○ Support SA in providing TA for high-risk SFAs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Iowa USDA Foods System. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Replace Commodities application with new USDA Foods System.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### Highlights

Iowa's 2009 ART grant was awarded so it could update its technology systems, design online training tutorials, improve its financial management and oversight, and implement a USDA Foods System. The activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- Sole-source procurement was used to implement a variety of new reports and business rules for the review and prevention of errors. Reports use verification collection data, which can be filtered for common errors and reviewed by the SA for any needed corrective action.
- A training provider was contracted to develop 17 web-based, interactive tutorials. Each tutorial contains five parts: (1) online tutorial content; (2) accompanying text document; (3) content quiz; (4) participant survey; and (5) completion certificate.
- The SA developed a comprehensive financial report generated from data uploaded from each district's accounting report, meal claims, and the Iowa USDA Foods System.
- The antiquated Commodities application was replaced with the new Iowa USDA Foods System application.

### Planning and Implementation

#### Management

The Iowa project experienced delays early in the implementation process due to staff turnover with its SA bureau chief and the original project manager, resulting in an approximately two-year delay. The original grant manager came onboard as a full-time project manager for the effort and oversaw the project schedule, budget, and implementation. The meal nutrient requirements were changed, so the SA requested to repurpose the money for Objective #4 "Nutrient Analysis" with "Iowa USDA Foods System." The project manager spearheaded all of the tasks for the grant and worked with contractors, consultants, or other SA staff (primarily a data analyst and a business analyst), as needed.

#### Funding

Iowa was awarded \$1,700,000 to complete its 2009 ART grant, and used 100% of the total award.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,700,000.00.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** A multitude of new reports were created, allowing SA consultants to quickly identify errors and contact LEAs for corrections. The web-based tutorials and reference library provide unlimited access to training to improve compliance with Special Milk Program (SMP) standards. The Comprehensive Financial Report allows LEAs to review and evaluate the management of SMP funds, specifically with USDA Foods System and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The real-time, comprehensive budget allows LEAs unlimited access to budget data, thereby reducing the risk of administrative error and increasing the use of USDA Foods System funds.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** To complete the USDA Foods System application, the SA used State Administrative Expense funds.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$0.

## Successes

The grant provided the SA with the opportunity to create new reporting systems, streamline a number of administrative and financial processes, create a comprehensive training tutorials and reference material portal, and implement an efficient and accessible USDA Foods System.

- **Administrative Oversight:** The design and implementation of new administrative tools and processes resulted in 5% or less incorrectly reported direct certification students and decreased the time needed to identify errors by half.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** More than 80% of the SMP staff met professional standards the year following the implementation of the training tutorials and reference library portal.
- **Financial Management:** The creation and implementation of the new financial report allows LEAs to enter data that then are integrated from the SA Certified Annual Report into the Comprehensive Financial Report (IowaCNP).
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** The Iowa USDA Foods Systems significantly reduces staff time. Prior to the system implementation, 586 hours of staff time were spent on tasks related to ordering, distribution, and tracking. The new system has reduced the staff time needed to 84 hours.

## Challenges

Iowa achieved the goals and objectives for the ART project; however, it required two no-cost extensions and it experienced the following challenges with the project:

- **Administration:** The most critical factor contributing to the challenges of the Iowa ART project was hiring a full-time project manager. Essentially no progress was made until a project manager was onboard.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** The tutorial design began without a full understanding of 508 compliance requirements. The SA had to work with the vendor to meet compliance standards. As a result, the task was delayed and cost significantly more than anticipated. Fewer than half of the originally proposed training tutorials were produced due to the oversight.
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** Several components of the Iowa USDA Foods System were implemented as part of the ART grant, but ultimately the SA used State Administrative Expense funding to complete the entire transition of the system for in-house application maintenance.

## Lessons Learned

Iowa chose to prioritize the tutorials and began designing those that were of highest need due to staff skill deficiencies. However, the highest priority topics tended to be the most complex, which increased the learning curve as the SA worked with the vendor on the design and tutorial content. The SA stated it would have been more efficient to have started with smaller, simpler tutorials so a common, mutually agreed upon design and approach could be identified.

It was important for the project manager to communicate early and often with the project team and vendors. Frequent and open communication promoted progress and addressed risks before they became issues. Informal communication was helpful with day-to-day tasks and keeping work groups updated and productive.

All procurement options were considered to select the most appropriate fit for the work. Tutorial development was a large project and required a team of experts to produce high-quality e-learning content. Rather than contract several individual consultants, a Request for Proposals for the project was prepared and the SA contracted with a media company. Doing so made oversight more efficient and reduced costs.



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2013	Grant End Year: 2017
Purpose: Technology improvements and LEA training to increase efficiency and decrease errors in AR process	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: KN-CLAIM v2	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,263,223.00	Grant Funds Returned: \$0

In 2013, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to replace its obsolete systems with an integrated online solution, including a fully automated e-review system for administrative reviews. The State was motivated to implement this new system because of a major security incident with its obsolete information and claiming system. In an effort to improve security across all Child Nutrition & Wellness programs, the grant-funded project (Kansas Nutrition–Claims and Information Management Version 2, or KN-CLAIM v2) integrated all programs’ claiming and logging into one updated system. The new system was developed to both industry and KSDE security standards, which included reauthorizing users, in an effort to reduce the probability of future security incidents.

Preceding the changes implemented under the ART grant, administrative review involved completing forms provided by USDA in spreadsheets and communicating with the Local Educational Agencies (LEA) via email before and after the on-site review. The new system is an e-review, and LEAs and State Child Nutrition consultants are able to access an online system to complete required forms. Some information is completed outside of the e-review and then uploaded by the LEAs for review by Child Nutrition consultants. The e-review generates a findings report and calculates fiscal action, reducing the labor burden for the Child Nutrition consultants following the on-site portion of the review.

To reduce the risk of administrative errors and improve the administration and integrity of school food service programs, the State created trainings on program requirements and professional standards. These include video tutorials that can be accessed by LEAs 24/7 to provide technical assistance, hands-on technology training, and an eight-week English as a Second Language (ESL) course for LEAs.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce the risk of administrative error by replacing the obsolete KN-CLAIM and CNP Logging systems with an integrated online solution.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a system that utilizes current technology and security protocols.</li> <li>Increase customer service and accuracy by simplifying data entry and reducing the number of times the same data is entered.</li> <li>Implement enhanced logging and reporting</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application to implementation phase.</li> </ul>

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p>capabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To implement comprehensive administrative review capabilities to identify at-risk LEAs and comply with the new administrative review process.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enhance reporting and monitoring capabilities to identify error-prone LEAs in real-time.</li> <li>○ Develop online functionality to support new requirements for administrative reviews.</li> <li>○ Empower LEAs to identify and reduce errors before data, claims, and/or information is submitted.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• To improve the integrity of school food service programs and administration, and to reduce administrative error through training and technical assistance.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improve counting and claiming accuracy.</li> <li>○ Provide training opportunities to develop basic computer literacy and technology skills.</li> <li>○ Offer a series of online training video tutorials.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

**Highlights**

Kansas’s 2013 ART grant enabled the SA to update and integrate its technology systems in a secure platform, streamline the administrative review process, and provide training to LEAs. The activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- Replaced the obsolete KN-CLAIM system and its Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) Logging system with an integrated online solution (KN-CLAIM v2).
- Implemented enhanced logging and reporting capabilities through creation of an e-review for the administrative review that:
  - Includes interactive communications between State Child Nutrition consultants and LEAs, reducing the number of emails exchanged between reviewers and LEAs.
  - Calculates fiscal action and findings reports, reducing State staff burden.
- Created online training modules that can be accessed 24/7 to provide assistance to LEAs that would be using KN-CLAIM outside of normal business hours.
- Offered an eight-week English as a Second Language class to decrease errors due to language proficiency.
- Documented business rules and created procedures for updating KN-CLAIM.

**Planning and Implementation**

**Management**

The grant was managed by two project managers, one from the Kansas Department of Education’s IT team and the other from the Child Nutrition & Wellness team. The Kansas Information Technology Office (KITO) oversaw the grant. The project managers sought input from the Child Nutrition & Wellness Advisory Council made up of LEAs.

**Funding**

Kansas was awarded \$1,263,223 to implement its 2013 ART grant, and used 100% of the total award. The majority of the ART grant was used to purchase a server to support the new system, to purchase mobile devices for Child Nutrition consultants to use while completing reviews in the field, and to fund

staff salaries. A significant portion of the grant was spent on the software vendor to support rewriting the claiming and logging system. Kansas supplemented the cost of grant activities with State Administrative Expense funds and a direct certification outstanding performance award.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,263,223.00.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** The majority of the funding went towards technical improvements to the State claiming and logging system, as well as integrating the new administrative review system with the existing system. Funds also supported salaries for the State child nutrition director, IT director and other IT support within the SA, and covered travels cost to attend mandatory USDA meetings. The SA also invested in a new server to support the administrative review system, as well as Windows 8 mobile devices that consultants use for the automated review. Funds were also used for training materials and indirect costs.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense funds were used to support staff time spent on program testing. Additionally, Kansas used a direct certification outstanding performance award to pay for unanticipated KITO fees.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$0.

### Successes

The grant was successful in streamlining the administrative review process and reducing the time spent by staff on completing the reviews. This was accomplished by updating the CNP logging system, and integrating it with an e-review for administrative reviews. The grant also successfully created eight online trainings and had more than 14,000 training registrations.

- **Administrative Costs:** The integrated review process saves an estimated eight hours per review. KN-CLAIM v2 also reduces burden for LEA staff, who can upload forms directly into the system and see the fiscal action as the review progresses. Administrative review summaries are automatically generated, saving the State 279 hours per program year.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** Though difficult to measure, the State noted that there has been a reduction in human error as a result of integrating the administrative review process into the online KN-CLAIM system.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** The State had more than 14,000 training registrations, and LEAs indicated that the trainings were effective. The State has developed eight online training modules and continues to develop more.
- **Data Systems:** The ART grant integrated all of the CNP reporting in one place, allowing LEAs to monitor multiple programs in one system. This information is easily shared with the superintendent or Board of Education.
- **Streamlined Reporting:** The system automates letters, corrections, and fiscal action calculations, reducing the time consultants spend on reviews (by eight hours per review).
- **Streamlined Communication between State and LEAs:** The project has resulted in improved communication and clarity. The dashboard, for example, allows LEAs to monitor their progress and communicate with State consultants throughout the process.
- **Transparency:** The State can analyze and pull data from the system and post on a public site.
- **Project Management:** Having two project managers, one representing Child Nutrition & Wellness and the other representing the Department of Education's IT team, allowed for successful implementation of grant activities. Each project manager took ownership of specific activities, and

having two individuals invested in the project timeline was helpful when the IT project manager left and a new one was hired.

### *Challenges*

The State and LEAs were pleased with the grant processes and the final product and had limited challenges throughout the implementation of the grant. The challenges revolved around contracting with a third-party vendor.

- **Vendor Challenges:** Because a limited number of vendors can build these systems, the State was competing with other States for the vendor's time and attention.
- **Project Management:** The vendor set an aggressive deliverables schedule that was difficult to maintain and therefore caused some delays that left LEAs waiting, in anticipation of the release.

### *Lessons Learned*

The challenges above highlight the need to set a realistic deliverables schedule, especially when working with a software vendor. Some of the delays were due to the desire to continue testing; however, the State noted that when implementing technology solutions, there will always be potential improvements. Therefore, it is important to set a release date and remain firm in going live on that date, if at all possible. After the grant award, the decision was made to produce the online trainings in-house. Though this reduced costs, the State found this process time-consuming and realized that timelines should be adjusted when making these decisions. Finally, the State learned that trainings should be conducted in computer labs with at least one Child Nutrition consultant present, to account for trainees' varying levels of computer literacy.

Kansas is interested in applying for other ART grants. However, it notes that it may be more beneficial to apply for a grant such as the Child Nutrition Technology Innovation Grant, which would allow it to use funding for all Child Nutrition Programs within the KN-CLAIM v2 system.



# MASSACHUSETTS



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2012 and 2014*	Grant End Year: 2014 (2012 Grant) and 2017 (2014 Grant)
Purpose: Expand the Massachusetts School Meals Accountability and Responsibility Training Tools (Mass SMARTTs) to enhance the administration and quality of school meals and minimize administrative errors	Extension(s): 2012: Yes ; 2014: No
Project Name: School Meals Accountability and Responsibility Training Tools: Making It Count and The Massachusetts Training, Evaluation, and Research Initiative (MassTERI)	Vendor/Partner: Outside, for-profit software vendor; University or Community College training developer
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,243,647.88 (2012) and \$1,495,840.00 (2014)	Grant Funds Returned: \$9,894.19 (2012) and \$4,220.80 (2014)

\* Massachusetts received three ART grants, in 2010, 2012, and 2014. This profile focuses on the 2012 and 2014 grants.

The primary goal of both the 2012 and 2014 Administrative Review and Training (ART) grants was to expand the Massachusetts School Meals Accountability and Responsibility Training Tools (SMARTTs) website to enhance the administration and quality of school meals by improving school nutrition personnel practices, thereby minimizing administrative errors. The State also developed technology and self-assessment tools to facilitate accurate monitoring and reporting and to improve tracking and analysis at site and district levels. The 2014 ART grant built and expanded the work completed during the 2012 ART grant.

Results from a previous Massachusetts grant project revealed the critical need to provide relevant, learner-directed education to school nutrition personnel at all levels to improve their skills and increase their confidence in using the technology needed to implement USDA requirements for meal quality and accountability. In response, the State used the 2012 and 2014 ART grants to enhance and expand SMARTTs and offer greater training opportunities to school nutrition personnel. First, Massachusetts enhanced collaboration among local and state agencies and organizations by expanding the SMARTTs advisory group membership to ensure it represented a diverse set of stakeholders and to improve the leadership competencies of school nutrition managers and directors. The advisory group pilot tested technology improvements and contributed to design and development of the SMARTTs modules. These Making It Count instructional modules provide interactive trainings and deliver user support to reduce administrative errors and improve the nutritional quality of school meals statewide. The modules focus on topics including nutrition standards, meal patterns, and meal benefit eligibility.

The grants also funded the MassTERI initiative, which provided foundation skills courses to school-level food services staff.

