

*Evaluation Report*

# **Local Government Cooperative Agreement**

*Executive Summary only*

*prepared by*

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## **Background and Methodology**

In February 1997, the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (the Alliance) requested Hagler Bailly Consulting to conduct a process evaluation of the Local Governments program, one of about 20 programs that the Alliance administers. The purpose of this evaluation was to document the history and progress of the program, and to identify the perception of the program's goals, objectives, management, and direction on the part of the Alliance staff, the Local Government Association staff, and the constituents of the Associations ultimately served by the program.

In order to accomplish this evaluation, in March 1997, Hagler Bailly reviewed a set of program documents (including contracts and reports submitted by the program participants), and interviewed 50 individuals, including:

- Alliance staff (3) and Board members (10);
- Local Government Association staff sponsored through the program (5) and the Executive Directors of the four participating Associations (4);
- Local city government and local community organization staff served by the participating Associations (30).

## **REVIEW OF THE SITUATION**

- The Alliance currently administers a Local Governments Program in which four Local Governments Associations participate: the League of Oregon Cities (LOC), the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), the Association of Idaho Cities (AIC), and the Montana Local Government Energy Office (MLGEO). For this current funding year, the Alliances has funded approximately 0.5 FTE in each of these four programs.
- The original intent of the Alliance was to focus on building energy codes, building commissioning, the building operators certification program, WashWise, and developing strong communication and education programs for their constituent cities and local governments regarding market transformation.

- Recently, the Alliance has been working with the Association staff to develop more effective program goals which include setting and working toward sales goals; serving as a delivery channel for specific programs; and setting tangible, measurable, or observable targets. With the new orientation, each Association representative would select those ventures which they believe they can best deliver to their constituents from among several programs. For each of these selected ventures, the Associations will define and target objectives that would be appropriate for that region.
- Reaction to the change has been primarily affirmative: the Association staff is positive about the focus and direction that the Alliance is offering, and are generally pleased that the Alliance staff will work with them to help clarify performance expectations; however the Association staff has difficulty with the “sales” component of the new focus, and will need encouragement from the Alliance staff to help them effectively consider alternative approaches and new outlooks.
- The Local Governments program is soon to come up for Alliance Board review. The sponsored staff and Executive Directors of the four Associations as well as most Alliance staff would like to see this program continue as long as it can be shown that the Local Governments program can meet its goals and objectives, and that a) local governments appear to constitute an appropriate target segment for Alliance programs, and b) Local Governments Associations appear to be the most appropriate and cost-effective vehicle through which to motivate this target segment to participate in Alliance ventures.

## **EVALUATION RESEARCH FINDINGS**

- There appears to be considerable agreement that the local governments represent an important market segment for Alliance programs. Local government officials have decision-making influence on specific program issues (e.g., local building codes, local water use policies and programs), and impact decisions made on legislative issues as well as decisions made at the household level.
- Local Governments Association staff and the Executive Directors of the four organizations believe that the Alliance programs provide a valuable service to their constituent local governments, that the specific Alliance-sponsored ventures provide an appropriate set of tools through which their constituents can achieve long-term energy cost savings and resource conservation, and that the programs fall squarely within the authority and/or influence of local governments to implement and/or support. However, without continued support of these programs, the local cities and governmental agencies will make decisions favoring less efficient, less resource-conserving solutions that appear immediately less costly. The continued impact of the Alliance support is that the Associations can continue to send and

support a message that encourages a longer-term view than the local cities and governments would make on their own.

