ONLINE GRANTS:

AN ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE SUBGRANT INFORMATION MANAGEMENT ON-LINE SYSTEM (SIMON)

AN ACTION REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

BY
MARIA M. SANTOS

mms2616@fsu.edu
mariasantos@fdle.state.fl.us

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA
August, 2006
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Government agencies provide online services because they save time and increases efficiency. Electronic government has transformed the public sector into a results-driven culture, and this is something that the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) understands. FDLE, which is a major funding source for law enforcement organizations throughout Florida, understands the need to adapt and invest in new technology. It created the Subgrant Information Management ON-line (SIMON) system, which went live on October 1, 2004.

SIMON continues to face criticism over accessibility. Improving accessibility is necessary because of the importance and contributions of law enforcement agencies, the need to disperse funds accordingly, and because advanced technology is effective at fighting and deterring crime. FDLE funding is used to purchase and maintain crime fighting equipment, train personnel, and support juvenile and rehabilitation programs.

Information was collected using academic literature, government publications and databases. Federal and state websites were also utilized. Subgrantees and FDLE employees gave their insights and shared their experiences with SIMON during phone interviews and through oral feedback and training questionnaires.

The report provides three policy options for strengthening SIMON accessibility: employee training, subgrantee training, and process reengineering. The criteria of time, money, and performance were used to assess the options. It was determined that subgrantee training is the most viable option. By providing training and refresher courses for new and returning subgrantees, SIMON users will be better equipped to navigate
through the system more efficiently. Once subgrantees become familiar with the program, they can complete their application and document submissions in a timely manner; this in turn allows FDLE Office of Criminal Justice Grants employees to complete their reviews and award the grants.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES 5
LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL 6

Section

I. PROBLEM STATEMENT 7

II. BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW 10
  Background 10
  Literature Review 13

III. METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION 17
  Methodology 17
  Evaluation Criteria 18

IV. MANAGEMENT POLICY OPTIONS 20
  Option One: Employee Training 20
  Option Two: Subgrantee Training 23
  Option Three: Process Reengineering 27

V. CONCLUSION 32

REFERENCES 35

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 37
LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Level of Importance in Increasing Accessibility 32
November 06, 2006

Gerald Bailey, Commissioner
Florida Department of Law Enforcement
2331 Phillips Road
Tallahassee, FL 32304

Dear Mr. Bailey:

It is with honor that I submit to you *Online Grants: An Analysis of Options to Strengthen the Subgrant Information Management ON-Line System (SIMON)*. Research was gathered over a period of six months. Strengthening SIMON accessibility is necessary because law enforcement agencies throughout the state rely on FDLE funding to purchase and maintain equipment, train personnel, and support rehabilitation programs.

After examining the alternative policies of employee training, subgrantee training, and process reengineering, I concluded that improving subgrantee training is the best option. The alternative policy was evaluated by using the criteria of time, money, and performance. Subgrantee training received high scores for both time and money. Performance scored lower because it has not improved much with the introduction of SIMON.

Providing solid training for subgrantees will also lead to the fulfillment of the other alternative policies. Doing so will increase performance and in the long run, lead to process reengineering. This recommendation will allow users to effectively apply for the funding needed to fight and deter crime throughout the state. Technology is transforming government, so it is necessary to provide the public with the necessary tools to adapt.

Sincerely,

Maria M. Santos
Florida Department of Law Enforcement
Office of Criminal Justice Grants
2331 Phillips Road
Tallahassee, FL 32308
(850) 410-8700
I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Electronic government has been created to improve public service delivery and responsiveness. Online services can save time, money, and increase organization performance. Time is saved when information is submitted electronically rather than mailed, reports are generated electronically rather than retrieved manually, and applicants are able to edit their information electronically rather than mailing in the changes, delaying their award. Investing in online services can be costly in the beginning, but actually saves money in the long run; faster services mean less waste—something that government cannot afford to have. “Because e-government ordinarily reduces agency expenses, its use is limited primarily by imagination and technology” (Roosenbloom and Kravchuk, 2005, p. 472). E-government also increases an organization’s performance by assigning and tracking roles and responsibilities of employees. E-government and online systems are the future of grant management systems, and this is something that the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) is no stranger to.