**Goals and Objectives**

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives – 2012 Grant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance the integrity and quality of school meals by improving personnel practices at all levels of school nutrition operations.</li> <li>• To substantially reduce administrative errors through the improvement of meal eligibility and reimbursement system interface to increase quality assurance of incoming LEA application and data reports.</li> <li>• Improve the personal and professional competencies of all school nutrition personnel to address the quality of meals served, the accuracy of the counting and claiming of meals, and eradicating errors.</li> </ul> <p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives – 2014 Grant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve nutritional quality of school meals through statewide compliance with the USDA meal patterns.</li> <li>• Modify Making It Count into useful group continuing education trainings.</li> <li>• Improve accurate and effective delivery of training and education to school nutrition personnel.</li> <li>• Educate school nutrition administrators on new School Food Agency Second Review of Applications.</li> <li>• Develop tools that allow: (1) State staff to analyze AR data and identify district-level problem areas requiring additional support; and (2) District staff to support themselves in identifying potential claim errors.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives – 2012 Grant</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

**Highlights**

Massachusetts used the 2012 and 2014 grants to fund three major initiatives: The Making It Count training module and website development, MassTERI skill-building workshops for local nutrition staff, and improved claim analysis reporting. The major accomplishments of Massachusetts’s 2012 and 2014 ART grants included the following:

- Development of the Making it Count videos and website to educate school nutrition personnel on a variety of subjects. Modules include training on meal pattern requirements, identifying reimbursable meals, menu planning food production records, portioning and serving meals, developing meal counting and point-of-sale systems, consolidation and reporting, making the FP9 count, and meal benefit issuance and reporting. This website is public and available to all States and districts across the United States.
- Development of analysis and reporting tools, which issue warnings and errors based on edit checks. This system allowed the SA to analyze data trends and provide better support to its LEAs.
- Train-the-trainer workshops designed to increase the number of qualified school nutrition trainers in Massachusetts to provide trainings that meet USDA’s professional standards.
- Establishment of a diverse advisory group (comprising large and small districts, urban and rural districts, and charter schools) that provided guidance on the SMARTTs design and development.
- Creation of MassTERI (Massachusetts Training and Evaluation Research Initiative) in collaboration with the University or Community College training developer. These skill-building workshops

provided staff with the context for understanding the State's procedures and policies. They also provided an opportunity for staff who may have never had a formal educational experience or professional development to participate in workshops such as introduction to computers, kitchen math, English as a Second Language, and communication to district-level food service staff. The State received a lot of positive testimonials from participants.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

The executive director at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) and the School Meals program coordinator were directly involved in preparing the grant applications. Many SA staff contributed to the content and script development for the Making It Count initiative. Massachusetts engaged a project coordinator to lead and manage grant activities and relied on a financial management supervisor for contract management support. Additionally, the SA benefitted from the SMARTTs Advisory Board members, who met several times each year to contribute to the project.

Massachusetts contracted with a training developer to develop and produce the Making It Count videos. The training developer subcontracted with a web designer and film producer to carry out the work. The SA explained that the State had a successful history of working with the training developer, which had proven itself able to execute high-quality products within budget and in a timely manner. So the State was able to minimize project risk by partnering with it again.

The SA also contracted with software vendor to update its administrative review software for claim analysis reports.

#### **Funding**

Massachusetts was awarded a \$1,243,647 grant in 2012 and used 99% of the allocated funds. It received a no-cost extension in 2012 to accommodate regulatory changes within these projects, to conduct an additional round of MassTERI Foundation Skills workshops, and to complete production of the Making It Count Breakfast Modules, with transition of the website into Spanish. Counting the extension, Massachusetts accomplished all grant objectives within the award period. In 2014, Massachusetts was awarded \$1,495,840 and used more than 99% of the allocated funds.

❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,243,647.88 (2012); \$1,495,840.00 (2014).

❖ **Activities Funded by the Grants:** The majority of the funding was used to create the Making It Count training modules and website, as well as the MassTERI training program through a subcontract with training developer. Massachusetts also subcontracted with software vendor for the development of claim analysis software module updates.

Specifically, the 2012 grant funded Advisory Group meetings, promotion of the Making It Count modules at national and statewide conferences and seminars, claim analysis software updates, data analysis for trends and meal claiming anomalies, merged claim analysis reports into the administrative review operational plan with ESE school lunch and review coordinators, MassTERI workshops and evaluations, and Making It Count module development with video and audio components and website. The 2014 grant funded the expansion of the Making It Count training modules. Massachusetts modified the website to be more user friendly as well as mobile and tablet accessible.

Additionally, the grant funded the development of a seven-part food production records/weights and measure module, the creation of self-study guides for each module, the addition of interactive site-based activities to complement online modules, integration of USDA Professional Standards requirements, and increased accessibility through a Spanish version of the website and closed captioning in Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Cantonese. The 2014 grant was also used to fund train-the-trainers workshops to increase the number of qualified school nutrition trainers in Massachusetts.

- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** No additional funding sources were used for the projects. The web server used for Mass SMARTTs is provided in kind by the training developer.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$9,894.19 (2012); \$4,220.80 (2014).

### Successes

- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** The claim analysis reports developed with the software vendor allow the SA to identify meal claiming anomalies, such as two schools with identical meal counts or large increases from one month to another for one particular meal. It notifies LEAs of errors and allows them to correct before submitting claims. It also allows the State to review all LEA actions in the system and contact a LEA regarding any irregular patterns in the data. The claim analysis reports help the SA identify districts that may need technical assistance regarding meal claiming and Community Eligibility Provision participation. The updated reports provide LEAs with more directed instruction on how to address the identified errors.
  - Additionally, the SA assigned the Making It Count modules as part of the corrective action process. Having a centralized and comprehensive set of training tools provides districts the resources to address and limit errors.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** With the update and new additions to the Making It Count website, Massachusetts is now able to offer greater training opportunities to school nutrition personnel across the United States. Statewide, there had been an increased demand for training surrounding production records and weights and measures. Though Massachusetts provides a production records training in-person once a year, the new seven-part online module will allow school nutrition personnel to receive this training anytime and anywhere there is internet access. Modules and interactive activities were also modified to be tablet and smart phone accessible so that the trainings can be completed on devices that many school nutrition personnel readily have available. The addition of self-study and group-study guides has also provided school nutrition directors and managers with the confidence to conduct trainings themselves to their staff. LEA respondents commented on the benefits of having a vetted training tool from the SA that reduced the time spent preparing for district trainings and allowed them to onboard new staff efficiently.
  - Although most Massachusetts school nutrition directors and managers are fully knowledgeable of the National School Lunch Program, many shared concern over their ability to teach their skills to their staff. Especially with the onset of USDA's professional standards, there was growing anxiety over providing effective and efficient training by those who have had no experience as a teacher. Through the development of the train-the-trainer workshop, Massachusetts has seen an increase in confidence and training hours provided by participants. Many of these participants, most of whom have never completed a presentation before, have since produced trainings and poster sessions within their schools and districts

and at Massachusetts and national SNA conferences to assist school nutrition personnel in meeting USDA's professional standard requirements.

- **Communication:** The SA employed a multi-pronged approach to advertising the Making It Count resource. LEAs noted that the SA successfully communicated the availability of the resource via email, conferences, and handouts featuring QR codes.

### *Challenges*

- **Competing Priorities:** The grant activities occurred on the same timeline that the SA was developing new administrative review processes and software (not funded with the ART grant), so Massachusetts experienced some difficulty prioritizing staff time and attention, given the multiple projects.
- **Film Production Challenges:** The SA experienced challenges related to the process of producing multiple instructional videos. Producing the scripts for each module required a lot of effort by SA staff to ensure that all of the information was accurate and clear. Additionally, filming in schools presented the challenge of obtaining student releases.

### *Lessons Learned*

Though the MassTERI project received positive feedback from participants, the SA learned that the endeavor was very expensive and not easy to replicate statewide. Once the grant period ended, the program was not sustainable.

The SA benefited from partnering with a local university. Not only did Massachusetts benefit from the expertise of the training developer and labor management workplace education program, but it also received assistance with data collection and reporting.



# MICHIGAN



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2013	Grant End Year: 2017
Purpose: Technology improvements to AR process	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Michigan Administrative Review System (MARS)	Vendor: [None, developed in-house]
Grant Funds Awarded: \$966,618	Grant Funds Returned: \$0

In 2013, Michigan received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to improve its technological infrastructure in order to increase the efficiency of data collection, reduce processing time, and reduce internal errors related to the administrative review (AR) process. The grant was also used to provide technical assistance and training to high-risk local educational agencies (LEA). The training included creating 36 online training modules and hosting regional trainings and targeted trainings for error-prone LEAs.

Prior to this intervention, Michigan’s Administrative Reviews were conducted manually, and all documents were exchanged by mail, email, or fax. The on-site review was done by hand, and analysts brought their handwritten notes back to State managers who would enter everything in a spreadsheet. Corrective action and findings reports were written on a carbon copy, which was given to LEAs on-site. LEAs had six months to mail or email responses back to the State. With the introduction of this new system, the Michigan Administrative Review System (MARS), all tracking and notification is done electronically. Using MARS, LEA staff download blank forms and upload completed forms. State analysts use tablets to access information in MARS during on-site reviews. Once reviews are complete, MARS creates findings packages.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve identification of high-risk/error-prone LEAs, and target them for training, technical assistance, follow-up, and other corrective action.</li> <li>Improve State of Michigan SNP technology to maximize efficiency in the areas of recordkeeping, reviews, tracking LEA activity, and training while maintaining a secure system.</li> <li>Utilize programmatic, review, analysis, and recordkeeping systems that will allow for information-sharing and real-time, fluid assessment of various measures including (1) number and status of high-risk/error-prone LEAs by subcategory; (2) success of corrective action; (3) training efforts; (4) technical assistance; (5) error rates in administrative review process; (6) time needed to complete and process reviews.</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application to the implementation phase.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### *Highlights*

Michigan's 2013 ART grant was awarded to update the State's technology systems and decrease processing time for data collection, individual reviews, and summary reports. In order to accomplish this, the State built the Child Nutrition Program component (MARS), of the Department of Education's Grant Electronic Monitoring System (GEMS), which was also being updated. Grant funds were also used to identify and train high-risk or error-prone LEAs. The activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- The State implemented an electronic, online monitoring system (MARS) allowing it to automate the AR process. MARS also allows the State to create real-time customized reports, track the status of corrective actions, and document technical assistance efforts.
- With the development of MARS, the State reduced time spent compiling data and completing reports, reduced processing time, enhanced error checks, and improved "cross-talk" between data sets.
- The State provided technical assistance to high-risk/error-prone LEAs through the development of 36 online training modules, as well as in-person regional and on-site trainings.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

The grant was implemented through the Office of Health and Nutrition Services. A project manager oversaw the effort, working with a consultant manager. A technological liaison and developers from the State Department of Technology Management and Budget built the system in-house.

#### **Funding**

Michigan was awarded \$966,618 to complete its 2013 ART grant, and used 100% of the total award. There were no other supplementary funds used during the grant period, 2013-2017, though the State did need to reallocate its awarded funds midway through the project from its original budget.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$966,618.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Funds were used for staffing, travel for regional error-prone trainings, technical assistance visits, supplies, attendance at the Child Nutrition Access and Accountability through Technology (CNAAT) conference, and indirect costs.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** Following the completion of the grant period, State Administrative Expense funds were used to sustain the new system.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$0.

### *Successes*

The grant achieved the goal of building out the Child Nutrition Program component of GEMS. The grant helped streamline and automate AR processes and increased efficiency of communication between the State and the LEAs.

- **Administrative Costs:** There has been a reduction in time spent on ARs by the State staff due to activities funded by the 2013 ART grant, allowing the State to provide more technical assistance to LEAs.

- **Training and Professional Standards:** The State developed 36 online training modules, which can be updated as policies change. SA staff refer LEAs to these modules during the corrective action process. From the State’s perspective, the identification of error trends helps with identifying needed training for the LEAs.
- **Data Systems:** The automation, organization, and streamlining of data collection through MARS led to better quality data. The new system helps LEAs prepare for AR components in advance of on-site visits, and it eliminates the amount of paper that the LEAs must prepare and share with the State.

### *Challenges*

The grant-funded interventions were effective at improving the AR process, primarily for the State. However, a no cost-extension was required due to staff turnover that caused delays in the implementation of the grant activities. Though the grant was used to develop online training modules, LEAs expressed a need for additional hands-on trainings on using GEMS/MARS.

- **Training and Professional Standards:** Though the training modules covered topics related to AR, LEAs indicated a desire for more hands-on training related to using the MARS system. Additionally, developing content for 36 online training modules was labor intensive.
- **Staff Turnover:** There was repeated project manager turnover and subsequent delays. This was further complicated by the lack of a project management contingency plan.
- **Data Systems:** Though costs were saved by using the State Department of Technology Management and Budget to build the system in-house, the project had to compete for the limited State resources (i.e., developers and other related staff). There are still components of the findings report that are not captured in MARS, and State staff have identified “work-arounds” for entering these findings.
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** Though not directly attributed to MARS, LEAs responsible for multiple districts indicated they spend a significant amount of time on AR-related activities during the review cycle. Additionally, LEAs indicated preparing and uploading materials into the system is time-consuming. As noted above, MARS is an effective repository for information at the State level. It is not, however, designed for LEA program operations or management.
- **Policy and Program Requirements:** The convergence of new AR policies and requirements and a new system was overwhelming for staff responsible for grant-related activities.

### *Lessons Learned*

MARS is an effective tool for the State to conduct ARs and identify error-prone LEAs in need of technical assistance, but it is intended to help LEAs manage their programs. Developing a strong project management plan would have helped minimize delays due to staff turnover. Establishing project staff competencies prior to contracting staff would help avoid delays in development. Input from internal and external stakeholders regarding the forms, training modules, and updates and enhancements to the online monitoring system ensured buy-in and ownership of MARS. Stakeholder feedback was key in facilitating changes that streamlined and created efficiencies in the AR process. Stakeholders began believing in and supporting MARS when the changes they recommended were designed and implemented.



# MISSOURI



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2011	Grant End Year: 2016
Purpose: Creating a new data system that works with pre-existing systems to produce reports on key performance indicators; developing and delivering e-learning modules	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Serving with Success (e-learning modules)	Vendor: Outside for-profit software vendor; University or Community College training developer
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,276,900, reduced to \$922,900	Grant Funds Returned: \$143,392.56

Missouri received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant in 2011 to develop and implement a centralized data system that could provide the State Agency (SA) a comprehensive analysis of Local Educational Agency (LEA) key performance indicators. The grant also let the State implement an e-learning system to enhance the ability to provide needed program training for LEAs and schools. Prior to the grant, the State did not have the ability to do benchmarking or electronically collate LEA reports.

The new centralized reporting system allows the SA to remotely monitor program performance of LEAs for more efficient and effective administrative reviews. The e-learning modules provide consistent training designed to prevent errors and support corrective actions across a broader range of LEAs.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a technology system with a central data warehouse that will compile the data from different systems and entities in real time into comprehensive reports.</li> <li>Implement electronic learning using a series of web-based, individualized learning modules.</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With approval from FNS, the SA dropped "real time" from the description of the data reports. There were no other changes to project goals from the grant application to the implementation phase.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

## Key Features

Missouri is a large state with limited resources. The ART grant provided a centralized reporting system and online training modules that enable the SA to conduct comprehensive administrative reviews of LEAs effectively and efficiently, even with the ongoing staffing and funding constraints. Activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- Developed 50 total reports, including four key performance indicators (KPIs), 26 administrative reports, six financial reports, and 14 compliance reports.
- Developed the ability to produce ad hoc reporting and application and claim information.

