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Investing in Our Students:
An Interview with the Top-Scoring Applicant from Investing in Innovation P3

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Making Sense of the Medicare and Medicaid Incentives Packages:
Financing the Upfront Costs
BY CHRIS LAPAGE, GRANTS DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

So you have checked a few items off your list: (1) You determined you are an eligible health care provider, (2) You have calculated an estimate incentive payment and realize what's at stake in terms of reimbursement, (3) You have begun the registration process with CMS (Medicare) or the agency in your state administering the Medicaid program, and (4) You have reviewed and completely understand the various objectives and measures that your EHR system must meet in order to prove meaningful use and capitalize on the incentives.

Unfortunately, one large obstacle still stands in between you and the incentive payment. You cannot afford the upfront costs of purchasing and implementing an EHR. Furthermore, the incentive payments represent only a portion of what it will cost to get EHR rolled out through your entire practice, hospital, or clinic. Many EHR vendors are working out creative financing schemes that skew payments towards post-implementation when incentive funds would potentially become available. However, many providers in underserved urban and rural areas still wonder how they will be able to afford all of these upfront investments.

Fortunately, there are several funding options available to health care providers. While grant funding is typically geared towards nonprofit and public health care providers, for-profit physician practices can also take advantage of these funding streams by collaborating with appropriate entities. In addition, many states are finally getting their EHR loan programs up and running (which stems from Recovery Act funding), which provides low interest loans for EHR adoption to small- and medium-sized physician practices.

One potential source of EHR/HIE funding flows out of the Agency For Health Care Quality and Research's (AHRQ) Health Information Technology Portfolio. AHRQ puts out several grant programs that fund real world demonstration projects and looks for well rounded projects that include expenses for software, hardware, training, personnel, and the research/dissemination components of the grant program. The AHRQ grants are open to most nonprofit organizations, but success with this funding stream boils down to the ability of the applicant to attach a principal

FUNDED'S 3-PART SERIES ON MEDICARE AND MEDICAID ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD INCENTIVES
This article is the third and final part of an article series exploring the various components of the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentives programs. The focus for this month's article moves from program basics (part I) and meaningful use requirements (Part II) to exploring grant funding available on the front-end for providers trying to comply with meaningful use and realize their incentive payments.
Part I
Part II

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investigator (project lead) that has a background in research methodology. AHRQ must be sure that the research and dissemination piece will be brought to fruition; this requires you to look at the facilitators and barriers to EHR adoption and catalogue the lessons learned, obstacles encountered and best practices discovered. In addition, you must look at the ultimate effect of that implementation on quality of care indicators. Finally, AHRQ requires the creation of a dissemination plan, ranging from a journal article to regional and national conference presentations. The one issue with AHRQ's HIT portfolio is that you cannot do inpatient exclusive projects; you can do ambulatory-based projects or focus on transitions in care settings (between inpatient and outpatient). If you are willing to take on these elements, you can realize up to $2.5 million in funding over a five year project period.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) also administers several programs that allow for the acquisition of EHRs.

HRSA puts out solicitations specifically for Federally Qualified Health Centers to attain EHR systems and other types of health IT. HRSA also puts out a series of Rural Health Network Development grants that assist rural providers with planning and implementation activities in the formation of formal rural health care networks. Elements of health IT, such as health information exchange, are allowed expenses under the terms of these particular grant opportunities. In fact, HRSA is releasing a program in 2011 specifically for rural health networks to acquire EHR. The program offers applicants $900,000 over three years. They anticipate making 40 awards. HRSA also sponsors nursing education grants, including some that allow the acquisition of health IT for the purposes of training and continuing education.

Finally, you will want to explore alternative options beyond state and federal grant funding. Many organizations have secured earmarks for their health IT projects and that continues to be a viable funding stream. While earmarks are a hard sell in 2011, the process will likely be reformed and we will see some type

of reincarnation in future fiscal cycles. Elected legislators are not going to cede their ability to target federal and state budget funds to high priority projects in their district. In addition, you can approach local, regional and national foundations that have a history with funding IT projects. Since foundations mainly look at impact, you will need to make the connection between the implementation and improved quality of care. In other words, you must drive home the benefit to the patient in order to secure foundation funding. Most foundations only require a 2-3 page letter of inquiry to make a decision on whether they would like to invite the applicant to make a full proposal and fund the project.

While some providers are under the wrong impression that they will not qualify for the incentives if they utilize federal grant funding to secure their EHR, the truth is grant funding has no implications for a provider's eligibility as it relates the incentive program. When it comes to implementing health IT, the incentives should be viewed as just one piece of the financing package.

"Many EHR vendors are working out creative financing schemes that skew payments towards post-implementation when incentive funds would potentially become available."