Since its creation in 1969, the agency and its partner organizations have contributed to the decline in crime rates, such as violent and property crimes; yet Florida rates are still among the highest in the nation, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“Crime Rates by State in the United States”, 2006). According to the Census Bureau (2005), Florida’s population increased by nearly two million people, making it the fourth largest state in the nation. This means that law enforcement must also grow; investing in technology and crime fighting and prevention methods are necessary.
FDLE’s Office of Criminal Justice Grants (OCJG) is responsible for the management and dispersement of federal dollars among Florida’s criminal justice organizations. On October 1, 2004, the OCJG made the move to provide its services and grant management online, launching its Subgrant Information Management On-line (SIMON) program. Grant management includes monitoring, reviewing, and recommending applications, grants, and reports. The program allows users to apply online, to print, create and submit performance and expenditure reports. SIMON has expanded and improved since its implementation, yet, according to the system administrator, “it is far from perfect, as the system is still difficult for some users to access” (the present author, May 16, 2006).

The OCJG believes that improving the system is necessary since some of the applicants competing for grants may lack the necessary computer and organizational skills to integrate into a new system which requires them to apply and report (rather than have the Grant Managers submit all the paperwork). SIMON accessibility is important to organizations such as the Department of Juvenile Justice, local city governments, boards of commissioners, and sheriff’s offices throughout the state. Such organizations rely on FDLE funding to purchase and maintain crime fighting equipment such as SWAT trucks, bullet proof vests, and surveillance, update fingerprinting, DNA equipment and databases, as well as increase personnel, and implement drug and alcohol fighting programs.

The purpose of this Action Report is to examine alternative solutions to strengthen the Subgrant Management ON-line System (SIMON). In order to make it more accessible and save time, money, and increase performance, employee training,
subgrantee training, and process reengineering are analyzed. Historical background and related literature will be reviewed. The criteria will be used to evaluate the alternatives and determine the best policy for FDLE.
II. BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

**Background**

To understand the importance of improving SIMON accessibility, three key points must be addressed: importance of law enforcement, FDLE funding, and the use of technology to fight crime.

First, consider the following: A working mother wakes up, gets her child ready for school, drops the child off at school and heads to work. She realizes she does not have cash and goes to the ATM machine to withdraw money. At the end of a long day, she picks up her daughter from school and heads home. Now imagine the following: what if she did not know her daughter’s school was in a neighborhood inhabited by sexual predators who then kidnap her? Or what if she gets held at gunpoint when she goes to the ATM, or on the way home gets hit by a driver leaving happy hour at the nearest sports bar? Most Americans take for granted the freedoms and safety they are accustomed to, which would not be possible, were it not for law enforcement. Law enforcement protects and upholds the laws of this country; it protects and assists U.S citizens from both internal and external threats (September 11th), natural disasters (Hurricane Katrina), and secures American borders. From the establishment of the first system of law enforcement, known as the “Night Watch” officers in the 1600s, to the creation of the secret service (1860s), FBI Special Agents (1908), and state-wide local law enforcement offices and agencies, one thing is for certain: the need for law enforcement (Important Dates in Law Enforcement History, 2006).
The second key point is Florida Department of Law Enforcement funding. FDLE was created in 1969, after government restructuring of all state criminal justice organizations. There was a need to coordinate and support local law enforcement throughout the state, and facilitate federal law enforcement investigations. FDLE’s motto, “To promote public safety and strengthen domestic security by providing services in partnership with local, state, and federal criminal justice agencies to prevent, investigate, and solve crimes while protecting Florida’s citizens and visitors,” is what drives the agency to find better and more effective ways to serve the public (FDLE, 2006).

The Office of Criminal Justice Grants (OCJG), within the Business Support Program, is responsible for the management of federal grant monies awarded to the state for state and local criminal justice communities. The office also oversees the Florida Office of Drug Control, which was established by Governor Jeb Bush; the office has partnerships with various organizations to address the state’s problem of drug and alcohol abuse. It administers over 400 grants and $67 million awarded by the U.S Department of Justice (FDLE, 2006). Due to the increasing number of available grants and applicants, the OCJG set out to create an online grants program that would simplify the application process for applicants, facilitate the grant management process for the OCJG staff, and shorten the time between the application and award period.

