

Arizona Training Program Ensures Consistency, Cuts Costs

By Mary Branham Dusenberry

Facing a \$2 billion budget shortfall, Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano was looking for changes to make state government more efficient.

One area where state officials found savings was **Arizona Government University**, which was established in 2003 but underwent changes in 2005 to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of state employee training.

When Joellyn Pollock became director of AZGU—as it's known in Arizona—all nine large state agencies each had a designated training leader and all had previously agreed to a specific curriculum for classes, many of which were duplicative across agencies. A uniform curriculum didn't happen.

So Napolitano signed an executive order establishing a governing board for AZGU that developed plans for services, for centralizing the training system and for funding the program, according to Pollock. The revamped AZGU, which is one of eight national winners of CSG Innovations Awards, started with 19 classes, which replaced the duplicated training offered in individual agencies. It has grown to include classes that all agencies might need.

Eliminating training duplication wasn't the only goal of AZGU; Pollock said the training was in desperate need of an update.

"The training was not structurally sound. Some of it was old," she said. "Everything had to be redone, updated, so that's what we spent 2005 doing." AZGU also conducted a needs analysis of leadership development in state agencies.

Of course, some training remains with individual agencies

and departments. Technical training germane to a specific agency is still taught by an expert in that agency.

"We always focus in whatever we're doing on 'are there people in every agency that need something like this?'" Pollock said.

Sometimes, the push for classes begins in one agency and could offer benefits to others, she said. For instance, a workflow change in the registrar of contractors revealed a need for a keyboarding class. AZGU found that several agencies could also use such a class.

"That's always a marker: 'Will it improve the performance of employees across the enterprise and is it cost-efficient?' because we're all about efficiencies," Pollock said.

In addition to creating more efficiency, larger classes create a better learning environment.

"A lot of times we don't have the volumes that create a good learning environment," she said. "If two or three people are in the class you don't get the same energy or input and ideas and sharing as you do when you have 10 or 12."

But getting that many people in need of the same type of training together can sometimes be difficult, especially since 60 percent of state employees work in Phoenix, another 20 percent work in Tucson, and the rest are scattered around the state, according to Pollock.

AZGU addresses that problem by offering classes via I-link, where employees take the training via computer at their desk, according to Pollock. That cuts the travel cost for agencies with employees in far-flung areas of the state, but still provides interaction with the trainer and classmates.



Training for Arizona State Employees are offered through Arizona Government University.

"We're just thrilled that we're able to offer to people in outlying areas that we haven't been able to reach in the past," said Pollock.

But success didn't come without protest. While eliminating duplication obviously saved time and ensured conformity in training, some agencies were hesitant to endorse AZGU. That attitude is slowly changing, according to Pollock.

Employees who had participated in training, however, began to talk about how good and useful the training was. Now, any training program offered by AZGU is exclusive to the program. That eliminated "the most vicious and insidious costs," when an employee transferred to another agency, according to Pollock. Those employees didn't have to retake the same training

in the new agency.

Funding for AZGU comes from three sources:

- agency payments of \$8 per employee at the beginning of the fiscal year to develop curriculum and updates;
- training delivery fees starting at \$10.50 per hour for each employee who takes training; and
- money from the human resources arm of state government, which is required by law to fund training.

Pollock is pleased with the growth and success of AZGU, and said the program can be easily replicated in other states.

"We always have room for improvement and things continue to change," said Pollock. "But I can tell you that our training is structurally sound. It's updated. Things are consistent."

FAST FACTS

- The initial budget for AZGU in 2005 when the program was revamped was \$1.2 million.
- AZGU courses are developed in a competency-based structure, and trainees are asked to give feedback after taking courses.
- AZGU training is provided by experts in the field to ensure quality and consistency across curriculum.