



## 2008 SPRING SYMPOSIUM BUDGET POLICY AND ITS PEOPLE—AT THE CROSSROADS?

### SESSION SUMMARY

# Bringing Order to Data Collection

James R. Posluszny, Reporter

While **Mark Wichlin** was Chief for the Division of Budget Policy and Systems at the Department of Labor, one of his responsibilities was to perform all of the budget data requests. Those were daunting tasks at times, but things are changing, Mr. Wichlin explained, as he opened the afternoon session at AABPA's Spring Symposium panel. The Budget Formulation and Execution Line of Business (BFELoB) is working to help analysts organize large amounts of data and to make their job a little easier.

The Data Collection and Tracking Workgroup of BFELoB aims to transform budget exercises at agencies and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The workgroup's objective is "to identify, acquire, and make available processes, technologies, and services that enable the budgeting community to capture, process, and manage data from multiple sources government-wide." The workgroup is exploring options that are agile enough to be used for fast-turnaround exercises, able to handle both text and numbers, and have access controls that enable staged data sharing.

The workgroup has achieved a great success in a short period of

time. **Phil Wenger and Dave Harmon** from OMB discussed some of the data collection exercises that have been completed this year and focused on activities related to the continuing resolution, credit supplement report, and the collection of across-the-board reduction information. The newest exercise involved monthly outlay plans which replaced much of the manual method of collecting this data.

Prior to this workgroup only the Department of Defense (DoD) had a centralized process with a custom database. **Paul White** from DoD commented on how the workgroup's exercises will be able to be used as a historical reference. One of the major technological improvements of this type of collection is the ability to store the information in a central place (MAX) and locate it easily afterwards.

Another panelist, **Diane Shaughnessy**, Chief of Budget Administration with the Department of the Interior thought the BFELoB was very useful. Like many agencies, Interior lacks a budget system and uses spreadsheets and word documents, making the data collection workgroup very attractive. Like all new systems there were format-

ting problems, but the quick turnaround after feedback made the system user-friendly.

The panelists highlighted one example of how the BFELoB is helping budget professionals with their job. For example, this year, the briefing material for the 2009 budget rollout at OMB was posted to the MAX community instead of using Microsoft Word and dozens of binders. It included over 500 questions and 864 pages that were categorized by subject using a simple interface with text and PDF attachments.

The Data Collection and Tracking tools are developed based on user input. The MAX Federal Community offers a quick and effective way of collaborating with other agencies and finding out what tools and systems others are using. Analysts interested in the workgroup can check the MAX Federal Community for the upcoming exercises such as the questions and answer builder and the mid-session review change sheets. Your input will directly affect how these tools are created.

The workgroup meets on alternate Wednesdays at 11:00 at the Office of Management and Budget.

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