Since its creation and implementation on October 1, 2004, the Subgrant Information Management ON-line System has improved to meet the needs of both government employees and grant applicants. However in the rush to become technologically advanced, SIMON may have forgotten the most important part of an
online program: the application user. Subgrantees have to stay up-to-date because SIMON is not yet complete, it is constantly being updated and new features are being introduced (Author, personal communication, June 29, 2006). The program, which has been described as “not very user friendly,” has great potential if its accessibility problem is addressed and resolved. According to a knowledgeable FDLE source, SIMON is considered a pilot program for other state agencies, who in the future, will be moving to online grant services to keep pace with the growing needs of law enforcement (personal communication, April 20, 2006).

The third key point is using technology to fight crime. Over the last 37 years, FDLE has partnered with local and federal law enforcement agencies to tackle not only homicides and property crimes, but also cyber, counterintelligence, and terrorism. The introduction and mass use of the internet has been both a curse and a blessing; a curse because it may be a playground for sexual predators, fraud, and identity theft, it is a blessing because it allows law enforcement to obtain and share up-to-date information and resources quickly. “All law enforcement and justice agencies--local, state, and federal--need to find ways to overcome obstacles to sharing information. Doing so not only increases their ability to solve crimes and keep communities safer, it also helps them meet their increasing responsibilities” (U.S Department of Justice Website, 2006).

By using technology, FDLE is not only addressing and solving crime, but also deterring potential crime through data sharing of both state police and federal databases. “FDLE is taking the lead among U.S law enforcement agencies in creating integrated information resources designed to drive new levels of public safety and domestic security” (“Florida Department of Law Enforcement Selects Unisys for services to
Accelerate Statewide Criminal Intelligence Sharing Initiative,” 2006). Authorities now have access to important updated data such as warrants, reports, and citations stored in local agencies.

An example of how law enforcement has been using technology to solve crime is the 2006 Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act. Under this act, a national sex offender registry will be created; it will “authorize grants to help local law enforcement agencies beef up registry systems, assign more FBI agents to Internet sex crimes and require DNA samples of sex offenders” (“New Law Marks Adam Walsh Case Anniversary,” 2006). Also, last spring, the Florida Legislature mandated an advanced information system after Jessica Lunsford, a nine-year-old child, was sexually abused and murdered. This is the nation’s first statewide information system that provides real-time background checks and notifies authorities if a detainee has a record of sex crimes (“Jessica Lunsford Criminal Information System Comes on Line,” 2006).

To summarize, the importance of law enforcement, FDLE funding, and the use of technology to fight crime are useful in understanding the importance of increasing SIMON accessibility and strengthening the program.

**Literature Review**

The literature addresses three themes that emphasize the importance of improving online programs: Electronic government, efficiency in government, and investing in technology.

First, the literature discusses the importance, and impact of E-government (Rosenbloom and Kravchuk, 2005; Shafritz, 2005; West, 2004). The articles agreed that
government must be innovative and use technology to increase public participation and offer more effective services and information to larger segments of the population (Raymond, 1998; Stephens, 1992; Stephens, 2005). From federal agencies and state agencies, to local governments, these public service organizations are using e-government to provide the public with up-to-date information, renewal of services, visitor information, and provide educational, health, and community news. Various websites mentioned electronic government as being the answer for a citizen-centered, results-oriented, and market-based government (“President Signs E-Government Act,” 2002). The sources believe that technology and increased communications and performance have the potential to make government function more efficiently (“Transforming Organizational Culture,” 2006).

Although government is lagging behind the private sector in terms of fully utilizing online capabilities (“President Signs E-Government Act,” 2002) it has embraced the internet to address the public’s needs, issues, concerns, and securities. “By facilitating two-way interaction, electronic governance has been hailed as a way to improve service delivery and responsiveness to citizens, in the long run generating greater public confidence in government” (West, 2004, p. 16). The literature also mentions that e-government actually improves government efficiency by decreasing response time and tracking and increasing performance; this in the long run, will increase public confidence in government. “E-government offers the prospect of enhancing democratic responsiveness and boosting beliefs that government is effective” (West, 2004, p. 16).
Second, the literature addresses efficiency in government by improving performance. There is a need for increased accountability in order for government to redesign and reinvent to enhance performance. In his 1993 Report of the National Performance Review, Vice President Al Gore stated that government agencies should be accountable for achieving results and do away with regulations that stifle innovation (Shafritz, et al., 2005, p. 460-468). He also stated that to improve performance, government must empower its employees by providing training and other necessary tools to be effective at making their own decisions and producing results. The literature calls for a reinvention and renewal of government by establishing goals and objectives, reducing regulations (red tape), increasing and assigning accountability, and measuring performance to reduce government waste. “Governors can create a results-based government, if (among other things) they shift accountability from complying with rules and regulations to achieving results. If you want better management, untie the managers’ hands and let them manage, hold them accountable for results—not for following silly rules” (Behn, 2001, p. 27).