- Produced a series of 23 e-learning modules covering all topics contained within the administrative review.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), School Food Services provided oversight for the project. Two different groups at the State level made decisions relevant to the centralized reporting system component of the grant—the Missouri Office of Administration, Information Technology Services Division, and the DESE Office of Data System Management. Prior to the grant, the State acquired an administrative review module from a software vendor, the State’s existing web-based application vendor. Originally DESE planned to build the system in-house with support from a software vendor, but after the award, a Project Assessment Quotation resulted in a partnership with another software vendor, which ultimately built the reporting system. The training developer created e-learning modules.

#### **Funding**

FNS awarded Missouri an ART grant in 2011 for \$1,276,900. A grant adjustment in 2013, described in the challenges below, resulted in a reduction of funds by \$354,000. Of the revised amount of \$922,900.00, DESE used \$779,507.00 (84.5%) to create a centralized reporting system and e-learning modules, and returned the remaining funds.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,276,900.00, reduced to \$922,900 after award.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Central data warehouse and e-learning modules.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense funds covered staffing.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$143,392.56 (in addition to \$354,000 returned after award).

### *Successes*

The grant achieved the goals of creating a centralized reporting system for collating and organizing data relevant to the administrative review process and of developing e-learning modules that cover topics relevant to administrative reviews. Data from the reports has provided the ability to identify LEAs that are at risk for administrative errors, analyze trends, and track and review administrative review compliance. The e-learning modules provide Missouri-specific training in a central, easily accessible location. LEAs use the training to onboard new staff, refresh knowledge over time, and as a corrective action to address administrative errors.

- **Training and Professional Standards:** A series of 23 e-learning modules, called Serving with Success, is available on DESE’s website (<https://dese.mo.gov/financial-admin-services/food-nutrition-services/serving-success>). The training series covers a range of topics relevant to program performance and administrative reviews through the use of videos, photos of documents, and interviews with staff. There is an assessment quiz for each module.
- **Data Systems:** Missouri created a centralized reporting system that pulls data from existing systems and organizes them into key performance indicators by LEA. This allows the compliance staff at the SA to quickly identify error-prone LEAs and to notice trends that might require the State’s attention. The information provided through the reports allows the SA to prioritize more intensive training and support for at-risk LEAs, within the constraints of limited funding and staff. Overall, 50 reports were produced, along with the ability to produce ad hoc reports that pull from application and claim information.

## Challenges

Missouri encountered challenges with the involvement of multiple stakeholders and staffing (turnover), resulting in four no-cost extensions and a reduction in the original grant amount.

- **Multiple Stakeholders:** The State initially planned to develop an RFP for the centralized reporting system, but there were two agencies at the state level involved in that process and each had a different perspective on how best to move forward. The process shifted from developing an RFP, to developing the system in-house, to producing a Project Assessment Quotation for vendors on the existing State of Missouri contract. The initial delays and confusion over how to move forward resulted in a grant reduction and a one-year no-cost extension.
- **De-scoping the Grant:** Missouri de-scoped its contract to eliminate the development of an unnecessary technological feature: real-time reporting capabilities. That is, two years into the grant, the State realized that because LEAs submitted reports monthly, and the reports were processed using LEA data, there was no need to enable real-time reporting because “real time” would only ever have reflected monthly updates, not daily changes. Removal of “in real time” from the description of the data reports resulted in a grant reduction of about 30%. Ultimately, the reports were built off of data reported by the LEAs and provided on a monthly basis.
- **Staffing:** Managing the grant in-house placed a significant burden on SA staff, who maintained their regular job duties while also attending to project management, procurement, and the development of content for the reporting and training modules. Even with contracting out both components of the grant, the SA still had to spend an unanticipated amount of effort and involvement in order to provide guidance, feedback, testing, and review. This led to the second and third no-cost extensions.
- **Staff Turnover:** During the second phase of the grant, when the State focused on developing the e-learning modules, the project lost key staff who were providing oversight, which led to the fourth extension.

## Lessons Learned

Missouri addressed the challenges listed above to implement its ART grant project successfully. The process resulted in some lessons learned for future efforts. First, it is important to involve the relevant decision-makers early on and (particularly for efforts that involve IT) to identify what process will be used for procurement. Specifically, SAs should know at the time of grant application (or soon after grant award) whether the work can be handled in-house or a vendor is needed (and contracted by which procurement process).

Second, Missouri learned that a dedicated project manager is essential to keeping things moving. Having a detailed timeline for the project, along with regular progress updates and weekly check-in meetings with important stakeholders and participants, helps keep the project on track. It is also important to have people on the team who understand both IT and the program needs, who can translate and mediate discussions during check-in meetings.

Third, it is important to add sufficient time to the project timeline to account for staff turnover, long procurement processes, and multiple rounds of testing and review, especially if project staff will also be juggling other responsibilities.



# NEW HAMPSHIRE



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2011	Grant End Year: 2016
Purpose: <b>Web-based system and training</b>	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: <b>MyNHDOE System</b>	Vendor: [None, developed in-house]
Grant Funds Awarded: <b>\$1,409,532.85</b>	Reported Grant Funds Returned: <b>\$753,202.42</b>

New Hampshire received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant in 2011 to develop a web-based system for application and claiming and for conducting administrative reviews. The State also created online training modules and held a series of conferences to provide training on a variety of topics related to administrative review. The online training is also used as a tool for corrective action identified during administrative reviews.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an electronic web-based system that will identify at-risk and error-prone schools.</li> <li>Provide training to schools that have been identified as at-risk or error-prone by the new system, to build consistent Food Service operations management outcomes.</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application to implementation phase.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities

## Highlights

New Hampshire's 2011 ART grant was awarded so it could update its technology systems and provide training to schools identified as at risk. Activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- In-house development of a web-based system that includes application and claiming and administrative reviews.
- Development of a series of ART conferences that covered topics such as verification and free and reduced applications.
- Development of online training comprising 10 modules that can be used as part of corrective action during administrative reviews.

## Planning and Implementation

### Management

Project oversight was provided by the administrator of the New Hampshire Office of Nutrition. The administrator worked with a dedicated project manager. The New Hampshire Department of Information Technology built the system in-house.

### Funding

The State of New Hampshire was awarded \$1,409,532.85 through an ART grant in 2011. The grant funds were used to develop an in-house web-based system that includes administrative reviews. The decision to build the system in-house as opposed to purchasing an off-the-shelf system, as originally intended, led to significant cost savings. The State returned 53% of the award at the end of the grant period. In addition to grant funds, the state used State Administrative Expense funds to purchase printers that allowed staff to print the forms necessary for the on-site review.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,409,532.85.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Design and implementation of a new technology solution; training.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense funds.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$753,202.42.

## Successes

The grant achieved the goals of creating a web-based system for conducting administrative reviews and developing training for at-risk schools.

- **Training and Professional Standards:** New Hampshire developed 10 online training modules that were used by 73 people during the grant period. The State also hosted two conferences that provided training on a variety of topics including verification, free and reduced applications, etc.
- **Data Systems:** The State developed a web-based system—MyNHDOE—that includes administrative review forms as well as the FNS 742 verification summary report and the Community Eligibility Provision, which improved efficiency in completing claims and applications.

## Challenges

Though the goals of the project were achieved, there was a need for two no-cost extensions due to delays related to staff turnover.

- **Constraints of State Bidding Process:** The SA initially planned to use the grant to purchase an off-the-shelf web-based system. However, in order to fulfill State requirements to contract with the lowest bidder, it switched to an in-house version. This helped reduce the cost of the project, but it created a significant burden on project management staff and the New Hampshire Department of Information Technology.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** Developing the online training modules required significant content knowledge. The developer of one of the 10 training modules did not have sufficient content knowledge to create the module and it had to be scrapped. The State had to redevelop the module using the correct information.
- **Data Systems:** A lack of continuity in IT staff and a lack of dedicated staff led to delays in development of MyNHDOE. This has also made post-grant-period modifications difficult given the

lack of historical knowledge about the system. The State did not account for the time it takes to enter data into the system in order to test MyNHDOE.

- **Staff Turnover:** Turnover in administrative and IT staff led to significant delays in the development and rollout of MyNHDOE, eventually resulting in two no-cost extensions.
- **Project Management:** The initial project manager lacked the appropriate skill set to effectively manage the project.

### *Lessons Learned*

The project challenges detailed above highlight the need to include staff with the right skill set. When hiring a project staff, it is important to make sure their skills align with project needs and that they have adequate time to dedicate to the project. Online training development may require knowledge of complicated policies and regulations. It is important to ensure content developers have the appropriate knowledge.

It is important to determine the system's needs before building begins, including what is needed to maintain the system. The State learned that it is important to account for all steps in the project timeline, including the time it takes to effectively test a new system. When considering off-the-shelf products, it is important to account for funds to support maintenance after the grant period.

MyNHDOE may be an effective tool to help administrators identify at-risk schools. Given the small size of the State, however, at-risk schools may already be known by State Agency staff, and such a tool may not add much value.



# NORTH DAKOTA



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2014	Grant End Year: 2017
Purpose: Technology improvements	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: North Dakota ART	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$389,973	Grant Funds Returned: \$0

In 2014, North Dakota received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to update its administrative review technology system. The State used the grant funding to purchase an Automated Eligibility Processing System that reduces eligibility determination errors, creates efficiencies for Local Educational Agencies (LEA) and the State Agency (SA), and allows oversight of and access to LEA determinations for completion of administrative reviews. The grant also funded a Comprehensive Administrative Review System that integrates and automates all review processes to increase program integrity.

With these updates, the SA moved from a paper-based process to an automated process, which centralizes information, improves application and claiming accuracy, and ensures that administrative review procedures comply with federal requirements. The multi-user interface allows the SA and LEAs to simultaneously access the system, monitor progress, identify issues, and communicate effectively. As a result, the SA is able to provide more comprehensive and targeted technical assistance and training to LEA staff.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve accuracy in application and claiming processes by providing LEAs and State staff with tools to accurately determine meal eligibility and increase reporting accuracy.</li> <li>Update administrative review process to meet new requirements; streamline the process for efficiency, data completion, and accuracy.</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application to implementation phase. North Dakota met these goals by implementing a State-hosted centralized meal application determination system and state-level administrative review system.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities

## Highlights

North Dakota’s 2014 ART grant funded the implementation of a State-hosted centralized meal application determination system and administrative review system. The activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- Partially automated a web-based administrative review process, including electronic form submission and automated reporting features.
- Ensured the administrative review process complies with federal requirements.
- Improved management and monitoring: State and LEAs can easily track requirements for the process:
  - Allows the State to efficiently identify issues and track corrective action requests to ensure prompt completion.
- Centralizes all information and facilitates better communication between State and LEA staff:
  - Sends the SA's off-site and on-site confirmation letters through the new system.
  - Allows the State to better understand where additional technical assistance is needed.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

A number of staff from North Dakota's SA and the software vendor were involved with the 2014 ART grant project. The SA director oversaw the project and the staff who worked on it. The State technology coordinator worked closely with internal SA staff, but a project manager was also hired to work directly with the software vendor. The project manager oversaw the project task schedule and budget and worked with a grant manager on finances. The software vendor also assigned a vendor project manager who worked directly with State staff.

#### **Funding**

North Dakota was awarded a \$389,973 grant, and stated they used 100% of the allocated funds. The majority of ART funding was spent on vendor contracts. The SA's technology coordinator was also funded through the ART grant. The SA project manager was funded by State Administrative Expenses funds. No other supplementary funding sources were used as a part of this project.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$389,973.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Customization and implementation of the software.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expenses.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$0.

### *Successes*

The grant achieved the goals of streamlining and automating the administrative review process and improving the application and claiming processes. Additionally, North Dakota employed a dedicated grant management team, including a project manager, technology coordinator, and a fiscal grant manager, which facilitated the successful implementation of the grant.

- **Administrative Costs:** The ART grant did not present significant changes in administrative costs or time spent on administrative review for State staff.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** State staff noted increased error identification as a result of the improved organization and management of the administrative review process afforded by the new system.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** The centralized and automated nature of the new system allows the SA to identify areas where LEAs need assistance. LEAs noted that State staff were easily accessible for technical assistance over the phone.
- **Data Systems:** The automation, centralized organization, and streamlining of the new administrative review system created better data quality, improved monitoring and follow-up, and providing

facilitated communication between the State and the LEA staff. The new system also improved the workflow for LEA staff, because components of the administrative review are prepared in advance, reducing on-site review time.

- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** The online free/reduced-price meal applications have been well received by parents. LEAs have seen an increased number of families completing the online application. The SA noted that more LEAs have completed verification accurately and on time.
- **Improved Direct Certification Process:** The new system allows LEAs to accurately and quickly identify students for direct certification. The direct certification process more efficient because verified information is sent to LEAs directly from the State.
- **Grant Management:** The State's grant management team included a technology coordinator who was the primary support staff for the SA's computer systems used to manage the nutrition programs. Additionally, the State hired a dedicated project manager to work with the vendor and the State IT department on the new technology software. North Dakota also had a grant manager assigned by the Department of Public Instruction's internal fiscal office.

### Challenges

Though the grant was effective at streamlining the administrative review process and providing online application options, there is still room for improvement and a need for additional training. Additionally, two no-cost extensions were needed to accommodate delays related to staff turnover and vendor issues.

- **Administrative Costs:** The new system is able to automatically complete direct certification matching using uploaded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program data; however, the North Dakota Department of Human Services would not approve the release of that data to the vended system. As a result, direct certification student data must be downloaded nightly from the State direct certification system into the new student eligibility system. This process does not delay issuance of free meal benefits to students, but does increase the administrative burden on the SA.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** LEA staff believed the initial training videos were too broad, as they were not tailored to the LEAs' use of the system and covered modules that were not required. LEAs initially didn't understand which system components they would be using, resulting in confusion and a need for clarification and direction from the State. LEAs suggested that a more directive and tailored training (i.e., in person) was needed, specifically with completing the new spreadsheets.
- **Staff Turnover:** North Dakota lost many administrative reviewers due to staff turnover, resulting in increased training time, offsetting the anticipated efficiencies of the system. Interviewees noted that some State program staff were resistant to the new system and unwilling to use it properly, which may have contributed to staff turnover.
- **Vendor Challenges:** The software vendor's original project manager was unresponsive and did not understand the system the SA was working with. The software vendor assigned a new project manager to the contract. Additionally, the SA noted the schedule was delayed as a result of errors in the technology, requested changes that had not been integrated by the vendor, and features that did not meet the SA's expectations and required revisions. The SA noted that this is an ongoing challenge that requires persistent follow-up with the vendor. Unfortunately, the State no longer has funding for the project manager position and is not able to withhold payment to the vendor, so it has very little leverage to ensure prompt vendor response.
- **Lack of LEA Buy-in:** North Dakota has many small LEAs, and the SA saw them as the target audience for the new student eligibility module. However, the LEAs were interested only initially, until they learned of the work required on their end. LEA buy-in was also affected when the system feature that auto-populated eligibility information (to save LEAs time) didn't work when the system was rolled out at the beginning of the school year. The failure caused many LEAs to opt out of using the system and to stay uninterested even after the problem was fixed. The State expects use by LEAs

to increase as they become more familiar with the system and understand the benefits of automating the student eligibility system. Large LEAs that already had an electronic application determination system as part of their point-of-sale system use the State online household application but do not plan to fully use the centralized system.

