

Transcript: “Podcast: Office of Justice Programs’ Management of the Crime Victims Fund Grant Programs,” September 2017

Stephanie Logan (SL): Welcome to the latest podcast from the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General. My name is Stephanie Logan and I am a Public Affairs Specialist in our office.

Today, our office released an audit report on how the Office of Justice Programs, or OJP, managed the Crime Victims Fund, which is used to support victims of crimes by issuing grants to organizations that provide victim assistance and victim compensation. Our audit found that the Office for Victims of Crime, which is a part of OJP, did not consistently perform onsite reviews of State Administering Agencies, staff did not fully understand grant monitoring procedures, and there were risks associated with the performance measures used by the Department.

Here to talk about these findings in greater detail is Elisa Lee, a Program Manager from our Audit Division. Elisa, thanks for joining me.

Elisa Lee (EL): Thanks, Stephanie. It’s my pleasure to discuss this important report here with you.

SL: Let’s start by talking about the Fund, generally. Can you explain where the money comes from and what it is used to support?

EL: Sure. The money from the Crime Victims Fund is used to support public and nonprofit organizations that operate counseling centers, domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and other victim services. There aren’t any tax dollars that go towards the Fund. It is made up entirely by things like criminal fees, forfeited bail bonds, penalties, gifts, donations, and other collections from the U.S. Attorney’s Offices, federal courts, and the federal Bureau of Prisons. From these sources, more than 16.3 billion dollars was deposited between fiscal years 2011 and 2017. And of that, 10.8 billion dollars was available for distribution.

Congress places a cap on the amount of funds available for grants each year during the appropriations process. And in 2015, the amount was tripled as Congress made 2.36 billion dollars available for distribution.

This funding increase presented new challenges to the Department for managing the significantly larger amount of grant funding. And our audit assessed these challenges and the associated risks.

SL: Okay, so one of the areas you identified for improvement was the monitoring of grant recipients. Can you talk about your findings?

EL: Yes. We found that the Office for Victims of Crime was not consistently performing onsite reviews of grants awarded to State Administering Agencies. Reviews of each of these 56 agencies are supposed to be conducted every 3 years, but we found that in the majority of cases, these occurred less frequently.

For example, between fiscal years 2008 and 2016, only 18 of the State Administering Agencies were reviewed every 3 to 4 years. Another 18 received their 2 most recent

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onsite reviews within 5 to 8 years. For the remaining 20, there was support for only one review for each since 2008.

The Office for Victims of Crime did perform other monitoring activities for these agencies, such as remote reviews by staff members. However, we determined that such reviews are not as effective as onsite monitoring. Onsite monitors can have direct access to grant managers, view grant management processes and documentation on location, and provide technical assistance.

SL: What are the broader consequences for not consistently performing onsite reviews of State Administering Agencies?

EL: Well, when onsite reviews of State Administering Agencies are not consistently performed, there is increased risk of deficiencies in grant management. For example, 11 recent audits by our office found deficiencies in grantees’ management practices for Crime Victims Fund grants.

Another consideration is that the majority of grant money from the Crime Victims Fund is initially awarded to State Administering Agencies. These agencies are responsible for managing and overseeing thousands of subrecipients who receive the grant funds. Given the volume of funds that are being allocated to these agencies, we believe that OJP should establish an oversight strategy that ensures a consistent, reasonable, and achievable review cycle for onsite visits to State Administering Agencies.

SL: Did you have any other findings related to the monitoring of grant recipients?

EL: Yes, we did. We found risks associated with OJP staff’s understanding and performance of grant recipient monitoring procedures. Specifically, we found that some OJP program specialists and financial monitors did not fully understand grant monitoring procedures. In fact, the Office for Victims of Crime—which again, is part of OJP—hadn’t established a training program for the staff who perform monitoring functions. We further found that OJP did not have sufficient procedures for completing some of the financial questions in the OJP monitoring checklists. These kinds of weaknesses increase the risk that OJP monitors will fail to identify deficiencies.

We also found that the OJP monitors did not routinely verify the accuracy of payouts and revenues. This means the victim assistance grants are at risk of misallocating millions of funds.

SL: Now let’s talk about risks the audit identified relating to performance measures of the grants. Walk me through your findings.

EL: Sure. We concluded that the strategic goal and objectives for the Crime Victims Fund program are consistent with the Department’s strategic plan. However, the goal and its objectives address only two of the seven program categories funded by the Crime Victims Fund. Also, the goal and its objectives aren’t outcome-oriented or expressed in a quantitative and measurable form. That makes it difficult to measure and evaluate the quality of services provided to victims and improvements in their lives that are a result of

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the grantees’ services. Additionally, they were not reported as part of OJP’s budgets as required by the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-11 and the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act.

Now I don’t want to suggest that the Department doesn’t collect any quantitative data on grantee programs. They do. But what we found when we talked to several program specialists from the Office for Victims of Crime is that the data collected is generally output-related. And by that, I mean it’s used to determine things like the number of victims served, the types of victimization, demographic information, or the types of services provided. That data alone doesn’t tell the Department the quality of services, such as whether the grantee programs are meeting the needs of the victims and, therefore, whether the Crime Victims Fund is making an impact.

SL: So, what does this all mean?

EL: We determined that OJP needs a more effective system to collect, analyze, and report performance data for all of its Crime Victims Fund activities.

The Office for Victims of Crime is working to reevaluate existing measures and establish new measures for the programs it manages. But given that billions of funds are being awarded, we believe more progress is needed to ensure that the achievements and impact of Crime Victims Fund activities are identifiable to OJP, the Department, Congress, and the public.

SL: Elisa, thank you so much for speaking with me today.

EL: It was my pleasure, Stephanie.

SL: That’s it for today. To read the report, please visit our website, oig.justice.gov. Thanks for joining us.