Third, investing in technology is investing in the future. The literature recognizes that technology has become and will continue to be essential to government operations. It will become essential for government to keep pace with technological advances in order to better serve the public. Advanced education, training and technology will be necessary for managing international and high tech crime. According to Stephens (1992) and Raymond (1998), technology is being developed and improved to reduce street, property, and online crime. Examples include the “smart house,” heat sensing cameras,
bullet cytology, voice-stress analyzer, wrist communicators, and databases that include people’s personal and financial records since birth.

The articles (Raymond, 1998; Stephens, 1992; Stephens, 2005) go on to say that in the future, computers and global positioning systems will facilitate faster DNA, fingerprinting, and search results; computers will eliminate human contamination at crime scenes. “You can’t fight high tech terrorists, criminals and sophisticated gangs without high-tech equipment,” said Energy Secretary Federico Pena. “We have a message to criminals: beware, because we’re going to come after you with technologies you’ve never seen before” (Raymond, 1998).

In summary, the different themes in the literature discuss the importance of electronic government to improve government efficiency and the need to invest in technology. This report supports and adds to the literature in describing the need for improved technology in online grant management systems by specifically analyzing the FDLE SIMON system.
III. METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION

Methodology

Information for this report was collected using the following methods:

1) Reviewing/analyzing online journals, academic and government publications, and government websites. The databases used were Lexis-Nexis and ProQuest. The websites used were the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, U.S Department of Justice, U.S Census, Encarta, and the White House. The personal experiences of the SIMON Administrator were also taken into consideration.

2) Structured, 10-15 minute phone interviews (n=20) with subgrantees (some wished to remain anonymous).

3) Oral feedback and training questionnaires from OCJG employees (n=12).

These resources used provided insight into the importance of improving online services and programs, such as SIMON. The literature emphasized the need for increased government performance in order to be effective. Personal experiences of the SIMON administrator (the author) were also instrumental in the research and findings.

Interviews were conducted with both subgrantees and FDLE administrators on SIMON history, experiences, and performance. Insight on the program, subgrantees, and grant management was provided by the System Administrator, Community Program Administrator, Grant Managers, Planner IVs, Planning Managers, and 20 subgrantees from different counties throughout the state who agreed to be formally interviewed.
OCJG employees received SIMON training, and feedback was obtained through questionnaires. Subgrantee interviews and training feedback were collected and compiled during a period of six months in 2006.

**Evaluation Criteria**

The criteria of time, money, and performance were used to evaluate the SIMON accessibility constraints.

* **Time:** The duration of the learning and adaptation process during the application, reporting, and closing periods. The data sources were subgrantee interviews and oral feedback from FDLE employees.

* **Money:** Any change in the budget for both FDLE and subgrantees since SIMON’s implementation, and how it affects them when learning the program. The data sources were subgrantee interviews and oral feedback from FDLE employees.

* **Performance:** Efficiency; the successful execution and accomplishment of grant management by obtaining the necessary skills to apply, report, and close grants. The data sources were subgrantee interviews and oral feedback from FDLE employees.

The above criteria were best suited to analyze the policy options and propose recommendations. Other criteria (such as SIMON creation and maintenance cost, subgrantees’ average age, computer knowledge and grant writing experience) could have been taken into account but were outside the scope of this study and faced administrative and time constraints.
One limitation of the study is the lack of extensive analysis and literature on online grants systems. SIMON records were difficult to obtain because there was no strategic plan and performance measurements have been created. However, literature on related topics provided information for the study. A second limitation is insufficient performance measurements of the SIMON program, such as average time it takes the Grant Managers and supervisors to review and approve certain tasks. A third limitation was the fact that the SIMON Administrator (the current author) performed the interviews. Those interviewed may have shaped their responses to accommodate her. Despite these limitations, relevant criteria and SIMON user feedback were used to evaluate the best possible alternatives.
IV. MANAGEMENT POLICY OPTIONS

This section reviews the findings and discusses three alternatives to strengthening SIMON accessibility: employee training, subgrantee training, and process and behavioral reengineering. Each option is evaluated by three criteria: time, money, and performance. Other possible options not addressed in this report are program marketability, program viability, and discarding of the program. These were not addressed because of time and administrative restrictions (it was difficulty to obtain SIMON financial records).