### *Lessons Learned*

North Dakota noted that it would consider applying for an ART planning grant in the future in order to research system options and functionality and to better prepare the SA to design and implement new technology that meets its needs. Many of the State's challenges were a result of the SA staff not fully understanding the functionality needed to address the new administrative review requirements. Additionally, the SA acknowledged that expanding pilot testing to a wider range of LEAs (beyond those already interested in the technology) and gathering LEA feedback on the administrative review module would provide valuable information regarding system functionality from the LEA perspective.

Other lessons learned included the importance of budgeting for a dedicated project manager, immediately addressing vendor service-related issues to prevent project delays, and including at least three months in the schedule to complete the procurement process of a vended system.



# PENNSYLVANIA



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2013, 2014	Grant End Year: 2016 (2013 grant), 2017 (2014 grant)
Purpose: Technology improvements (2013 grant), technical assistance (2014 grant)	Extension(s): No
Project Name: Pennsylvania Student Eligibility & Direct Certification Systems (PA-SES)	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,499,977 (2013), \$464,801 (2014)	Grant Funds Returned: \$0

### 2013 Grant

Pennsylvania applied for its 2013 Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant in response to the changes to the administrative review process mandated by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. These changes affected Pennsylvania in particular because its State Agency (SA) has oversight for more than 900 Local Educational Agencies (LEA). The new regulations shifted administrative reviews (AR) from a five-year to three-year cycle, resulting in a 67% increase in the volume of ARs scheduled.

In order to accommodate this shift, the SA used its 2013 ART grant to purchase an automated eligibility-processing system. The SA selected an automated, commercial off-the-shelf solution to develop the Pennsylvania Student Eligibility and Direct Certification Systems (PA-SES). This software was used to facilitate efficient AR; reduce eligibility determination errors while creating efficiencies for the LEAs and the SA; increase direct certification (DC) match rates; and allow remote oversight of eligibility determination, verification, and DC for LEAs.

The 2013 ART grant was also used to migrate the DC process from the existing system, COMPASS, to PA-SES. COMPASS was Pennsylvania’s online benefit application for free and reduced-price meal benefits. Prior to implementing the new PA-SES system, LEAs would directly certify by uploading student files to match against the State’s Department of Human Services benefits data, which include Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Medical Assistance, as well as whether the family met the income threshold guidelines. The benefits data were provided by the Department once a month, and LEAs were encouraged to perform the DC process once a month and a minimum of three times a year.

Now PA-SES provides stronger matching algorithms during the DC matching and is more cost-effective, given the ability to use the full student eligibility system. The new technology includes automatic DC of matched students, generates lists of possible household matches, reviews and manages unmatched students, extends DC to siblings, and creates eligibility roster reports.

### 2014 Grant

Through the 2014 ART grant, the SA identified and provided technical assistance to LEAs at high risk for administrative errors or those significantly out of compliance with menu planning requirements. This grant funded a new position dedicated to providing training and support to high-risk LEAs using the new PA-SES system. It enabled the Division of Food and Nutrition (DFN) to provide one-on-one, on-site technical assistance to 97 LEAs in the areas of certification, verification, meal counting and claiming, and

menu pattern compliance. Additionally, the State also provided on-site technical assistance visits focused on meal counting and claiming to 35 individual private schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and 31 schools in the School District of Philadelphia.

**Goals and Objectives**

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <p><i>2013 Grant</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a new direct certification and application system that will simplify work for LEAs, reduce error rates, and increase the number of directly certified students.</li> <li>• Implement a system that creates efficiencies and streamlines the administrative review process for the SA respective to areas of validating the certification process (direct certification, eligibility determination and verification)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increase the number of students directly certified to meet federal thresholds.</li> <li>○ Validate the LEA’s certification process during an administrative review remotely in order to decrease the amount of time needed on-site at the LEA.</li> <li>○ Provide a more efficient means to monitor and provide technical assistance to error-prone schools relative to eligibility determination errors associated with Performance Standard 1.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>2014 Grant</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure LEAs have resources in order to maximize understanding of administrative and menu compliance requirements and identify error-prone or high-risk LEAs.</li> <li>• Ensure LEAs have the technology to reduce administrative and menu compliance errors by providing statewide access to the Student Eligibility System and Menu Planning System at no charge to a LEA.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The goals and objectives for both the 2013 and 2014 projects did not change from the application to the implementation phase.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

**Highlights**

Pennsylvania’s 2013 ART grant project streamlined and digitized its AR and DC processes. Over 300 LEAs use the full student eligibility system, and all of the LEAs (more than 900) are using it for DC. The 2013 grant allowed for the implementation of the PA-SES software, which:

- Streamlines the SA’s administrative review process.
- Decreases administrative reviewer time on-site.
- Increases DC of students through automatic matching.
- Provides DFN access to all DC data at the LEA level and allows determination of the frequency of LEAs performing DC matching.
- Collects online, user-friendly meal applications and ensures completion.
- Provides immediate and automatic notifications to parents/households.
- Automates the verification process.

The 2014 ART grant provided one-on-one training and technical assistance to high-risk LEAs, along with access to the new software system. The 2014 grant allowed the SA to employ dedicated technical assistance staff to work with high-risk LEAs to train LEA staff on the system and address other site-specific problem areas, including meal counting and claiming, eligibility determination, verification, and DC.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

Prior to the award of the 2013 ART grant, Pennsylvania contracted with a dedicated project manager/IT liaison who was heavily involved in the process of purchasing and installing the software and training State staff. The state nutrition director was directly responsible for writing the grant application and overseeing implementation. The State also benefited from having a software vendor project manager and software support team. The SA employed a compliance manager and school nutrition program manager to assist and consult during grant planning and implementation.

Additionally, the software solution was facilitated through the State's Dell Contract, which provided access to State-approved software. Use of the existing Dell Contract streamlined grant management, as the vendors were preapproved and the SA was not required to conduct a formal bid process. As a large state, Pennsylvania conducts approximately 300 administrative reviews each year. The DFN department responsible for administrative reviews aided in the 2013 grant implementation. This department comprises a manager, five supervisors, and 13 field advisors who conduct the reviews. The 2014 ART grant funded an individual to provide one-on-one technical assistance to LEAs and schools identified as high risk.

#### **Funding**

Pennsylvania was awarded \$1,499,977.00 for its 2013 grant, and \$464,801.00 for its 2014 grant. The State stated they used 100% of its total award for each grant.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,499,977.00 (2013); \$464,801.00 (2014).
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** The majority of 2013 funding went to the upfront cost to purchase, install, and pilot the software. Funds were also used to promote the new technology and train LEAs. The 2014 grant funding was used to fund technical assistance staff.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense (SAE) funding was used to fund the project manager position for the 2013 grant, as well as other staffing costs. Since the grant expired, the SA uses SAE funds for annual software maintenance and hosting fees for the new technology.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$0 (2013; 2014).

### *Successes*

Pennsylvania's 2013 ART grant enabled the purchase and implementation of the PA-SES system, which streamlines the administrative review process, increasing efficiency and reducing errors for the SA and the roughly 300 LEAs that opted to use the full student eligibility system. The grant also resulted in the migration of the DC process from a Department of Human Services web application (COMPASS) into PA-SES, resulting in increased DC matches, as this module was mandatory for all 900 LEAs. The SA noted an initial DC increase from 70% to 80%, with continued gradual increases.

Regarding the 2014 grant, the SA noted that working with LEAs one-on-one to provide technical assistance in areas of concern resulted in corrections in areas of noncompliance identified during administrative reviews. LEAs benefited from the technical assistance visits and support.

- **Administrative Costs:** The SA noted savings related to the decreased time needed to complete the eligibility and verification processes and the automation of notifications. The online system also allows for multi-user remote access and may result in travel savings. Additionally, the SA responded to the LEAs' challenge to secure IT staff time by requiring superintendents to commit IT resources and by conducting conference calls with LEA IT staff and large student information system providers. Instead of multiple schools contacting sales reps about file transfer issues, the State facilitated the communication with the student information software companies and provided webinars for LEAs. The SA noted that this resulted in overall cost reductions because issues were addressed and paid for once, rather than each time a different LEA contacted the software company.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** The 2013 ART grant verification reporting improvements allow for improved monitoring and reporting, and they increased DC matching. The online system rejects incomplete meal applications and alerts the State and LEA when corrections are required. The 2014 ART grant has made it possible for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to provide additional training and technical assistance to help reduce the amount of administrative errors in high-risk LEAs. The additional trainings and technical assistance have helped LEAs to better understand the Child Nutrition Programs and allowed them to successfully provide these programs to children in Pennsylvania.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** DFN promoted the PA-SES to LEAs through a designated website, software previews, email campaigns, and memorandums. Though use of the new eligibility system wasn't mandated, the SA provided training to all LEAs that opted in. Additionally, training was provided statewide via webinar for the mandatory use of the DC module in PA-SES. The 2014 ART grant allowed the PDE to provide one-on-one technical assistance in areas of concern. Providing technical assistance in this manner allowed the LEAs to work with the SA to help correct areas of noncompliance found during administrative reviews. The SA received positive feedback from LEAs in regard to using on-site one-on-one technical assistance to help prevent future administrative errors.
- **Data Systems:** The PA-SES system streamlines SA management of student eligibility; increases LEA DC percentages, leading to increases in statewide DC percentages; and increases efficiencies of the off-site review of information during the administrative review.

### Challenges

Major challenges for Pennsylvania included the lack of a common statewide student information system, lack of local IT resources, and burdensome contracting and hiring processes. Additional challenges include frequent LEA staff turnover and reluctance of LEAs to adopt the new technology and electronically share data with the SA.

- **Data Systems:** Pennsylvania identified the lack of a statewide student information/school enrollment system as the biggest challenge faced. The PS-SES student eligibility system is a food service, Child Nutrition Program system, but the student information system is what drives the enrollment in the school. In Pennsylvania, LEAs purchase their own student information system if they want to use an IT-based system; everything is locally driven. In states where LEAs have a common system, it is easier to feed information into PS-SES; in Pennsylvania, each LEA has to upload its student information files, to ensure changes in the student information system are integrated into PA-SES. Though the SA expected this issue, it complicated the process. Additionally, the State encountered difficulty creating an eligibility algorithm that limits the number of matches that schools must review, without missing any eligible students.

- **Limited LEA IT Resources:** After a first round of onboarding the PA-SES system, the State realized that the commitment of local IT staff at LEAs and individual schools was critical. The SA found that even if the food service director was onboard, IT knowledge limitations resulted in a large LEA dropout rate. Also, although most Pennsylvania school districts have an electronic system, many charter schools and private schools may not, making it harder for them to implement and maintain the new system.
- **Administrative Delays:** The SA noted that despite selecting an approved vendor from the established Dell Contract, moving the software vendor contract agreement through the state system for the 2013 ART grant was time-consuming and challenging. Even though the 2014 ART grant's technical assistance position was a carryover from the prior ART grant, rehiring for the position took a very long time in the State's human resources system.
- **Staff Turnover:** Regarding both the 2013 and 2014 grants, the SA noted that staff turnover at the LEA level presented a constant challenge, requiring frequent re-trainings.
- **Participation Rates:** Though Pennsylvania was happy with the overall rate of LEA participation in the new system (300 LEAs out of 900), the State encountered LEAs reluctant to share and save information to the cloud. Pennsylvania also has robust participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (200 LEAs), so those LEAs aren't incentivized to use the PA-SES for full application processing, because they don't have to process individual applications.

### *Lessons Learned*

Pennsylvania observed that establishing electronic free and reduced-price meal applications as the default option increased online participation. When schools gave out paper applications at the beginning of the school year, online participation was low. If LEAs adopted the electronic form as the primary method and required parents to request a paper application, online participation increased. The SA noted that LEAs with the online application as the default had approximately 70% online participation, as opposed to 40% in LEAs that did not.

Additionally, the State noted that local IT staff availability is critical to successfully implementing new technologies, such as the new PA-SES system, to its LEAs. The State observed that the majority of LEAs dropping out during implementation did so as a result of a lack of local IT staff time, noting that the total time commitment is minimal overall, but it is especially critical during the initial implementation stage.

The State also underscored the benefits of the one-on-one technical assistance provided through the 2014 ART grant, noting that it would be prioritized in future grant applications.



# RHODE ISLAND



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2013	Grant End Year: 2015
Purpose: Technology improvements	Extension(s): No
Project Name: CN Central	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor (2)
Grant Funds Awarded: \$312,183.00	Grant Funds Returned: \$5,680.15

Under the Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) worked with a vendor to customize its commercial off-the-shelf software system, CN Central, to align with USDA guidelines, streamline workflow, and leverage the functionality of existing Coordinated Review Effort (CRE) software. With the rollout of the new system, the State Agency (SA) is able to select and track Local Education Authorities (LEA) for the administrative review three-year cycle. CN Central includes a secure log-on system as well as a communications and notification system that issues, captures, and stores communications among RIDE, the administrative reviewers, and LEA staff. This feature streamlines both the initial review and subsequent follow-up, such as the corrective action processes tied to regulatory requirements.

Preceding the changes implemented under the ART grant, all administrative review forms were paper, not electronic, and were scanned and emailed before the on-site review. The new system was meant to reduce this labor burden for LEA staff, by having them upload documents through an online portal, accessible by both the State and the respective LEA. State reviewers can enter information collected on-site through this system.

However, State reviewers and LEA staff reverted back to old processes and stopped using the system after school year 2017-2018.

Additionally, RIDE used ART grant funding to create an electronic version of the Meal Benefit Application verification summary report (FNS 742) that was integrated into the pre-existing Child Nutrition Program, CNPConnect. Prior to the grant implementation, these forms were filled out on paper by LEA staff and very often contained incomplete or erroneous information. The new electronic version is mandatory for the schools, and it automatically reviews and monitors submissions to identify errors.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) CNPConnect software to enhance the AR process.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement the new USDA AR changes to the existing Comprehensive Review Evaluation (CRE) processes by re-distributing a portion of reviewer's preparation steps to the districts.</li> <li>Use CNPConnect to identify "error-prone" schools and districts.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Contract with software vendor to customize CN Central system.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives for this project did not change from the application to the implementation phase.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### *Highlights*

Rhode Island applied for an ART grant in 2013 so that it could streamline and digitize its administrative review (AR) process and create an electronic Meal Benefit Application. The activities funded by its 2013 ART grant achieved the following:

- Created a standalone AR module that allowed for electronic preparation of the off-site and on-site reviews and redistributed a significant portion of the State reviewers' workload in the review preparation workflow steps to the LEAs.
  - Included an interactive communications and notification system that issues and stores customized system-based communications among the SA, administrative reviewers, and LEAs.
  - Included a Corrective Action Plan tool that allows the SA to select predetermined and customized corrective actions.
- Created an advanced claim edit for school meals programs, an electronic validation web form, which decreased errors through a series of checks and made it simpler for the State to monitor submissions and detect errors. New site-level checks included possible block claiming, stagnant attendance numbers, and number of meals claimed matching the attendance for 15 consecutive days.
- The State used the grant-funded system during school years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, but it has since reverted back to old processes.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

The RIDE project team consisted of six members: the state child nutrition director, a finance manager, and four content experts, but they did not have a dedicated project manager. The staff conducting the administrative reviews were not directly involved in the selection of the software. There were two software vendors, one working on each component: one customized the AR module, and the other created the electronic Meal Benefit Application. For the most part, LEAs were not involved in the ART grant process before the new systems were rolled out, though at least one district was involved with testing the near-final project.

