

CASE STUDY

CLIENT

- Large California school district with 54 schools and 40,000 students.
- Annual state violence prevention funding allocated to secondary schools.

CHALLENGE

- A lack of training and oversight (at the school site and district office levels) led to years of misspending school violence prevention funds.
- Due to the ongoing nature of the funding, and that very few expenses were rejected, spending soon went on “auto pilot.”
- Inappropriate expenses included items such as: floor polishers, tree stump grinding, school logo clothing for staff, office furniture, building awnings, cell phones, outdoor benches, etc.

SOLUTION

- Freeze placed on new and pending expenses.
- Audited five years of expenses.
- Met with all line directors, middle school and high school principals and assistant principals to discuss past unallowable expenses.
- Mapped the procurement procedures used at each school site. Identified breakdowns in the expense approval process.
- Added one step in the purchasing approval process to make line directors more aware of expenses at their assigned school sites.
- Provided training to school site staff and central office personnel regarding allowable expenses and revised approval process.

RESULTS

- Grant accounts reimbursed for unallowable expenses.
- Greater understanding of annually allocated funds and the need to remain observant of expenses—especially in situations involving high staff turnover—and to avoid complacency.
- Unallowable expenses were nearly eliminated after the new protocols were implemented. If an unallowable expense appeared in the purchasing queue, coaching was immediately provided to staff to reinforce initial training and to prevent future occurrences.

BEST PRACTICES / LESSONS LEARNED

- Train staff when new funding arrives and when new employees are hired: purchasing policies and procedures; allowable and unallowable expenses; specific grant requirements; general grant management procedures; and contact information for someone to answer questions.
- Provide annual professional development for staff involved with managing grant funds and initiating or approving expenses.
- Review (audit) program expenses and documentation at regular intervals (2-4 times per year). A random/spot check of expenses, documentation and adherence to purchasing procedures. No need to review every expense unless conditions warrant that level of scrutiny.

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