**Option One: Employee Training**

Training employees provides them with the necessary tools to effectively perform their duties. SIMON training encompasses familiarizing the FDLE administrators, Planners, Grant Managers and staff with the program by demonstrating the multiple system features, and providing hands-on experience and instructional material. This policy calls for the SIMON Administrator to provide a comprehensive two-day training session for all new employees, as well as two refresher courses a year for all OCJG employees. During such sessions, they will not only be informed on program updates, but also on future features and procedures.

**Time:** Time is valuable for employees and their subgrantees. According to various OCJG employees, they never received official training on SIMON until May of this year when a SIMON Administrator was hired (anonymous, personal communications, March 29, 2006). Employee feedback included dissatisfaction that SIMON is not paperless. Grant Managers feel as though they are working double since
they have to review both the online submissions as well as the hard copies that are mailed in. According to a Grant Manager, employees learned the program through trial and error, and by taking the time off to practice (personal communication, May 5, 2006). During oral interviews, four Grant Managers reported that there is confusion over the correct procedures to take when reviewing and routing applications (personal communication, April 4, 2006).

Although it takes time to train all employees, training them at the beginning is better for both the organization and the subgrantees. Once employees have been officially trained, they will complete and review tasks expeditiously, require less assistance and supervision, and can assist subgrantees in a timely manner. Corporal Wendy Lord of the Gainesville Police Department commented that it is helpful to have people at the OCJG with SIMON knowledge who can assist her whenever she does not have time to read the user manual or wander through the grant (personal communication, October 3, 2006).

Money: Not only is it necessary for organizations to invest in technology, but to also invest in training their employees on such new technology. The one thing that is apparent is that FDLE has and will continue to invest in SIMON. Based on anonymous employee training questionnaires, FDLE has done a good job in taking both employee and subgrantee suggestions for improvements under consideration. It has drastically improved the program based on user needs. Ten out of the twelve employees who were trained express satisfaction that FDLE’s budget expanded to create the position of a SIMON Administrator. This person provides tech support, creates and updates user manuals, and assists subgrantees.
FDLE has also invested in recruiting top computer engineers and program writers to improve the program and make it more user-friendly. “This organization is efficient because it is well structured. FDLE invests in technology, encourages employee innovation, and plans for the future accordingly” (anonymous, personal communication, June 9, 2006). Ben Carroll of Clay County commented that FDLE does encourage increased technology when awarding grants. “It is a good program. SIMON should be packaged so that everyone in state agencies can use the software” (personal communication, September 29, 2006). Overall, FDLE has the monetary resources to maintain and improve SIMON, yet it may have neglected a critical part of the implementation process—the employees who use the program to perform their jobs.

**Performance:** With government organizations looking to improve efficiency, online programs are designed to maximize organization performance; needed information and documents are only a few clicks away. Based on information obtained from oral feedback, it became evident that Grant Managers do not totally support tracking employee performance, but they do understand that it is necessary because there is a need to improve both employee and subgrantee performance for the organizations to be efficient. For this, it is important that employees understand their jobs and responsibilities. For instance, one of the employee training questions asked Grant Managers to determine how often they would like to have training. To this, one responded “Quite often, especially whenever the program is updated. There has been a lack of communication with the staff members who are responsible for producing the work” (anonymous, personal communication, May 26, 2006). The problem comes in that OCJG employee performance depends on the performance of subgrantees; they must wait
until subgrantees create and submit the necessary documents before they can proceed and complete their tasks. According to one of the Grant Managers, there is not much they can do because they do not have any authority to pressure subgrantees to “respect” the deadlines for submissions; all they can do is notify them and wait (anonymous, personal communications, October 11, 2006).

SIMON should keep track of the average number of days it takes OCJG employees to complete reviewing and routing applications, grant adjustments, reports, and closeouts. It turns out that employee training has not necessarily improved performance. The OCJG staff must assist their subgrantees during the application, reporting, and closing processes because ultimately, they depend on them to fulfill their job responsibilities.

