

AGO

Interview of Rebecca Podzsus, former AGO grant manager of WCCVA grant

Date: February 1, 2019

Time: 11:00am

Interviewers: Sarah Walker, Fraud Manager and Stephanie Sullivan, Assistant Fraud Manager

Place: via skype conference phone

Introductory information and questions:

- Thank you for meeting with us today. My name is Sarah Walker and this is Stephanie Sullivan. We will both be asking some questions and taking notes.
- The State Auditor's Office is a reporting agency, not an enforcement agency. We perform several different types of audits at a variety of government agencies across the State of Washington. The State Auditor's Office is performing a review of a grant managed by the AG's Office and we have a few questions about the process and specific expenditures.
- I want to make sure you are aware of the following:
 - You are not required to discuss any information related to the audit with us; however, we consider your input valuable and it will assist us in making recommendations to the AG's Office.
 - If you would like to end the meeting at any time, you may do so. Also, if you want to take a short break from the interview, just let us know.
- Do you understand what we have explained to you? Yes, I will try to remember everything since has been a while since I worked there.
- Are you willing to proceed? Yes

Questions:

1. How long were you employed with the AG's Office? Nearly 10 years. Left in March 2015.
2. What was your position title and responsibilities?

Program Specialist 3 was the title when I left. I had many and I moved to a confidential secretary and then I became a special assistant to government affairs and then final was the program specialist 3. This position worked on policy work and grants. I filled in as an assistant for Mike Webb. I worked extensively on policy work for human trafficking. Helped lead an advisory committee. I liked to say it was an all purpose job.

I didn't do grant work the entire time I was there, this roughly started around 2010 during two years under Bob Fergeson.

3. Can you talk to us about what grant programs you were involved with?

I was given my first grant, which dealt with a pregnant and parenting teens, a federal grant that was subcontracted with Washington State Collation of Violence and Public health. The Attorney General at the time was involved to address sexual assault, stalking, and assault and helping to establish guidelines. In 2013, the AGO started to administer another grant related to crime victims, the WCCVA grant.

4. Who at the AG's Office was also involved with these grants?

When I first began, several people the higher execs worked with WCCVA. Kendee Yamaguchi, Mike Webb, and Mami Markus worked on it. They gave it to me to help with administering. All the conversations with WCCVA over expectations and the contract agreement were established before it was handed to me. I worked with financial services folks in the AG's office, Betty Frasier who processed the invoices. Melanie and Janice worked and Pete Beckel in financial services also were involved. Pete worked with AG map reporting measures (state wide reporting measures) to make sure that WCCVA did their trainings as part of their contract. I worked with other folks for approval I talked to executive staff about how things were going. I know Darwin also handled a few approvals and at the time I left I handed all of this information to Mike Webb who was to be my replacement for monitoring the grant.

- a. What was Melanie's role at time there? I know she was hirer up than Betty. More like an advisory and oversight role. I can't recall which Melanie at the AG's because there were two working at that time.

5. Do you remember the nonprofit organization, WCCVA? Yes this is one of the ones I mentioned earlier.

6. Can you talk to us about who you worked with at the WCCVA?

I worked with Cody Benson, their Director a lot. Rose Torgenson, she was their training director. She had left shortly before I left AGO. Jackie Hatfield was their contracted bookkeeper and close to when I was leaving Cody had hired another person (male), can't remember the name, to take over the bookkeeping.

Brad Tower was another contracted service. I had spoken at one of their gatherings.

7. Has Cody contacted you recently? She has.

- a. What did she tell you? That the AGO was looking into some of the expenses with WCCVA. I didn't hear a huge amount of detail. I had someone from the AGO contact me a year ago, and they asked me questions about the WCCVA grant and some questions of the task force work that I had done. What I understood from that person, not a lot of work had been accomplished on the grant and or done with since I left. I guided her to where the files that I had left were to be a resource.

8. We spoke with Cody, the Executive Director for the WCCVA and she explained that you can support that the AG's Office allowed the submission of expenditures in advance of services being provided or expenses being incurred by WCCVA, is that correct?

On occasion, I don't think it was the absolute practice. It happened on both grants that I was involved with. They wanted to bill us in the month prior for a conference that was in the following future month. We had approved to pay that. WCCVA website expense was an example of this. This was something that was paid before finished because it was something they needed. I remember WCCVA was trying to make it easier for the advocates and members of the public to access information. Because this project was going to be longer reaching, I'm pretty sure it was all approved and invoiced before it actually happened.

- a. What about the annual training? Allowed to be paid before actually incurred?

They would have their basic trainings as required by the grant. I actually spoke at one of those. I don't recall. It is certainly possible. Particularly because unlike the other grant that I worked on we were giving them supplemental monies. We were WCCVA's sole funder and I could see that occurring when they needed the funding. It was AG financial services responsibility to make sure they spent the funds down at the end of the contract. Financial services communicate there was money left over and the AGO execs wanted to make sure the funding was being spent down because if the legislature looked at it then could give impression that it wasn't needed and didn't want that.

- b. Is that the norm or exception? I don't recall there being a lot of discussion about it. I know the AGO was handling invoicing procedures much like Commerce had when they managed the grant. WCCVA billed us the same way. We had a meeting in the later part of 2014 between WCCVA and AGO to make sure they were handling expenses right. It was at the AGO office location, which included me, Betty, Melanie (possibly the other Melanie not Griffith), Pete, Jackie, don't think Cody was there. I attended so I made sure I was on the same page. Felt WCCVA and AGO were doing everything well. There was another meeting before prior to that 6 months, where AGO finance folks went to WCCVA and met with Cody and Jackie to go over expectations and make sure the way things were being done was correct.

- c. So were funds allowed to be requested from AGO, before an expense was incurred, or rather never incurred? No. I don't recall that ever happening. The money had to be accounted for. Even if it was for an advance. WCCVA did have a couple of different things that were paid. Cody had a bonus and it would come in at the last month of the end of the year and it was different than other grants. Finance had approved it. I looked at invoices and would call Cody if I had questions. Then pass off to finance services who was responsible for insuring the invoices amount totaled what was being requested. When I was leaving, Mike Webb was going to take over working with Cody. WCCVA was going to send the invoices directly to financial services to process and review the supporting docs to make sure it could be paid. This took the grant manager out of the role of specific invoice monitoring.

As I mentioned, an example, was the website funding issues WCCVA had and we talked about when to invoice for that. Pretty sure we were told by AGO to back date an invoice for the website to get it within the previous fiscal year to help spend down the grant money. Another training that Cody had been looking at with the same people Jeri Costa and Stanley (Thurston Co. Prosecutors office) who were working on an advanced training is one we had talked about and given preliminary approval for the plan.

- d. Who guided the back dated receipt at the AG's? During the time right after Mami left, it may have been Darwin, but it was a transition time between the Chief of staff role. I had seen this happen before with a sexual assault collation grant.
 - e. When you say amending the invoice, how do you amend it? The AGO would say this was what we want you to do. The WCCVA or the vendor would send us a receipt for those expenses and then sign off for financial services where they would update the payment. I had no idea if it had been paid yet or not.
 - f. So if it was January 2019, you'd ask the vendor, can you date to December 2018? Well no, it would done when additional information would come. Financial services would ask is there something else they can charge because of the funds left. We'd tell them there is a project coming down the line and so financial services would say well let's put that in their now and so WCCVA would send more information and we'd process payment. This didn't happen all the time.
9. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us? Not that I can think of.