



# Budget Professionals Discuss Certification Options

Amanda Cherrin, Reporter

“Does the budget profession need certification standards similar to those for accountants, acquisition staff, and financial managers?” That was the question on the table at the AABPA Spring Symposium morning session entitled “Certification for Budget Professionals.” The session, convened by Department of Housing and Urban Development Budget Director **Anthony Scardino**, included advice and cautionary tales from a panel of professionals who were involved in the creation of certification programs in their respective fields.

Mr. Scardino set the stage for the discussion with a brief introduction that highlighted the challenges of creating appropriate standards for a profession characterized by such diversity in background and experience. He emphasized the need to start a dialogue among professionals to assess the importance of certification standards in the budgeting field and the impact of such a process on both offices and individuals.

The first speaker was **Lesley Field**, a procurement policy analyst at the

Office of Management and Budget. Ms. Field gave a brief overview of the effort by the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) to create a certification process for contracting professionals in civilian agencies. With a goal of standardizing education, training, and experience within the profession, the Federal Acquisition Certification in Contracting Program was approved in 2005 and implemented in 2006. According to Ms. Field, the goal of the program was to encourage coordination in management and practice among the agencies and “meet the challenges of the acquisition world.”

Next, **Relmond Van Daniker**, executive director of the Association of Government Accountants, spoke about his work to create a certification program for government financial managers at the federal, state, and local levels. The Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM) program was established in 1994, and since then, has issued 14,000 certifications.

According to Mr. Van Daniker, the creation of the exam was a “sig-

nificant undertaking not to be taken lightly” and involved considerable time, money, and manpower for both the development and maintenance of the program. Mr. Van Daniker cited initial development, ongoing administration, infrastructure, marketing, training, and costs as factors to be considered when creating a program, remarking, “I don’t want to burst your bubble, but it’s costly and requires a 10 to 15-year time commitment.”

American Society of Military Comptrollers Executive Director **Robert Hale** spoke next. A self-described “budget-junkie,” Hale gave some recommendations for budgeting professionals based on his experience with the Department of Defense. While asserting that test-based certification can help professional development, Mr. Hale recommended that AABPA focus on developing a broader accreditation program instead of trying to create certification standards for budgeting professionals and thought that this could be done through the creation of education guidelines, the establishment of courses, and the implementation of levels of accreditation.

*Certification Options, Continued*

Like Mr. Van Daniker, Mr. Hale emphasized the difficulty of launching certification programs, pointing to the money and time involved in such an endeavor.

Mr. Scardino then discussed the certifications that already exist, relevant skills and education that might be part of a new process, and possible names for the certification before opening up the floor for

questions and comments. Those in attendance expressed the need for consistency in standards among agencies, emphasized the value of tests in addition to training, and stressed the difficulty of defining the necessary skills. Mr. Scardino ended the session by saying again that the process will take time and reminding attendees to take the dialogue back to the office.

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