Investing in Our Students:
An Interview with the Top-Scoring Grant Applicant from Investing in Innovation
By Christopher Haight, Grants Development Consultant

Regina Renaldi is the Executive Director of Priority Programs at St. Vrain Valley School District in Colorado. St. Vrain received the highest scoring application in the Investing in Innovation (i3) grant competition. Ms. Renaldi was generous enough to sit down and discuss with us the i3 grant and St. Vrain's grantseeking in general. Below is our conversation.

St. Vrain received the highest-scoring application on the Recovery Act-funded Investing in Innovation program. Can you tell us a bit about your project and what you hope to accomplish with the grant funds?

St. Vrain Valley SD is implementing a plan for addressing and targeting the unmet needs of at-risk students; specifically Hispanic and ELL students at Skyline High School and its feeder schools. Our strategy is to provide

> **St. Vrain Valley School District won a 5-year $3,608,880 Development Grant from Investing in Innovation.**

students with a sequence of focused interventions to reduce the achievement gap. We have designed a system that brings supports and an augmented school year for elementary students to build a literacy foundation. The system then shifts focus to the mathematics foundation in middle schools, with math labs and an augmented school year to build stronger mathematics skills. At the high school level we provide students with a science focus through a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) certification track. We have designed a program that brings data-driven decision making and information technology integration through our Digital Learning Collaborative which is accessible throughout the K-12 system of targeted schools. Our plan is to increase the graduation rate at Skyline High School especially for our Hispanic students and improve overall proficiency levels for at risk students in reading at the elementary level and math at the middle school level.

What do you think were some of the top factors that contributed to your success with the I3 proposal?

Our project was awarded as a development grant which means that we had data that supported our hypothesis that this initiative would result in improved student performance in reading and math. The success of our project was based on several previous successes in St. Vrain School District. The math intervention we proposed was implemented the previous year through a Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG) Grant through the Colorado Department of Education, resulting in improved performance by ninth graders following the intervention. One of our CTAG goals was the improvement of ninth graders in overall performance in Algebra I. We improved the success rate of ninth graders in Algebra I from 62% of students passing in Year One to 92% passing in Year Two. The curriculum and expectations for students remained the same but the success

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improved appreciably with implementation of a math intervention called Navigator for at risk students. At the elementary level, we implemented an augmented school year at two of our now identified i3 schools. Following a seven week literacy intervention in the summer we experienced six months of growth for 56% of our students. This excellent pre i3 intervention data contributed to the success of our proposal. The strength of our application can also be attributed to the support we accessed through our collaboration with Grants Office. Their experience with grant writing and focus on the questions posed supported the strength of our project and thus the success and strength of our i3 proposal.

What is the process for developing a project like this? For example, do teachers bring a project idea to you or is there a specific team of individuals who research and identify new initiatives?

Often, the District identifies key initiatives to support student learning and academic progress. When these key initiatives are identified, leadership at the district level reviews project needs and begins the process of exploring possibilities for funding these key initiatives and developing them to align with district goals and vision. Teachers and leaders who have expertise in the areas of focus are assembled to develop ideas that include research and innovation that would support the project. For St. Vrain Valley School District, it is imperative that all projects align with district goals and vision.

Developing these kinds of projects and seeking funding/applying for grants requires the involvement of a lot of stakeholders - teachers, administration, grant writers, etc. Do you have any advice for schools just beginning this process in keeping everyone coordinated and committed to the project?

Our experience with grants has provided us with strong foundational understandings of the necessary protocols for grant development and administration. We have learned that it is important to define a lead person for each grant initiative. Next, a team of knowledgeable contributors needs to be assembled based on their expertise regarding the grant focus. Teachers, administrators, students, community stakeholders and local business concerns need to be part of the grant writing team. The grant manager needs to be the lead regarding the initial grant writing process. Communication and development of a timeline for writing, editing, reviewing, rewrites, and submission need to be made available to all team members. It has been helpful to use a common site or shared folder for feedback opportunities that is readily accessible by all participants to include edit opportunities and pertinent research documents that would support the grant focus. Also, there must be a plan for data management and data review and reporting as part of every grant plan. Data is key to reporting and a strong relationship with a district's assessment department is essential so that data collection can be aligned with the grant parameters and reporting requirements.

In terms of grantseeking for these projects, do you develop projects in response to a new grant programs or develop the details of the project first and then seek grant funding?

We have found that aligning our district goals with available grants is not as effective as finding grants with parameters and focus that align with current district goals and vision. That way we are funding initiatives that are meaningful rather than beginning too many projects that diminish the capacity of the district to meet its identified and data-driven goals.