#### **Funding**

Rhode Island was awarded \$312,183.00 for the 2013 ART grant and used 98% of its allocated funds. The ART grant funds were used almost exclusively to pay the vendors for their work on the project. No other supplementary funding sources were used as a part of this project.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$312,183.00.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Customization of an electronic AR module and creation of an electronic Meal Benefit Application.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** None.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$5,680.15.

## Successes

The new AR module was used from April 2016 through the 2017-2018 school year. It allows for multiple user access, increases consistency among reviewers, and streamlines dissemination of AR findings, allowing letters to be issued while reviewers are on-site.

- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** The new electronic version of the FNS 742 form was successful in reducing errors, as LEA staff could not submit the form if they had made errors that were flagged by the system. The SA reported, anecdotally, a 75% reduction in errors.
- **Data Systems:** The new AR module system allows the SA to easily establish and monitor timelines for LEAs, keeps all materials in a centralized location, and provides a standardized process with built-in checks that reduce submission of incomplete and incorrect information.
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** Following the implementation of the new systems, there was an increase in the direct certification rates. However, the direct certification process underwent an improvement at this time, as well. Thus, it is not clear that the ART grant activities are responsible for this improvement.

## Challenges

Major challenges during the implementation of Rhode Island's ART grant included the development and design of the AR module, resource limitations, and minor schedule setbacks.

- **Administrative Costs:** As a result of the increased complexity of the AR process and the introduction of new software, more time is needed (and scheduled) for on-site reviews. Additionally, high staff turnover at the State and LEA levels resulted in increased time spent on administrative review preparation. Additional costs were incurred, as State staff time was required to provide one-on-one support to LEA staff to help them navigate the software and prepare for the on-site evaluation.
- **Data Systems:** The COTS system did not provide the functionality that the State and LEA staff needed to efficiently complete the review process, and customization was not included in the budget. The system would not send notifications when actions were taken in the system, and the letter templates were not customizable. Additionally, the system was very slow and the interface was not intuitive, dis-incentivizing adoption.
- **Behavior Change and Lack of Training:** Especially because Rhode Island is a small state, the LEAs have close relationships with their State contacts and are accustomed to emailing State staff directly. This habit proved hard to break, as LEAs would refuse to use the new system, preferring to send materials via email, thus requiring State staff time to upload the LEA materials to the system. Additionally, the LEAs did not receive any training on the new system to facilitate the transition.
- **Vendor Challenges:** Following the award of the contract, discussions with the vendor uncovered an understanding gap caused by misinterpretation of the vendor's capabilities and miscommunication of the SA's needs because staff lacked the technical expertise (language and information) needed to accurately communicate project needs. Respondents noted that the process would have benefited from an IT project manager to bridge that gap.
- **Schedule Changes:** Though no extensions for this grant were taken, the internal timelines were delayed on a few occasions due to USDA updates to the AR process, procurement delays with the vendor, and revisions to the AR software.
- **Resource and Software Limitations:** Because RIDE was concerned that integrating the AR module into the existing CNPConnect system would cause problems, it developed a standalone AR module. Adapting a COTS solution to RIDE's needs enhanced the prior Comprehensive Review Evaluation module to meet the new SMART administrative review process and provided a responsive solution to this grant's requirements in the short term. Respondents, however, shared that the software was not intuitive and did not always meet their needs. Respondents noted that a long-term solution would require additional funding to completely update and integrate all State nutrition systems with software

that could evolve over time to meet requirements and allow for more sophisticated resources management.

### *Lessons Learned*

The project challenges detailed above highlighted the need for a designated project manager with both technical and program expertise who could liaise between the software vendor and program staff to lead testing, tracking, and documenting issues to ensure the final product delivers the needed functionality. Additionally, the limitations of the new AR module underscore the need for a comprehensive, integrated CNP system that can evolve as processes and guidelines change.

The State did successfully complete the scope of work detailed in its grant application and came in on time and under budget. However, as mentioned above, the software funded by the ART grant did not completely meet the needs of SA staff. Respondents noted that changes to the system would require additional technical assistance, funding, and planning and that these steps should be recommended for future grant applications. Staff conducting the administrative reviews should be heavily involved in the planning and development process in the future to ensure the new technology is functional and sustainable.

Rhode Island is investigating advancements made by other states and exploring solutions that may more comprehensively address its needs in the short term and the ability to adapt to its needs in the long term. State staff mentioned the possibility in the future of using a system that was already developed and tested by another SA.



# SOUTH DAKOTA



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2011	Grant End Year: 2014
Purpose: <b>Implementation of a technology system and training</b>	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: ICAN	Vendor: <b>Outside, for-profit software vendor</b>
Grant Funds Awarded: <b>\$843,158.00</b>	Grant Funds Returned: <b>\$315,580.22</b>

In 2011, South Dakota received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to implement a new technology system and conduct both in-person and online training. The goals of the interventions were to (1) decrease administrative error; (2) streamline data entry, data analysis, and accountability reporting processes; and (3) train State Agency (SA) and Local Education Agency (LEA) staff in the application, verification, meal counting, and meal claiming procedures. The program had not been fully implemented when the grant period closed.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add a new technology system that streamlines data entry, data analysis, and accountability reporting processes to decrease administrative errors.</li> <li>Provide face-to-face and online training for Child &amp; Adult Nutrition Services (CANS) and LEA staff on application, verification, and meal counting and claiming procedures using the new software.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives for this project did not change from the application to the implementation phase.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with SA and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

## Highlights

South Dakota’s ART grant project aimed to reduce overall administrative errors by implementing new technology and delivering SA and LEA staff training.

- South Dakota designed a three-pronged technology project to upgrade the State’s system: Phase 1, Food Distribution Programs; Phase 2, School Nutrition Programs; and Phase 3, Summer Food Service and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. The ART grant funded Phase 2.
- The State purchased an off-the-shelf, customizable software application from a software vendor for its school nutrition program for applications and claims.
- SA staff and the software vendor collaborated to create training modules and deliver technical assistance to end users (SA and LEA staff).

## Planning and Implementation

### Management

The State's office administrator and a project director from the South Dakota Technology and Innovation in Education (TIE) office managed the grant project. The South Dakota Bureau of Information and Technology (BIT) also assisted managing with State-mandated terminology, server information, and ensuring the new system maintained the look and feel of other State IT systems. The FNS technical assistance consultants) assisted with the management of the entire system upgrade (all three phases) and was involved in some aspects of Phase 2.

SA team members would meet once or twice a month to evaluate the progress of the project. In addition to the State director, the SA team members included the office administrator, the TIE program manager, the BIT staff member, and one or two school food program representatives. At times, the FNS' technical assistance consultants and the software vendor would also participate in meetings, depending on the topic or if there were specific issues where outside input was required.

### Funding

In 2011, South Dakota won an ART grant to create and implement a new technology system. The award was for \$843,158.00, and the State used 63% of the total allocated ART funds. South Dakota also used reallocated State Administrative Expense funds to assist with the school nutrition system installation, as well as approximately \$100,000 annually from the South Dakota State Technology Funding to support the software vendors system.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$843,158.00.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Creating a new software system and training SA and LEA staff on its use.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expenses, South Dakota State Technology Funding.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$315,580.22.

## Successes

The grant provided the SA with the opportunity to create and implement a new software system for its school nutrition programs and provide training, tutorials, and technical assistance on the use of the new system.

- **Administrative Costs:** The new system saves significant time over the previous process. For example, staff are able to enter data as they becomes available (rather than during a small, two-month window). The certification process takes less than a week, whereas it took more than two weeks to complete previously.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** The SA was not able to quantify the reduction in error rates, but did comment that typical errors seen in the past, such as checking the "offer versus serve" option, have been eliminated with the new system. Also, the system immediately catches potential errors, and staff are required to verify that the data entered are correct before submitting. The edit checks in the new system allow the SA to review what has been submitted by the LEA and ensure accuracy.
- **Training and Technical Assistance:** The SA conducted in-person trainings for LEA staff to ensure one staff member fulfilled the "business manager" role and one fulfilled the "school food service" role.

- **Data Systems:** The SA and LEAs are pleased overall with the new system, particularly with the flexibility and centralized accessibility to information it affords. The previous system was rigid and allowed a short window of time during which to enter data. The new system allows flexibility to enter, and correct, data as needed. Also, state-level program specialists have easier access to the information needed to complete annual agreements with each LEA.
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** The new system allows continuity at both the State and local levels, despite staff turnover and, unfortunately, natural disasters.

### *Challenges*

South Dakota achieved the goals and objectives for the ART project; however, it required a no-cost extension and experienced the following challenges with the project:

- **Administration:** The SA did not realize the amount of time the entire process would take. During implementation, the SA requested an additional FTE from the South Dakota BIT department. To maintain the software vendor's system (which includes programs other than school food), some \$100,000 from South Dakota State Technology Funding is needed.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** Not all of the LEAs came online at the same time. At the end of the grant period, the SA was still implementing the new system with LEAs.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** LEA staff had varying levels of competency with technology. The SA did not anticipate the need to offer remedial-level training for LEA staff with extremely limited computer experience. During the grant project implementation, the SA discovered it needed to train LEA staff on permissible use of newly installed computers and Internet access.
- **Data Systems:** A significant number of LEAs lacked access to computer systems within their respective offices. The SA had to work with State and local staff to identify funding for equipment and Internet access, needs not anticipated when the grant application was written.

### *Lessons Learned*

South Dakota shared the following lessons learned:

- **Project Management:** A dedicated project manager (from grant application phase to project completion) with in-depth computer language and processes background is integral to an IT project's implementation success and efficiency. Many of the delays, unanticipated costs, and need for extensive staff time could have been avoided if a project manager with the IT skills, knowledge, and background had been involved.
- **Software Testing:** Request testing protocols from the software vendor to be able to see what the vendor has done before beginning internal testing. Involve LEAs and other end users in the testing phase to get a clearer picture of what they may experience when the system goes live. Make sure the IT vendor understands the State's security requirements, and anticipate significant time for testing for security.
- **Training Materials:** The RFP and subsequent contract with the software vendor need to specifically address who is responsible for the development of end-user manuals and training materials—both upon initial implementation and to cover any updates that occur after the system is online. Step-by-step user manuals and training materials and recorded webinars/training sessions will help prevent issues with future training upon staff turnover.
- **Staff Training:** It is difficult for SA staff to learn a new system and then provide training on it. Initial training for SA and LEA staff should be included in the RFP/contract with the software vendor.
- **Software Licensing:** Be prepared for the cost of maintaining the annual software license after the grant period has ended.



# WASHINGTON



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2011	Grant End Year: 2016
Purpose: Replace CNP 2000 with WINS	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Washington Integrated Nutrition System (WINS)	Vendor: In-house IT department (began with Outside, for profit software vendor and then moved in-house)
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,478,700	Grant Funds Returned: \$0

In 2011, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) was awarded an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to replace an existing (and aging) Child Nutrition application and claiming system (CNP 2000). The new platform, the Washington Integrated Nutrition System (WINS) integrates data from separate programs, provides error checks and alerts, eliminates duplicate data entry, and allows for site-based claiming. Local Educational Agencies (LEA) can directly upload fillable spreadsheets for their administrative reviews, reducing the amount of paper that passes between the State and LEAs. Importantly, the system pre-populates information where possible, streamlining data entry for sites that run multiple nutrition programs and providing error checks in real time.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replace the claiming and application system with a new solution, so that the data entry process is streamlined, LEAs with multiple CN programs can consolidate data, and increase accuracy of claims.</li> <li>• Increase data-sharing by creating a system that will interface with other Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) software, including the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS), the list of directly certified students from the Department of Social and Health Service, students who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or other food benefits, and students who are eligible based on foster care status.</li> <li>• Improve program integrity and administrative accuracy through the new system by tracking and analyzing CRE results, analyzing nutrition of school meals, identifying at-risk LEAs that need additional training, and improving accuracy in USDA reports.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did not meet the objective to develop capabilities for electronic verification due to insufficient grant funds and schedule delays. The SA plans to develop electronic verification (including nutrient analysis for meal plans) as a part of a follow-on maintenance and operations contract.</li> <li>• Removed the goal of integration with CEDARS and the Department of Social and Health Service (upon more in-depth analysis, the agency learned that integration would not be beneficial because of differences in the types, timing, and requirements for data across the three agencies).</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and LEA staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

### Highlights

Overcoming challenges with an IT vendor and a large team with multiple stakeholders across multiple agencies and contractors, the SA used ART grant funds to develop a unified application and site-based claiming system across multiple Child Nutrition Programs. The activities funded by the grant achieved the following:

- The system eliminates duplicate data entry for sites that run multiple programs, provides edit checks, and provides ad-hoc reports that allow the SA to identify areas for targeting training and correction.
- WINS ensures revisions, adjustments, and financial transactions are always assigned the correct general ledger coding (the previous system did not accurately track and report these without manual intervention).
- WINS consolidates claim data for all Child Nutrition Programs, enhancing reporting accuracy and ensuring School Food Authority (SFA) demographic characteristics are consistently reported.

### Planning and Implementation

#### Management

The State director, supervisors, fiscal staff, project manager, and child nutrition business analyst were all involved in writing the grant application; SFAs were not. An Executive Steering Committee and OSPI's budget analyst were also involved in grant management.

The State worked with a vendor for all but the final year of this project. Unfortunately, the vendor could not meet the needs of the complex system. In the final year of the contract, OSPI negotiated an end to that contract and the work was taken over by an internal IT team. Another vendor has been contracted to manage the maintenance and operations of WINS.

#### Funding

Washington was awarded \$1,478,700.00 through the ART grant and used 100% of the funds to complete its project. A significant portion of the grant funds were used for project management. In addition, it used State Administrative Expenses (SAE) funds to expand this system to cover the Child and Adult Care Food Program. The SAE funds continue to be used to cover maintenance and operations.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,478,700.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** This grant funded the replacement of CNP 2000 with WINS. In addition to funding for OSPI project and budget management, and the vendor services, the SA also hired a business analyst to build a list of specifications for the new data system and an external project manager to manage grant progress. The grant also funded internal trainings on the new system for LEAs and technical assistance as needed when the new system was launched.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expenses (SAE).
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$0.