In summary, employee training scores highly on the time criterion. Both employees and subgrantees expressed the importance of training. Providing users with the knowledge to freely navigate the program can shorten the time it takes to perform tasks and maximize results. The criteria of money and performance received the same low score. Employees and subgrantees reported no significant increase in performance since SIMON’s implementation. The money criterion also scored low because it is not seen as a pressing issue. Based on feedback, respondents do believe FDLE will continue to invest in SIMON.

Option Two: Subgrantee Training

Familiarizing those who rely on FDLE funding with the SIMON program is important since it is an in-house program, developed exclusively by and for the agency.
Subgrantee training is to give subgrantees the necessary tools (hands-on experience and instructional material) to manage their grants in SIMON. Familiarizing subgrantees with SIMON and providing training can make them proficient in online grants management. It would be in FDLE’s best interest to designate or reserve special funding for organizations to improve their employees’ computer skills. Subgrantee training is necessary so that document submission and the time spent learning and navigating SIMON is shortened.

**Time:** One of the reasons to provide services online is to shorten the average time it takes to perform tasks. SIMON is not paperless, subgrantees can apply, report, manage, and close grants online; yet, they still have to print, sign, and mail in hard copies to the OCJG (this includes any changes made to the grant).

During telephone interviews with subgrantees, it became evident that they did not feel that the program made much difference in the time spent managing their grants. According to Michael Antos, the Assistant Grant Manager for the Orange County Sheriff’s Office (personal communication, September 8, 2006) and Laurie Scott, Records Supervisor for the Atlantic Beach Police Department (personal communication, September 14, 2006), SIMON has “made life a little easier,” yet its layout and administration process must be improved. Seventeen out of the twenty interviewed, declared dissatisfaction in the creation of multiple user accounts, the time it takes to amend the grant, and the limited access in the creation of applications, reporting and closing periods. “There are supervisors who like to keep track of who does what and when, so sharing of passwords is inefficient and can create security and performance problems when those who create the application and those responsible for reporting do
not work at the same location (Vance Arnett, personal communication, September 11, 2006).

In order to decrease time spent, SIMON needs to allow various users to have access to their organization’s applications. The subgrantee agencies should designate someone as the grant writer or coordinator within their organization or county. This person would then be responsible for managing the applications, subgrant reporting, and for training anyone else who will be working in SIMON. An example is Joel Kaufman from the Broward County Commission on Substance Abuse. He assists and trains those new to SIMON on the program and on grant management (personal communication, September 28, 2006). Online services are supposed to decrease time spent completing tasks, but there are a few issues in SIMON that still need to be addressed in order to improve time management.

Money: Officially training subgrantees costs money for both FDLE and subgrantees. Creating and hosting workshops can be costly, while attending workshops, training sessions, and taking the time off to learn and teach the program can also become a financial burden to subgrantees, especially those from smaller counties. But by not training subgrantees, performance gains will be limited, which in turn affects the OCJG staff performance. There will also be a decrease in the amount of monies dispersed if subgrantees have difficulties using the program and completing the documentation in a timely manner.

Two representative subgrantees interviewed mentioned the fact that they work for small organizations and do not always have the resources to effectively train employees on advanced computer skills or grant writing and grant management. According to Ben
Carroll from Clay County (personal communication, September 29, 2006), applying online has not increased their budget or grant awards. He mentioned that SIMON is convenient when it comes to downloading and reprinting documents but does not necessarily speed up the award process. Hancel Woods from the Putnam County Sheriff’s Office commented that although subgrantee training is necessary, the best type of training is that which is fairly inexpensive and takes up very little time.

The SIMON Administrator should provide training which is accessible to all subgrantees. An organization’s budget or award amount should not dictate who can obtain the necessary SIMON training; therefore, the best training is that which can be obtained in the comfort of the subgrantee’s own office. It could be provided through a budget simulation course, an instructional CD, or an online virtual course. It is necessary to effectively and inexpensively train subgrantees, even if SIMON does not necessarily speed up the award process or increase their budget.

Performance: Training subgrantees allows them to navigate freely through SIMON and complete tasks in a timely manner. An increase in performance for subgrantees means an increase in performance for OCJG employees and staff members.