- There is general consensus on the part of Local Governments Association staff that they are providing a valuable and necessary function for their constituent organizations by providing them with Alliance-sponsored materials and programs; the specific ventures and the overall approach is a message that “fits” well with the mission of Local Governments Associations to encourage their constituents to make the “right” decisions regarding energy use.
- There is general consensus on the part of Local Governments Association staff that certain administrative/contractual difficulties continue to require attention, and agreement that once these difficulties are worked out, the program will be more effective, each of them will be more productive, and they will more readily meet program objectives. The Association staff currently attribute these difficulties to “growing pains” which they associate with the “start-up” or “reorganization” of this program as an Alliance rather than BPA administered program. The Association staff believe that once these administrative/contractual issues are clarified, they will be able to adapt their approaches and account for their actions more appropriately.
- For example, each of the Local Governments staff is required to submit monthly reports describing their activities during that period. These regular reports are requested by the Alliance project coordinator to provide a basis for the on-going evaluation of the program, and to provide a mechanism for offering feedback between Alliance and Association staff. Both Alliance and Local Government Associations staff would like to see the purpose, format, and content of these reports clarified and improved.
- The Alliance staff is concerned that the Local Governments program has not successfully made a transition in their operations and accountability procedures from a level of accountability that was acceptable under previous administration to a level of accountability which the Alliance and its Board currently requires. The administrative procedures for this project are under review and the Alliance and the Local Governments associations staff are working together to realign the project goals and accountability efforts.
- There is some difference of opinion among the Alliance staff, Board members, and Local Governments association regarding the purpose and goals that the Local Governments program can realistically achieve. As a result, there are those who believe that
  - the Local Governments program can and should be evaluated in terms of specific program deliverables (e.g., number of local governments recruited into Alliance programs),
  - the Local Governments program can and should demonstrate that it is a viable information channel and “visible presence” among the local governments it services and therefore the program should be evaluated in terms of how well it serves this

target market (e.g., number of local governments and local agencies who have been informed and been “made aware” of the benefits of Alliance programs),

Each of these opinions, of course, leads to a different approach to program management, administration, accountability, and, ultimately, evaluation and review.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Local Governments Association staff is strongly committed to Alliance program goals and long-term energy efficiency programs. However, it is unclear to these staff members exactly how they should manage their Alliance-sponsored efforts and account for their time and efforts. One preliminary recommendation is that the Alliance should develop very clear guidelines for monthly reporting and provide the Local Governments staff with a template to assist them in accounting for their efforts. Steps are already being taken in this direction, so this issue should be resolved within the month.
- The Local Governments Association is strongly committed to presenting Alliance program information to its constituent local government agencies in such a way as to promote the long-term participation of its constituency in Alliance programs. One preliminary recommendation is that the Alliance provide clear “recruiting” goals as well as support for assisting the Local Governments Association staff in understanding better how to “learn” from apparent failures.
  - Institutionalizing communication between the four staff members and Alliance support for regular meetings will assist Associations staff in building upon each others’ successes and “lessons learned.”
  - Support from the Alliance in term of additional training for the Local Governments Associations staff in the area of developing marketing plans and operational and/or implementation strategies as well as professional sales training will also be very useful in this regard.
- The Local Governments program has emerged from a transition period in which both the administrative procedures and program deliverables have changed dramatically. However, Alliance support for the program participants’ understanding of business and accounting procedures has not sufficiently sustained this transition. An additional preliminary recommendation is that the Alliance provide a workshop for Local Governments staff focusing specifically on business practices. The outcome of this workshop would be clear direction for the staff regarding deliverables, timelines, reporting procedures, and accounting requirements.

This research included a qualitative analysis of the image of the Alliance among local governments. Although the conclusions are based on a small sample, the data strongly suggest ***that there is confusion in the ranks regarding the purpose and function of the Alliance.*** Specifically, the data suggest that

- Most city and government officials have not heard of the Alliance and have difficulty distinguishing it from other quasi-regulatory organizations such as the Northwest Power Planning Council. Those with any awareness are likely to view the role of the Alliance as an organization that lobbies for energy code legislation.
- Contacts that result in awareness of the Alliance generally occur at conferences or seminars where the Alliance has a presence and where they can “connect” the energy program directly with the Alliance. Those respondents who were familiar with the Alliance (although again, their familiarity with the Alliance is with the program, not the name) indicated that these seminars may be the only time they have heard of the Alliance efforts.
- Most, if not all, describe having had positive contact and good ongoing relationships with the Local Government Alliance-sponsored staff person in their area. The Local Government Associations’ energy staff are perceived as “information resources,” and are valued for their ability to “provide information regarding deregulation.”

Even though the sample was small, the responses were reasonably consistent: ***the Alliance has not yet earned a public presence.*** Throughout the four states, it appears that there is:

- Little, if any, awareness of the Alliance as a corporate identity,
- Little understanding of the purpose of the Alliance,
- Potential room for misunderstanding about the role of the Alliance as an associate or partner with local governments in the area of energy management.

The Alliance may want to consider two actions: developing a brand awareness strategy and implementation campaign designed to clearly position the Alliance as a player in a potentially confusing field, and conducting further research designed specifically to track the growing community awareness of the Alliance as it emerges as a regional voice.