### Successes

The grant achieved the goal of creating a unified application and claims system that reduces data entry and errors for LEAs undergoing administrative reviews.

- **Administrative Costs:** State staff time spent working on administrative reviews has been reduced and their tasks have been simplified. This cost is difficult to capture accurately, as this grant was implemented at the same time as a number of other changes, such as the move from the former Coordinated Review Effort (CRE) to the new administrative review.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** WINS processes applications at the site level rather than at the program level, and it retains information that would otherwise be entered multiple times for sites that run multiple programs. The SA and LEAs reported fewer errors as a result of streamlining data entry.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** The SA took a proactive approach in providing in-person training on the new system for LEAs. It developed documentation on how to use the new system. The SA also provides ongoing technical assistance.
- **Data Systems:** In addition to processing site-based applications and claims, WINS compares ongoing claims with October building data to flag potential errors in real time and allows for ad hoc reporting to allow State staff to analyze problem areas and errors. LEAs report that the application and claims process is easier in WINS than in the previous system and is very straightforward.

### Challenges

Washington encountered challenges with a vendor that did not have the resources to keep up with the demands of the project, resulting in four no-cost extensions, higher project management costs than anticipated, and the State ultimately bringing the system in-house.

- **Data Systems:** Once the development of WINS was underway, the SA learned that it would not be beneficial to integrate data across multiple systems, for a variety of reasons. In some cases, data were collected at different times and for different purposes; in other cases, the LEAs were required to collect and report certain data even if they could be pulled from other systems. There are several enhancements (other than integration) that the SA has pursued after the implementation of the ART grant, including some that were originally planned for the ART grant period but the project schedule and funds ran out before completion. These include adding electronic verification and the ability of LEAs to upload claims.
- **Working with a Vendor:** The vendor that was originally contracted to create WINS did not have the resources to keep up with testing and development at the same time. Despite several efforts to add resources and get the development back on course, the SA negotiated an end to the contract before the project was completed.
- **Cost of Project Manager:** The cost of hiring a project manager to work on this project was very high, in part due to local economic factors and in part due to project delays from the vendor. In the end, the SA spent more of the grant budget on project management than initially planned.
- **Communications:** There were communication challenges among the many stakeholders involved (including the vendor, the project manager, and multiple State agencies). Sometimes decisions were made without involving all parties, and sometimes communication was difficult because IT and business staff did not always know what questions to ask each other. Midway through the project, a business team with subject matter experts was assembled to improve communication and help everyone get on the same page.

### Lessons Learned

The State learned that including representatives from both the IT and business sides in project planning, evaluation, and decision-making can help prevent miscommunications that can turn into bigger issues over time. Project management is key, as is ensuring staff time commitment especially on a large IT project where there is a need for collaboration between technical and business staff. The State also learned that having all the players in place early in the planning and development process (including LEA staff to help pilot new system developments) is very beneficial.



# WISCONSIN



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2010	Grant End Year: 2015
Purpose: Customization of nutrition program management software	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: School Nutrition Accountability System (SNACS)	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$1,960,526.00	Grant Funds Returned: \$207,806.36

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant in 2010 to purchase and implement the School Nutrition Accountability System (SNACS). SNACS is an accountability system designed to help schools reach full Child Nutrition Program (CNP) compliance. Integration with existing DPI systems and applications improves accuracy of reimbursement claims and allows DPI to address administrative errors by School Food Authorities (SFA) as they occur, rather than errors compounding between review cycles. SNACS also provides all SFAs with the ability to use online applications.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide technical assistance and training to schools at risk of administrative errors and help LEAs reach full CNP program compliance.</li> <li>Purchase and host accountability software. This software will allow SA staff to identify and resolve errors as they occur and will target the reduction of errors in small LEAs. The update will improve the accuracy of claims by integrating the existing DPI systems and applications, and will provide online applications for all LEAs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from the grant application to implementation phase.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

## Highlights

Wisconsin's ART grant was awarded to foster school compliance with CNP regulations. The State customized an off-the-shelf system for online applications, claiming, verification, and administrative reviews. At the time of data collection for this report, Wisconsin had not conducted administrative reviews using SNACS due to the delays with the system. Activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- Development of an online CNP system that interfaces with existing DPI systems.

- Development of an online application and verification system. The parent application is available at no cost 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for all SFAs.
- Development of an online claim submission system. The system creates reminders, does claim comparisons, and suggests eligibility.
- Development of an automated administrative review process that allows error identification in real time.
- Improved reporting; reports created for each module within the new system to monitor and benchmark the SFAs.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

In addition to the DPI director, Wisconsin hired a contracted IT employee as project manager, and subsequently hired a project lead to manage the project. The State contracted with the software vendor to develop and implement SNACS. It also engaged nutrition program consultants as subject matter experts.

#### **Funding**

In 2010, Wisconsin received ART grant funding to customize a technology solution and offer technical assistance to error-prone LEAs. The State was initially awarded \$1,960,526 to carry out these activities, and it returned 11% of its awarded funds at the end of the grant period. The project required three no-cost extensions and used State Administrative Expense dollars to fund the project manager position.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$1,960,526.00.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Customization of CNP management software (SNACS).
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense funds.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$207,806.36.

### *Successes*

The grant activities were successful overall, as they developed a system that complies with USDA regulations and integrates with existing DPI systems. The system created an interface between the online contract and claiming system and SNACS accurate claims submission. SNACS automates the administrative review process and helps identify errors as they occur.

- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** The free online application tool is now available through SNACS. Many small SFAs that previously could not afford an online application have taken advantage of it and have found the verification process to be less time-consuming.
- **Error Rates in Application Processing:** The availability of the free online application tool has reduced application errors and expedited application processing. Error rates have declined, but staff cautioned that some schools have implemented the Community Eligibility Provision, which itself likely reduces the State's administrative error rates.
- **Data Systems:** Wisconsin created a system that complies with USDA regulations, interfaces with the State's existing online system, and creates reports allowing the State to monitor SFAs. At the time of data collection for this report, approximately 40 of the State's SFAs were using SNACS.

### *Challenges*

Though some the goals of the project were achieved, there was miscommunication with the vendor before and during the implementation of the grant, which significantly delayed the completion of grant activities.

- **Project Management:** The State fired the first project manager, who was replaced by a project lead who was responsible for managing the project. There were personality conflicts between the State management and subject matter experts and the vendor, leading to project delays and staff turnover. The State had little leverage over the software vendor's staff and schedule, noting there were long delays in system development that the State could not control.
- **Data Systems:** The State did not clearly define requirements during the procurement process. Consequently, its expectations for the final product were not aligned with the vendor's understanding. The State continued to address bugs in the administrative review module after the grant ended. The State owns the source code, but it has been challenging for staff to understand the programming logic, making it difficult to modify and further develop the system to meet the State's needs. SFAs identified glitches in the application and verification modules that continued to be issues at the time of data collection for this report.
- **Communication:** Poorly defined requirements during the procurement phase led to tension between the State and vendor, contributing to communication challenges throughout the contract. The State believes the vendor was not sufficiently responsive to the State's timetable and needs. This belief was exacerbated by insufficient direct contact with the vendor staff developing the product. State staff would have preferred face-to-face communication with the software vendor's developers rather than with the corporate representatives who came on-site.
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** SFAs using PowerSchool or other point-of-sale systems must double enter student data, as the two systems do not communicate.

### *Lessons Learned*

Wisconsin learned that during the procurement process, it is critical for the RFP to specify all system functionality and testing requirements to ensure all expectations are clear and then later to minimize misunderstandings during system development and rollout. The State also learned that when hiring project staff, it is important to assess that both technical and interpersonal skills align with project needs. Wisconsin's experience also highlighted the importance of including in-house IT programmers in early phases of planning and development, so they gain an understanding of the coding logic and can provide support after the contract with the software developer expires.



# WYOMING



## Overview

Grant Start Year: 2009	Grant End Year: 2013
Purpose: Customize technology for the AR process	Extension(s): Yes
Project Name: Wyoming ART	Vendor: Outside, for-profit software vendor
Grant Funds Awarded: \$482,500	Grant Funds Returned: \$160,314.37

In 2009, Wyoming received an Administrative Review and Training (ART) grant to develop and implement a new technology system to identify, reduce, and prevent administrative error for the following programs: National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Care Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, USDA Food Distribution Program, Special Milk Program for Schools, and the Summer Food Service Program. The new system allows the State Agency (SA) to identify at-risk Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) through real-time data analysis. SAs are able to use monitoring information to ensure corrective actions are implemented upon completion of administrative reviews. The new technology also allows the SA to provide appropriate training for LEA staff to prevent repeated administrative errors.

## Goals and Objectives

Grant Application	Post-Grant Implementation
<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customize a new technology system to identify error-prone/at-risk LEAs, by comparing at-risk LEAs that have not met benchmarks to peer districts.</li> <li>Provide corrective action and training to LEA employees to prevent future errors.</li> </ul>	<u>Goals &amp; Objectives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goals and objectives did not change from those stated in the application.</li> </ul>

The following sections include information from grant applications, final grant reports, and discussions with State Agency (SA) and Local Educational Agency (LEA) staff members about their experiences related to the ART grant and its associated activities.

## Highlights

Wyoming’s ART grant was awarded to develop review modules within a new technology system for Child Nutrition Programs to (1) Identify at-risk districts through real-time data analysis; (2) add the ability to modify forms, reports, interfaces, and outputs to improve program integrity and accuracy; (3) use benchmarks as a tool to assess program performance and implement corrective action where warranted; (4) establish a Child Nutrition database to compare at-risk districts with peer districts and implement standards for evaluation; (5) provide training for LEAs to prevent repeated administrative errors; and (6) reduce risk levels for administrative errors. The activities funded by the ART grant achieved the following:

- Developed and implemented new technology and software for accessing and reviewing LEA data to assist with identifying LEAs that have a high level of (or are at risk for) administrative error. The system allows the SA to support and monitor corrective actions as errors are addressed.

- Implemented targeted monitoring within the new system to identify training needs for LEAs, specifically tailored to prevent repeated administrative errors.

### *Planning and Implementation*

#### **Management**

The SA director and finance specialist managed and coordinated the project tasks. The SA director worked with the finance specialist to develop the RFP for the technology vendor. The Wyoming SA staff team is relatively small, so the director took on most of the project management activities, including establishing a timeline, progress reporting, and managing the software vendor. At times, other SA staff would assist, but their participation with the project tasks was limited.

#### **Funding**

An ART grant was awarded to Wyoming for \$482,500 to implement a technology solution with the objective of using benchmarks as a tool to assess program performance, establish a database to compare at-risk districts with peer districts, and provide targeted training and technical assistance to LEA employees to prevent repeated errors. The State also relied on State Administrative Expense funds.

- ❖ **Initial Grant Amount:** \$482,500.
- ❖ **Activities Funded by the Grant:** Customized software and trainings.
- ❖ **Additional Funding Sources:** State Administrative Expense funds.
- ❖ **Funds Returned:** \$160,314.37.

### *Successes*

Wyoming's ART grant allowed the SA to implement a system to reduce administrative errors with LEAs, particularly those at higher risk for producing such errors. Additionally, the system immediately flags trends that suggest technical assistance and training are needed for specific LEAs.

- **Administrative Costs:** The new system identifies at-risk districts with a module automatically producing red flags in each area indicated as a potential issue. Administrative reviewers are able to use time on-site with LEAs to target specific problem areas and implement corrective actions needed.
- **Error Rates:** The review module creates all required USDA reports, and the claiming module interfaces directly with the Wyoming State Government Payment System. Human error has decreased significantly with the automation available with the new technology.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** Training is customized based on the errors reviewed within the system. SA staff are able to quickly identify training needed and monitor progress through the new technology.
- **Administration of School Nutrition Programs:** A single database for Child Nutrition programs allows the SA to identify at-risk districts and the strengths and weaknesses of the programs on a statewide basis. As a result, the SA has experienced an increase in data integrity and has been able to establish statewide standards.

### *Challenges*

Wyoming achieved the goals and objectives for the ART project; however, to do so required a no-cost extension and the State experienced the following challenges with the project:

- **Administration:** The SA director was, at times, overwhelmed. The ART grant project required consistent and detailed oversight, and the SA director was managing the ART project in addition to the day-to-day duties required of the SA director.
- **Training and Professional Standards:** The training was developed as online modules. The SA did not anticipate the lack of technology skills of LEA staff. Basic computer tutorials were conducted with LEA staff to position them to take advantage of the online training sessions.
- **Data Systems:** The testing for the new system was onerous and took more time than originally anticipated. Due to the small number of SA staff, the SA director conducted most of the testing and provided feedback to the technology vendor.

### *Lessons Learned*

The Wyoming ART grant project would have greatly benefitted from having a dedicated project manager. The project required detailed organization and oversight to ensure tasks were completed accurately and were timely. The SA director was often pulled off overall department functions to focus on the project. This caused a significant amount of stress, and project activities were delayed because the director had competing duties (other than the ART grant project) to perform.

The amount of time and work it takes to apply for a grant can be overwhelming for a small State team. If Wyoming were to apply for a grant in the future, it would look to partner with a local university to help it develop its application.

## Appendix B. Research Questions

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1. Describe the interventions funded by the ART grants.
  - a. Why were these interventions chosen?
  - b. How did the interventions and activities as implemented track with the original grant proposal?
2. For those ART Grantees whose projects are related to administrative review, how did the State collect, aggregate, and report data to FNS for administrative reviews and for NSLP and SBP prior to the intervention(s)?
  - a. What data systems and software were used?
  - b. How did interventions change the administrative review process and data systems at the State level? At the LEA level?
3. What were the intended measurable outcome(s) of the interventions?
  - a. How do States perceive the outcomes of the grant?
  - b. How successful were the interventions funded by ART grants in terms of their intended outcomes?
  - c. If possible, what impact did the intervention have on error rates?
4. How did ART Grants impact the perceived efficiency of administrative staff?
  - a. Did ART Grant interventions result in a net change to staff time on certain activities?
  - b. What impact did the interventions have on State administrative costs?
5. If ART Grants were used to improve the Administrative Review (AR) process, what impact did the intervention have on the State conducting the AR process?
  - a. Did State and LEA staff spend more or less time on administrative review processes and other activities related to the AR process during and after the grant period than they did on these activities prior to ART Grant funding?
6. If ART Grants were used to improve direct certification processes, what impact did the intervention have on State direct certification rates?
7. If ART Grants were used for training on program requirements and professional standards, what impact did the intervention have on the State meeting these requirements?
8. If ART Grants were used to improve direct certification processes, what impact did this have on claiming and eligibility under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)?
9. If grant funding was used to improve data systems or general administrative processes with wide applicability, how did interventions funded by ART Grants also impact administration of other programs beyond SBP and NSLP, such as the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)?
10. What challenges did grantees face in the implementation of their interventions?
  - a. How did they overcome these challenges?
11. Did intervention proceed according to schedule? In the case of delays, what were the causes? How many no-cost extensions were necessary to fully implement the intervention? Why were these extensions necessary?