Once Subgrantees become familiar with the program, it becomes easier for them to manage their grants. Jimmy Moon of FDLE Capitol Police (personal communication, October 2, 2006) stated, “Familiarization with SIMON is the key to efficiency and applying online can be essential for organizations that rely on FDLE funding”. Fifteen out of twenty subgrantees mentioned that navigating through SIMON and its complex links is difficult at first, but applying for grants essentially becomes easier through practice. According to the Grants Writer for the Nassau County Sheriff’s Office, “the
links on the left should be more descriptive. Also, the language used in SIMON can be redundant and ambiguous” (Valerie Curtis, September 20, 2006). The most difficult thing is setting up user accounts and applying for the grant, but user performance usually increases during the reporting, closeout, and documentation process.

In summary, when it comes to subgrantee training, time and money received the same high score. Subgrantees must be trained in SIMON in order to successfully apply and manage their grants. Money can be a major concern for organizations that do not have the resources to effectively train those working in SIMON. Performance was last because it has not improved much for subgrantees.

**Option Three: Process and Behavioral Reengineering**

Process reengineering are improvements and increases in performance. It is to abandon outdated procedures and focus on fresh and innovative ways of accomplishing tasks and results (“Transforming Organizational Structure,” 2006). SIMON users must be encouraged to embrace and adapt to innovation (the program) in order to maximize results. Technology can not only bridge the communications gap, but can also create a burden if it is not adaptable and properly utilized; such is the case with SIMON. Process and behavioral reengineering allows for an increase in performance, but only when technological capabilities are fully utilized. Organizations and employees must collaborate and adapt to change.

**Time:** Time can be the nemesis for process reengineering. Investing in technology is important, but so is learning it, embracing it, and effectively implementing it into the everyday functions. It can take a long time to get people to accept and fully
utilize the opportunities provided by technological advancements. Collaboration is essential in adopting new technology. Organizations and their employees must work together to learn, teach, encourage, and promote advancement and innovation. It is in everyone’s best interest to adopt new, faster, and more reliable ways of offering services and accomplishing tasks.

David Bjelke of the City of Tampa Police Department mentioned that learning a new program can be difficult, but with time and practice, people will be more accepting of it (personal communication, October 3, 2006). Time must be spent by organizations to create or strengthen an organizational culture that embraces technology. The problem is that employees who have been with the organization for a long period of time may be reluctant to change and may sometimes refuse new procedures. According to the author, one third of Grant Managers were not too satisfied with having to work with a brand new program and learning new grant management procedures. Also, subgrantees were not too happy with the idea of applying, reporting, or closing their own grants online.

An issue that the OCJG is facing is that subgrantees tend to dislike taking the time to learn the new systems or reading instructional manuals. Subgrantees do not necessarily care about learning the program, they prefer to call the OCJG and have SIMON Administrator talk them through the necessary steps. In summary, it can take an extended amount of time for people to embrace change and technology; it is in an organization’s best interest to invoke process reengineering.

Money: Through process reengineering, money spent on administrative functions can possibly decrease. Technology increases efficiency and teamwork, as long as it is effectively utilized. Process reengineering for FDLE and its subgrantees is possible by
investing in online work and task tracking features, emailing, creation of databases and intranet; yet, 75 percent of those interviewed reported no change in their budgets due to SIMON’s implementation (personal communication, October 25, 2006). Although SIMON went live over two years ago, users are still having difficulties applying, reporting, and reviewing. Only eight out of twenty subgrantees interviewed reported extensive computer literacy, while only ten reported grant writing or grant management experience. This means that those applying for FDLE funding are those at the lower levels or those with minimal grant writing experience. “The Chief Officials and the Chief Financial Officers do not want to learn the SIMON program. It is the Secretary or an Administrative Assistant who usually does all the work” (anonymous, personal communication, September 13, 2006).

According to one of the OCJG Planners, “FDLE has spent quite a bit of money to develop the SIMON system, and it is a great system, but subgrantees are having a difficult time because they may lack the necessary computer skills and are used to having their Grant Managers input all the paperwork for them” (anonymous, personal communication, August 22, 2006). The Planner also stated that although SIMON is not complete, she expects that in the future, other grant providing organizations will also invest in the SIMON program.

