NGA's Justice IT Integration Project, Boosting State Justice Information Sharing

The end of May 2003 will not only reveal what states will receive the next round of National Governors Association (NGA) $25,000 Justice Integration grants, but also what technology and methods in justice information sharing each recipient will pursue and implement in their state.

To encourage justice information technology integration among the states, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices ("Center") and the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), developed a project that provided each governor an opportunity to apply for a $25,000 grant. This grant funded the resources necessary for each state to create a working group that would develop a justice information sharing project proposal for state implementation.

These proposals were the first steps in a broad national effort to integrate justice agencies allowing police officers, court administrators, corrections officers, and other officials at the local, state, and federal levels to share relevant justice information. "The technological solutions already exist." explained Thom Rubel, NGA's Program Director for State Information Technology. "The goal here is to integrate all the different systems. When law enforcement officials and the rest of the justice community share information, they position themselves to make better decisions that improve the entire justice system and provide for better public safety."

If approved, the proposals would qualify the recipient state for additional funding from a larger grant, made available under a program authorized by the Crime Identification Technology Act of 1998, and administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance OJP, DOJ. This grant would allow states to implement some piece of their strategic plan for statewide integrated justice. To receive the additional funding, the proposals had to be directly related to justice information sharing and with identified goals attainable within two years.

Forty-two governors responded and established state working groups. The NGA assisted these working groups by providing a series of strategic planning workshops designed to help states prepare their proposals. The project leaders of each state were able to openly discuss each other's projects, providing valuable information to their peers on the successes and challenges of implementation. Other relevant topics included how to sustain funding for justice integration during tight budget periods, what strategies states can use in transitioning to new administrations, and discussions on tracking project progress. The workshops were beneficial in providing a forum for discussion and idea sharing. For a summary of the Justice Integration Project States Workshops, refer to
http://www.nga.org/cda/files/0306PROJECTSTATES.pdf.

Of the 42 state working groups, 31 submitted specific project proposals, for further consideration. A panel of six reviewers, representing the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO), the National Conference for State Courts (NCSC), and the Center, reviewed the proposals and recommended 26 state projects for further funding. Based on these recommendations, the 26 states received a total of $16.4 million, ranging from $40,000 to a maximum of $1 million. For state project summaries, refer to http://www.nga.org/cda/files/0303JUSTICEITSUMMARIES.pdf.

"Governors are in a unique position to create an effective justice system by connecting the data across government agencies," Rubel said, "because they can provide statewide leadership and help garner the resources to coordinate and fund the project."

Another round of $25,000 state planning grants will be announced in the summer of 2003. For more information on the NGA Justice Information Technology Integration Implementation Project, contact Erin Lee at (202) 624-5392 or elee@nga.org, or refer to the NGA Center Web site, http://www.nga.org/center.