12. Do any challenges from the ART Grant interventions linger? If so, what steps are States taking to overcome these?
13. What facilitators aided grantees in implementation of their interventions? How did they identify these facilitators?
14. How were grant funds utilized? What other funding sources were used for the ART Grant interventions?
15. How did States sustain their ART grant interventions after grant funding ended? How were State Administrative Expense (SAE) funds used to maintain projects, if at all?
16. How can USDA administrative review guidance be improved to take into account lessons learned from ART Grant Interventions?

## Appendix C. Extant Data Review Protocol

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These reviews began with the FNS ART *Grant Summary of Best Practices*, the FNS request for application, grant application reviews, and then included a review of the final progress report, if it existed. The protocol is organized in four sections: (1) Preliminary Questions; (2) Grant Applications; (3) Final Progress Report; and (4) Challenges and Outcomes.

C1. Preliminary Questions

**Extant Data Review Protocol**

Reviews will begin with the FNS ART Grant Compendium and the grant application review, then include a review of the final progress report, if it exists. Use additional intermediary progress reports to capture or help obtain information needed.

Please complete all three modules on this tab, then proceed to the second tab of the document.

**1. BASIC INFORMATION**

Grantee State:

Year of Grant Award:

Year of Grant Completion:

Final Progress Report Available:

**3. GRANT APPLICATION**

Which of the following strategies were included in the state agency's ART Implementation Grant Application? Please mark all that apply.

- Training of School Food Authority (SFA) administrative personnel in application, certification, verification, meal counting and meal claiming procedures. Training may include internet-based training sessions.
- Oversight and training activities focused on the nutritional quality of school meals.
- Modifications that may be necessary to update processes and systems to comply with revisions to the new Administrative Review process first implemented in School Year 2013-2014.
- Technology improvements which demonstrate an ability to address administrative errors through the use of targeted monitoring and increased training in error-prone LEAs. States choosing this option must clearly demonstrate how the proposed technology can be used to implement state-level activities, specifically review and training activities associated with error-prone LEAs.

**2. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY**

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**Grant Application**

Available?

State/Territory:

Award Year:

Completion Year:

In-House or Online?

Description or Notes:

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**Interim Progress Report**

Available?

In-House or Online?

Description or Notes:

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**Final Progress Report**

Available?

In-House or Online?

Description or Notes:

---

**Compendium**

Available?

Received TA?

Award Year:

Completion Year:

Description or Notes:

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**Other**

Name:

Available?

State/Territory:

Award Year:

Completion Year:

In-House or Online?

Description or Notes:

## C2. Grant Applications

### Extant Data Review Protocol

Reviews will begin with the FNS ART Grant Compendium and the grant application review, then include a review of the final progress report, if it exists. Use additional intermediary progress reports to capture or help obtain information needed.

Please complete all five modules on this tab, then proceed to the third tab of the document.

**1. What were the grantee's goals and objectives from the grant application?**

Goal 1:	<input type="text"/>	Objective 1a:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 1b:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 1c:	<input type="text"/>
Goal 2:	<input type="text"/>	Objective 2a:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 2b:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 2c:	<input type="text"/>
Goal 3:	<input type="text"/>	Objective 3a:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 3b:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 3c:	<input type="text"/>
Goal 4:	<input type="text"/>	Objective 4a:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 4b:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 4c:	<input type="text"/>
Goal 5:	<input type="text"/>	Objective 5a:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 5b:	<input type="text"/>
		Objective 5c:	<input type="text"/>

**2. What activities were stated [plan to meet goals and objectives to meet the goals and objectives from the grant applications?]**

**3. What were stated performance measures for each objective from the grant applications?**

**4. What were anticipated challenges/issues and proposed solutions from the grant applications?**

Enter challenge/issue here. Enter proposed solution here.
Enter challenge/issue here. Enter proposed solution here.
Enter challenge/issue here. Enter proposed solution here.

5a. Was the grantee the recipient of technical assistance from the FNS contractor?

5b. From which state?

### C3. Final Progress Report

#### Extant Data Review Protocol

Reviews will begin with the FNS ART Grant Compendium and the grant application review, then include a review of the final progress report, if it exists. Use additional intermediary progress reports to capture or help obtain information needed.

Please complete all three modules on this tab, then proceed to the fourth tab of this document.

1. Did goals and objectives change from the original application?

3. Was grantee able to meet performance measures as described in the grant application?

Describe which ones, and why not.

2. Was grantee able to achieve all original goals and objectives?

### C4. Challenges & Outcomes

**Extant Data Review Protocol**

Reviews will begin with the FHS ART Grant Compendium and the grant application review, then include a review of the final progress report, if it exists. Use additional intermediary progress reports to capture or help obtain information needed.

Please complete all three modules on this tab, then check your work throughout and finish.

**1. Any additional challenges not described in grant applications?**

Yes

Describe challenge one here.	Describe challenge four here.
Describe challenge two here.	Describe challenge five here.
Describe challenge three here.	Describe challenge six here.

**2. Please describe any key lessons learned.**

Describe key lesson one.	Describe key lesson four.
Describe key lesson two.	Describe key lesson five.
Describe key lesson three.	Describe key lesson six.

**3. Any additional information about the grantee that might be useful to know for the interview, for example:**

<b>Unintended consequences of intervention?</b> Enter text here.	<b>Reporting improvements?</b> Enter text here.
<b>Changes as a result of implementing intervention?</b> Enter text here.	<b>Process improvements/changes as a result of intervention?</b> Enter text here.
<b>Identified barriers and strategies for addressing them?</b> Enter text here.	<b>Performance improvements/changes as a result of the intervention?</b> Enter text here.

## **Appendix D. Interview Protocols**

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There are three interview protocols: (1) State Agency; (2) Local Education Agency; and (3) State Agency Administrative Reviewers.

**D1. State Agency Interview Protocol**

My name is [name], and I’m a researcher at [Abt Associates/Insight Policy Research]. My colleague, [name], is also present to take notes throughout the interview. As you may know, we are conducting a study of the Administrative Review and Training (ART) Grants for the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The primary purpose of this study is to better understand the ART grant interventions and to gather information about perceived results and implementation challenges. Additionally, we are interested in finding out how States sustain the grant-funded activities once the grant has ended. Your candid responses can help identify opportunities for improving the effectiveness of the ART grants and inform FNS about the ways these grants have influenced the administration and delivery of child nutrition programs among grantees.

We are conducting interviews with a total of 20 States for this study. When we complete the interviews, we will summarize your responses with those provided by the other States in a final report for FNS. We will not use any names in that report or identify any individual respondents.

We expect our conversation will take between 45 and 60 minutes. Do you have any questions for me about the project in general or what we will be discussing today?

With your permission, we would like to record the conversation to ensure our notes accurately reflect your responses. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

***Confirm permission once recording starts. Note the State Agency name and date and time of the call.***

- Yes
- No

<b>State Agency</b>	
<b>Interview Date</b>	
<b>Time Start</b>	
<b>Time End</b>	

Let’s begin with introductions.

Please provide your name, job title, role in the Administrative Review process generally, and role on ART grant funded activities in particular, including how long you have been involved in that role.

Name	Title	Role in Administrative Review Process	Role with ART Grant	Time in Role (Years/Months)

**Planning and Implementation**

Extant Data Summary		Note Changes Given by Interviewee
State		
Year of Grant Award		
Year of Grant Completion		
Intervention Strategy(ies)		
Goals/Objectives		
Performance Measures		
Grant Activity Summary		

**NOTE TO INTERVIEWER:** *The table above will be populated prior to the interview with data from the application, progress reports, final report, and the ART Grant Summary of Best Practices.*

1. As we begin, we are referring to the ART Grant funded in year *(verify from table above)* and completed in *(refer to table above)*.

Based on my review of your ART grant application, I understand your State Agency applied for this grant for the following reasons (briefly summarize reasons/targeted issues discussed in grant application). Would you say my understanding is correct (as far as you remember)?

- a. If not, can you tell me in your own words why your State Agency applied for the ART grant in the first place?

2. Let's talk about the project that was implemented with ART grant funds and the issues the project was intended to address.
  - a. Prior to applying for the ART grant, who was involved in the decision-making to apply for the ART grant? Who was involved in the grant application process? ***(PROBE: If SFAs were not mentioned, ask:)*** Were SFAs involved in the grant planning or application process? What role did they play?
  - b. After the ART grant was awarded what was the process for managing the ART grant project? How did you monitor the project tasks, schedule, and budget?
  
3. We are interested in how States and their SFAs dealt with issues or challenges during implementation. ***(RQ4)***
  - a. What issues did you encounter during implementation?
  - b. How were these issues addressed?
  - c. Were the steps that were taken to address those issues effective? In other words, did they resolve the problems being targeted? Did they make it easier to implement the project afterwards?
  - d. What issues did your SFAs encounter during implementation?
  - e. How were these issues addressed?
  
4. Oftentimes, project plans require some tweaking during implementation. How did your project plans or activities change between planning and implementation, if at all? ***(RQ1a)***
  
5. Did the project progress according to the original schedule? If not, what caused the delay? ***(RQ4a)***
  - a. Were any extensions needed? If so, how many? For what reasons? Did you receive any additional funding or were these no-cost extensions? ***(RQ4b)***
  
6. How did you evaluate the project's successes? Who was involved in that process and what was their job title and role within the organization?
  
7. We are also interested in getting a better understanding of how grant funds were utilized and whether you used any other funding sources to implement or sustain grant activities.
  - a. Can you provide an overview of how the grant funds were allocated? ***(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: If reports include this information, verify that the information in the reports is complete and up to date.)*** ***(RQ6)***

- b. What additional funding sources, if any, did you use to support grant implementation? *(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Ask the questions below if additional funding sources were used.)*
- i. How were these additional funds used?
  - ii. How long were these funds used (for example, duration of grant, when grant monies ran out, a specified number of months, etc.)?
  - iii. Are these funds still available? Are you still eligible to apply for these funds in the future? (RQ6A)

### Short- and Long-Term Effects

8. Now I want to ask a few questions about the specific procedures or activities your grant targeted, and the outcomes.
- a. *(FOR GRANTS PROJECTS RELATED TO ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW:)* Would you please briefly describe the process for Administrative Reviews prior to the intervention? We are interested in processes directly addressed by the Administrative Review such as the off-site and on-site review process, the corrective action process, and any fiscal action process, if applicable. (RQ2)
 

What tool was used to collect the Administrative Review information from SFAs (for example, Excel spreadsheets provided by USDA, paper forms, etc.)?

    - i. How did your project change the Administrative Review process at the State level? (RQ2a, RQ3e)
    - ii. How did your project change the Administrative Review process at the SFA level?
  - b. Do you think State staff spent more or less time on the Administrative Review process and other activities related to the Administrative Review process during and after the grant than they did on these activities prior to the grant? What about SFA staff? (RQ3e)
    - i. *(PROBE: If the new process requires additional time:)* Do you think the new Administrative Review process will go faster for the State staff or SFA as they become more familiar with it?
  - c. In general, what impact did the project have on State administrative error rates? (RQ3a)

- d. How do you think the intervention affected program staff, at the State Agency level and the SFA level? (RQ3b)
- i. Did it simplify the work of State Agency staff or make it more complicated?
  - ii. How about SFA staff?
  - iii. Do you think State Agency staff spend more or less time on administrative tasks targeted by the project than they did before funding was received?
  - iv. How about SFA staff?
- e. **(FOR GRANTS INTENDED TO REDUCE ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS:)** What savings or increased administrative costs have you seen as a result of the ART grant intervention? (RQ3c)
- i. Was there a specific area or process you were targeting to reduce costs? **(PROBE: If targeted area was mentioned with an observed decrease in costs:)** Did you see costs increase in any other area despite decreased costs in the targeted area as a result of ART grant activities?
  - ii. At what point would you say you started to see those savings/increased costs (e.g., how long after implementation of the project)? **(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Probe from beginning of grant period.)**
  - iii. What specific factors contributed to those costs or savings?
  - iv. Do you have any evidence, such as the time necessary to complete the Administrative Reviews or changes in the number staff needed to perform Administrative Reviews that demonstrate these effects or is this based on your estimation?
- f. **(FOR GRANTS INTENDED TO IMPROVE DIRECT CERTIFICATION PROCESSES:)** What impact, if any, did the project funded with the ART grant have on direct certification rates? (RQ3f)
- i. What about the direct certification procedures?
  - ii. What changes, if any, have you seen since the grant was implemented?

- iii. What effects, if any, did the grant have on claiming and eligibility under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)? (RQ3h)
- g. ***(FOR GRANTS USED FOR TRAINING ON PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS:)*** What outcomes were you hoping to see as a result of the training funded by your ART grant? (RQ3g)
- i. Which of those outcomes were successfully accomplished by the end of the grant?
  - ii. How about since the grant ended? ***(PROBES: What changes on SFA error rates, if any, have you seen; for example, meal counting and claiming, DC matching, verification, etc.)?***
  - iii. What are some other outcomes of the training you think we should know about? These may include positive or negative outcomes that were not specifically targeted.
  - iv. What do you consider the most important outcomes of the training? What outcomes did you see at the SFA level? At the State level?
9. The ART grants targeted the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program; however, we are interested in exploring impacts the grants may have had on the administration of other child nutrition programs. Do you administer either the Child and Adult Care Food Program or the Summer Food Service Program? (RQ3i)
- a. Please describe any impact on your school food service program administration of the Child and Adult Care Food Program or the Summer Food Service Program due to the implementation of the [local project name]. ***(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Probe for unintended consequences.)***

### Outcomes and Challenges

10. From your perspective, what were the most important outcomes of the ART grant-funded intervention (s), and how do these compare to the anticipated outcomes you discussed earlier? (RQ3) ***(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: These may be positive or negative and you may probe accordingly.)***
- a. Did you see any unanticipated outcomes?
11. How long after implementation did you first begin to see results from the project funded with the ART grant? (RQ3)

12. From your perspective, what were the top three challenges your State Agency experienced with grant activities before and during the implementation of the ART grant? How did you address these? *(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Probe for specifics as it relates to what has been discussed about the State Agency’s objectives for the grant activities.)*
- a. What are some lingering challenges following implementation of ART grant funding? What plans, if any, are in place to address those challenges? Have you applied or are you currently considering applying for another ART grant in order to address these lingering challenges? (RQ4c)

**Lessons Learned**

13. If you were to apply for another ART grant what would you do differently? *(NOTE FOR INTERVIEWER: Probe for during the planning phase, implementation phase and closeout phase.)*

**Wrap-up**

14. Is there anything we did not ask that you think is important for us to know, or you were hoping we would discuss?
15. I realize that SFAs may have multiple ongoing projects at any given time, but we want to make sure the people we speak with focus specifically on ART grant-funded activities when answering our questions. How would you suggest we ask our questions so that respondents understand we are asking specifically about activities funded by the ART grant?