**Performance:** Getting away from outdated ways of performing tasks can be difficult, even with the introduction of new or advanced technology. OCJG employees have had difficulties fully utilizing the capabilities provided by the program. They are constantly comparing SIMON to the former grant management program (Foxpro) which they consider to be less involved. The OCJG is falling short on process reengineering
because SIMON is not paperless; even though they can apply online, subgrantees have to print, sign, and mail in all forms during the application, reporting, and grant closeout process. When it comes to reviewing documents (applications, grant adjustments, letters, reports), too many steps are taken between the time the Grant Manager receives the task, to the time it is routed up the chain of command and back (anonymous, personal communication, August 30, 2006).

Also, Grant Manager performance depends on that of the subgrantees (how fast they submit their items) and on the Planning Managers and Community Program Administrator (how fast they can review and either approve or reject items). Subgrantees seem to also have difficulties fully utilizing the program. During the phone interviews, subgrantees were asked whether or not they believed SIMON had improved over the last six months. Fifteen subgrantees responded that it had improved, yet they did not consider themselves very knowledgeable on the program because they do not use it as often as they should (anonymous, personal communications, October 10, 2006).

The OCJG should modify their administrative procedures. To increase performance, Grant Managers should receive more discretion during the review and grant adjustment process. They should be able to approve zero expenditure reports, minor adjustments, such as project end dates, Project Directors and organization contacts.

In summary, time is rated at the highest criterion for process reengineering. Adapting to new technology, ideas, and procedures can take an extended period of time. Performance is the second highest rated criterion. Performance is affected by the rate of process reengineering; innovative ways of performing tasks increase efficiency. Money
scores the lowest because respondents did not believe money invested in SIMON has drastically affected them.
V. CONCLUSION

This report has presented three policy alternatives on how to improve SIMON accessibility. The policies were evaluated using time, money, and performance criteria. Table 1 summarizes the results. All of the policy alternatives can strengthen SIMON accessibility. FDLE and the OCJG could apply all three alternatives, even though the goal of process reengineering can take longer to obtain. The focus at this time should be on the alternative with the highest rated criteria.

Table 1. Level of Importance in Increasing Accessibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Options</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Training</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgrantee Training</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Reengineering</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ranking Scale: 3=High, 2=Medium, 1=Low

For employee training, the strongest criterion is time. SIMON users apparently believe that training employees is important to obtain maximum results. Since Grant Managers are the first in the review process, it only makes sense to equip them with the necessary knowledge of SIMON. Money and performance received the same score. Based on feedback obtained, performance has not increased much with the introduction
of SIMON because even though online services are now available, the application and the grant management process have not drastically changed. The criterion of money scored low because respondents believe SIMON is here to stay. FDLE has invested money in its creation and maintenance; but just as they have invested on improving the program, they need to focus on training those who depend on it.

When it comes to subgrantee training, time and money scored the highest among the criteria. Just as employees, subgrantees must also be trained on SIMON in order to complete their tasks in a timely manner. The issue of money is important because a number of organizations do not have the necessary resources to thoroughly train SIMON users. Performance criterion came in last for subgrantee training. Because SIMON is not paperless, there has not been much improvement in performance for subgrantees.

For process reengineering, time was the highest criterion. It can take a long time to get subgrantees to adapt to SIMON, new ideas, and procedures—there may be resistance to change. Performance came in second for process reengineering. It is fairly important because embracing process reengineering means utilizing technology to increase efficiency. The least important criterion for process reengineering was money. Most respondents were not too concerned with the amount of money being spent on SIMON.

After evaluating the policy alternatives through the use of criteria, it is evident that the subgrantee training policy option is the most viable. Taking the time to train subgrantees is the best possible option to strengthen SIMON accessibility. This policy option has a direct affect on the other two. If subgrantees struggle in SIMON, it places a heavy burden on the employees—they cannot perform their jobs; this in turn can stall
process reengineering. Once a proper subgrantee training plan and schedule are established, the other two policies will be met; subgrantees affect OCJG Grant Managers’ performance, and performance determines the rate of process reengineering for the organizations.
REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria M. Santos graduated with a Masters in Public Administration in 2006, specialized in Leadership and Strategic Management, from The Florida State University. She previously received a double Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs and Political Science, minor in English, from Florida State. She is currently employed at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Office of Criminal Justice Grants, and has been the SIMON Administrator since March 2006.