<b>Local Project Name</b>	
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Thank you for answering my questions.

That completes today’s interview. We may select State Agencies to further discuss details about challenges, successes and lessons learned for future grants. Would you be the best person to identify staff who may have expertise/experience with specific ART grant activities, such as training development, IT solutions, etc. for a future discussion?

- o Yes.
- o No. Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you again. Have a nice day.

*Stop recording and note time interview concluded.*

**D2. Local Educational Agency Interview Protocol**

***NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: The SFA may know the intervention/project by a name other than “ART Grant.” Prior to the interview(s) with SFA staff, verify data collected from State Agency.***

<b>Local Project Name</b>	
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My name is [name], and I’m a researcher at [Abt Associates]. My colleague, [name], is also present to take notes throughout the interview. As you may know, we are conducting a study of projects funded by Administrative Review and Training grants, or ART grants. Your State received an ART grant in (insert year) to help fund the (insert project name).

The purpose of this study is to gather additional information about these projects, including their results and implementation challenges. Your candid responses can identify opportunities for improving the effectiveness of these projects and help FNS better understand their effects on the administration and delivery of child nutrition programs.

We are conducting interviews with a total of 20 States and 40 SFAs for this study. When we complete the interviews, we will summarize your responses with those provided by others in a final report for FNS. We will not use any names in that report or identify any individual respondents.

We expect our conversation will take between 45 and 60 minutes. Do you have any questions for me about the study or what we will be discussing today?

With your permission, we would like to record the conversation to ensure our notes accurately reflect your responses. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

***Confirm permission once recording starts. Note the SFA name and date and time of the call.***

- Yes
- No

<b>Local Education Agency</b>	
<b>Interview Date</b>	
<b>Time Start</b>	
<b>Time End</b>	

Let’s begin with introductions.

I would like to confirm your names and job titles and ask your role in the Administrative Review process.

Name	Title	Role in Administrative Review Process	Length of Time with the AR Process

**Planning and Implementation**

Extant Data Summary	
State	
Year of Grant Award	
Year of Grant Completion	
Intervention Strategy(ies)	
Goals/Objectives	
Performance Measures	
Grant Activity Summary	

***NOTE TO INTERVIEWER:** Prior to the interview, the table above will be populated with data from the application, progress reports, and final report. Questions preceded by [For SFA] are best answered by the SFA/Food Service Director (or their designee). If we speak with someone other than the SFA/Food Service Director, we should ask the designated interviewee to gather the requested information from the SFA/Food Service Director prior to the interview.*

1. **[For SFA]** I’d like to start with a few questions about your school food service program’s level of engagement in the *[local project name]*.
  - a. **[For SFA]** How, if at all, were you involved in the grant planning or grant application process?
  - b. **[For SFA]** How did the State Agency involve you in other phases of the project, such as testing, reviewing training materials, etc.?
  - c. **[For SFA]** What information did the State Agency share with you about the goals of the *[local project name]* and the plans for reaching those goals?
  - d. **[For SFA]** How did the State Agency share information about the *[local project name]* with you? Probe: For example, via newsletter, email, or through training?

- e. How could the State Agency have communicated more effectively with your school food service program about this project?

### Short- and Long-Term Effects

Now I want to ask a few questions about the *[local project name]* and how it affected your school food service program.

2. ***(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: If applicable to intervention(s):) [For SFA]*** Have you been through an Administrative Review since the *[local project name]* was implemented? ***(If yes:)*** Please briefly describe the Administrative Review process prior to, and following, the implementation of the *[local project name]*. We are interested in processes directly addressed by the Administrative Review such as the off-site and on-site review process, the corrective action process, and any fiscal action process, if applicable. (RQ2)
  - a. Do you think these changes were helpful or an improvement over the previous process?
3. Did your SFA staff receive any training on the new Administrative Review process as a result of the ART grant intervention? What did the training cover? How did it help? (RQ3g)
  - a. What topics have you or staff participated in? In what format was the training provided (e.g., in-person training, State conference, webinar, on-line training)?
  - b. What effect has the training had on errors in the administrative process for SFAs (for example, menu pattern compliance, meal counting and claiming, certification)? (RQ3a)
  - c. What feedback have you received on the training and its effectiveness?
  - d. What recommendations, if any, do you have for improving the training?
4. ***[For SFA]*** From your perspective, how has the *[local project name]* affected your program operations? ***(NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: These may be positive or negative, probe accordingly. Also probe specifically for staff time if not mentioned by interviewee.)***
  - a. ***[For SFA]*** What tasks are simpler or less time-consuming for staff as a result of the *[local project name]*? (RQ3b)
  - b. ***[For SFA]*** How did you determine it was more or less time consuming?
  - c. ***(If not already addressed:)*** Have you experienced any changes in the administrative level of effort since the (local project name) was implemented? (RQ3c)

5. ***(IF THE ART GRANT WAS USED FOR TECHNOLOGY:)*** [For SFA] How did staff respond to the new system implemented under the grant?
  - a. [For SFA] How has the use of new technology affected the level of effort? Do you think it saves time? Did it help to streamline procedures? ***(PROBE: What activities increased or decreased the level of effort (e.g., meal claims) through the ART project?)***
  - b. What type of training and/or guidance was provided to the SFA from the State Agency? Was it helpful? Are there improvements that could have been made to how the training was provided?
6. [For SFA] What was the initial opinion by staff of the new technology? Did their opinion change over time? ***(IF THE GRANT WAS USED TO IMPROVE DIRECT CERTIFICATION:)*** Do you think the direct certification process became easier as a result? How so? (RQ3f)
7. Does your school food service program participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)? If so, what effect did project activities have on claiming and eligibility? (RQ3h)

### Outcomes and Lessons Learned

We want to ask about the positive and negative results of the *[local project name]*.

9. From your perspective, what were the major positive results of the *[local project name]*? What were some negative results of the *[local project name]*? (RQ3)
  - a. About how long did it take to see those results?

### Challenges and Facilitators of Success

We are particularly interested in learning about challenges related to the *[local project name]* as well as any facilitators of success. (RQ4)

10. From your perspective, what were the top challenges your school food service program experienced during or after implementation of the *[local project name]*?
11. ***(NOTE FOR INTERVIEWER: Relate to specific grant focus:)*** How did you address those challenges?
12. How did your school food service program get program staff buy-in for the *[local project name]* and any associated changes or activities?
13. What type of support did the State Agency offer during implementation of the *[local project name]* (e.g., technical assistance, training, manuals, etc.)? At what point in the *[local project name]* was assistance made available to your school food service program?

Did your school food service program have to request the assistance or did the State make it available as part of the project?

14. How effective was the assistance provided by the State? What recommendations, if any, do you have for improving the assistance offered?
15. *[For SFA]* How has the *[local project name]* assisted you in better managing your school nutrition program?
  - a. *[For SFA]* What, if anything, was most helpful?
  - b. *[For SFA]* What challenges were not addressed by the *[local project name]*?

### Wrap-up

16. Is there anything we did not ask you think is important for us to know, or you were hoping we would discuss?

Thank you for answering my questions. Have a nice day.

*Stop recording and note time interview concluded.*

**D3. State Agency Administrative Reviewers Interview Protocol**

My name is [name], and I’m a researcher at *Abt Associates*. My colleague, [name], is also present to take notes throughout the interview. As you may know, we are conducting a study of the Administrative Review and Training (ART) Grants for the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The primary purpose of this study is to better understand the ART grant interventions and to gather information about perceived results and implementation challenges. Additionally, we are interested in finding out how States sustain the grant-funded activities once the grant has ended. Your candid **responses about how the Administrative Review (AR) Process works in your State, both before and after the implementation of the ART grant**, can help identify opportunities for improving the effectiveness of the ART grants and inform FNS about the ways these grants have influenced the administration and delivery of child nutrition programs among grantees.

We are conducting interviews with a total of 20 States for this study; 10 of those were selected for interviews about their AR process. When we complete the interviews, we will summarize your responses with those provided by the other States in a final report for FNS. We will not use any names in that report or identify any individual respondents.

We expect our conversation will take 30 – 45 minutes. Do you have any questions for me about the project in general or what we will be discussing today?

With your permission, we would like to record the conversation to ensure our notes accurately reflect your responses. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

***Confirm permission once recording starts. Note the State Agency name and date and time of the call.***

- Yes
- No

<b>State Agency</b>	
<b>Interview Date</b>	
<b>Time Start</b>	
<b>Time End</b>	

Let’s begin with introductions.

Please provide your name, job title, role in the Administrative Review (AR) process and how long you have been involved with AR.

Name	Title	Role in Administrative Review Process	Role with ART Grant	Time in Role (Years/Months)

We have already spoken to [INSERT NAME OF SA INTERVIEWEE] and learned about [INSERT NAME OF INTERVENTION], funded by the grant awarded in [20XX]. We want to learn more about how ARs are conducted in your State.

1. Approximately how many ARs have you conducted in this State since [INSERT NAME OF INTERVENTION], funded by the grant awarded in [20XX] was implemented?
2. Would you please briefly describe the process for ARs *prior* to the implementation of [INSERT NAME OF INTERVENTION] for [Grant awarded in 20XX]? *We are interested in processes directly addressed by the AR such as, the off-site and on-site review process, the corrective action process, and any fiscal action process, if applicable.*
  - a. What tool was used to collect the AR information from LEAs (for example, Excel spreadsheets provided by USDA, paper forms, etc.)?
  - b. Who at the State Agency (SA) was involved in the AR? What were their roles? How many reviewers did the State have? Were they SA employees or contractors?
3. Now, we will discuss the *current* AR process. We are interested in processes directly addressed by the AR such as the off-site and on-site review process, the corrective action process, and any fiscal action process, if applicable.
  - a. What tool(s) is NOW used to collect the AR information from LEAs (for example, Excel spreadsheets provided by USDA, online forms, etc.)?
  - b. Who at the SA is involved in the AR NOW? What are their roles? How many reviewers does the State have? Are they SA employees or contractors?
  - c. What *specific* parts of the AR were affected (i.e., mode of data collection, data tracking and reporting capabilities, LEA training, SA training?) *PROBE for details.*
  - d. How has the offsite process changed for the SA reviewer/LEA, since the ART grant project was implemented? *PROBE for details.*

- e. How has the onsite process changed for the SA reviewer/LEA, since the ART grant project was implemented? **PROBE for details.**
- f. How has the corrective action or fiscal action process changed for the SA reviewer/LEA, since the ART grant project was implemented? **PROBE for details.**
- g. What do you see as the biggest changes to the AR process at the **State level**? **PROBE for off-site and on-site.**
- h. From your perspective, what do you think has been the biggest change for **LEAs or at the LEA level**?
- i. How many of these changes are related to the [INSERT NAME OF INTERVENTION] versus USDA policy changes?
- j. Do you **now** spend more or less time on the AR process and related activities than you did before the changes? **Probe for why or why not.**
  - i. **(PROBE: If the new process requires additional time)** How much of this additional time is related to the [INSERT NAME OF INTERVENTION] versus USDA policy changes?
  - ii. **(PROBE: If the new process requires additional time)** Do you think the new AR process will go faster for you as you become more familiar with it?
- k. Did [INSERT NAME OF INTERVENTION] simplify your work or make it more complicated? **PROBE, why or why not?**

### Successes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

- 4. Does the new AR process result in improved performance? How? (i.e., lower error rate, better meal pattern compliance, fewer corrective actions, etc.)
- 5. From your perspective, what are the top three successes related to the new AR process? If not mentioned: **Ask if there were successes at the State level that differed from the LEA level.**
- 6. From your perspective, what were/are the top three challenges related to the new AR process? How did you address these?
- 7. If you could change anything about the new AR process, what would you do differently?

## Wrap-up

8. Is there anything we did not ask that you think is important for us to know, or you were hoping we would discuss?

Thank you for answering my questions. That completes today's interview.

Have a nice day.

*Stop recording and note time interview concluded.*

## Appendix E. Data Summary Table

The following appendix includes a summary of the data presented in the above graphics. The information provided is drawn from both the extant data and qualitative interviews.

<i>Grantee</i>	<b>Intervention Type</b>	<b>Intended Duration (Years)</b>	<b>Number of Extensions</b>	<b>Extension Duration (Years)</b>	<b>Total Duration (Years)</b>	<b>Grant Amount</b>	<b>Amount Returned</b>
<i>AL</i>	Technology Intervention Only	2.6	1	1.0	3.6	\$494,769.00	\$217,491.00
<i>AK</i>	Technology Intervention Only	2.1	1	1.0	3.1	\$1,058,915.00	\$3,751.98
<i>CA</i>	Training Intervention Only	2.6	0	N/A	2.6	\$500,000.00	\$159,942.09
<i>GU</i>	Technology Intervention Only	3.6	1	1.0	4.6	\$1,700,000.00	\$53,482.61
<i>HI</i>	Training Intervention Only	2.1	2	4.0	6.1	\$1,499,385.00	\$46,613.71
<i>ID</i>	Training Intervention Only	2.6	0	N/A	2.6	\$251,655.00	\$0.00
<i>IN</i>	Technology Intervention Only	2.4	1	1.0	3.4	\$1,017,920.00	\$45,901.65
<i>IA</i>	Technology Intervention Only	2.6	2	2.7	5.3	\$1,700,000.00	\$0.00
<i>KS</i>	Both Intervention Types	3.0	1	0.8	3.8	\$1,263,223.00	\$0.00
<i>MA '12</i>	Both Intervention Types	2.1	1	0.3	2.4	\$1,243,647.88	\$9,894.19
<i>MA '14</i>	Training Intervention Only	3.0	0	N/A	3.0	\$1,495,840.00	\$4,220.80
<i>MI</i>	Technology Intervention Only	3.0	1	0.8	3.8	\$966,618.00	\$0.00
<i>MO</i>	Technology Intervention Only	1.9	4	3.5	5.4	\$1,276,900.00	\$143,392.56
<i>NH</i>	Both Intervention Types	3.1	2	1.5	4.6	\$1,409,532.85	\$753,202.42
<i>ND</i>	Technology Intervention Only	2.3	2	1.2	3.5	\$389,973.00	\$0.00
<i>PA '13</i>	Technology Intervention Only	3.0	0	N/A	3.0	\$1,499,977.00	\$0.00
<i>PA '14</i>	Training Intervention Only	3.0	0	N/A	3.0	\$464,801.00	\$0.00
<i>RI</i>	Technology Intervention Only	2.0	0	N/A	2.0	\$312,183.00	\$5,680.15
<i>SD</i>	Technology Intervention Only	3.1	1	0.2	3.4	\$843,158.00	\$315,580.22
<i>WA</i>	Technology Intervention Only	2.4	4	2.8	5.1	\$1,478,700.00	\$0.00
<i>WI</i>	Both Intervention Types	2.6	4	3.0	5.6	\$1,960,526.00	\$207,806.36
<i>WY</i>	Technology Intervention Only	2.6	1	1.0	3.6	\$482,500.00	\$160,314.37