> *"The strength of our application can also be attributed to the support we accessed through our collaboration with Grants Office. Their experience with grant writing and focus on the questions posed supported the strength of our project and thus the success and strength of our i3 proposal."*

Based on your experience with grant funding and expertise in K-12 education, what do you think are going to be some key areas of interest for grant funding in the future (for example, STEM, education technology, professional development, etc)?

We are certain that STEM will continue to be an area of focus for grants in the coming years. The data on the development of STEM-related careers and job opportunities makes that focus one that will continue to be of importance. We also believe that another key area of interest will be augmented school year planning. It is clear that students need more time. This is not only a need for students who are at risk but also for students who would benefit from enrichment opportunities. Lastly, we believe that the development of online learning opportunities will be a focus in the near future. Meeting the needs of all students is a goal for schools and

traditional seat time is no longer essential for students in terms of academic success. The traditional brick and mortar school may not be necessary for all learners.

Some school districts view grant funding warily due to reporting requirements. Can you describe your experience with the actual administration of grants? How manageable is it for schools?

Managing grants and reporting requirements are possible when there is a plan that is part of the grant from its inception. Agreements and data management plans need to be established before the grant is submitted. Reporting requirements are varied and can be time consuming if there is not an organized plan for their collection and review. Most large grants require the inclusion of a professional evaluator. Often that evaluator is crucial to the organization and management of the grant

reporting and data. Evaluators have the expertise to provide support to the district in managing resources and data. It is also helpful to have the support of the district finance office. They can be instrumental in providing reports that can make the administration of the grant more manageable.

Any last thoughts or advice for new grantseeking schools/organizations?

Define your key initiatives and remain focused on reaching identified goals through grant resources. Use them as supplements to general funding when additional resources will support those goals. Define a way to sustain whatever you learn during the grant time frame. Sustainability is the key to grant projects. Most foundations and grant programs will be your start up funds, but are looking for specific ways in which an organization will maintain programs after the grant funding ends.

Background on Investing in Innovation (i3)

The Recovery Act allocated $650 million for Investing in Innovation grants. These grants supported schools and nonprofit organizations across the country in developing, testing, and scaling up education reform projects. Applicants had to address one of four absolute priorities: (1) Innovations that Support Effective Teachers and School Leaders; (2) Innovations that Improve the Use of Data; (3) Innovations that Complement the Implementation of High Standards and High- Quality Assessments; and (4) Innovations that Turn Around Persistently Low-Performing Schools. The Department of Education awarded 49 i3 grants, in the categories of Development, Validation, and Scale-Up projects. The Obama administration has sought to sustain the program under annual appropriations. To learn more about i3 and the winners, please visit http://www2.ed.gov/programs/innovation/index.html.

HEAD OF THE CLASS:

WHAT A RENEWED ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT COULD MEAN FOR GRANTSEEKERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

BY CHRISTOPHER HAIGHT, GRANTS DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

While Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 and FY2012 budget talks will likely continue to dominate the political psyche for the foreseeable future, other important legislative endeavors remain alive - albeit in a much more latent way. Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has been a standing priority for the Obama administration, as it remains an area of possible bipartisan achievement.

Democrats and Republicans last came together to reauthorize ESEA in 2001 under President Bush in what became known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, with the U.S. House of Representatives voting 384-45 and the U.S. Senate voting 91-8 in favor of the law. NCLB required students take state standardized tests and measured schools' progress in improving academic achievement every year. The law has since received commendation for supporting improved accountability and standards as well as significantly increasing Federal funding for education - although many claim this increase is still not enough to support the breadth of the law's ambitions.

NCLB has hardly been met with universal approval, however. In addition to criticisms over the level and direction of funding, many have noted that the requirement that states administer standardized tests did nothing to address what constituted adequate standards from state to state. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan aptly captured this sentiment in describing a "race to the bottom" in states setting low academic standards in order to improve the number of students appearing to have mastered the required content.

Current negotiations of ESEA reauthorization are still in the very early stages of bringing together relevant leaders. In the House, the Education and Workforce Committee is holding hearings on reauthorization led by Rep. John Kline (R-MN), Chairman, and Rep. George Miller (D-CA), Ranking Member. Although Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) is not expected to be intimately involved in these preliminary steps towards drafting legislation, his previous involvement on NCLB may help ESEA gain traction later as it battles for

Most Likely to Be Cut:

- Enhancing Education Through Technology
- Improving Literacy Through School Libraries
- Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools
- Teaching American History Grant

Most Likely to Be Funded:

- Race to the Top
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Successful, Safe and Healthy Students
- Investing in Innovation

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space in the public consciousness.

Likewise, the Senate is taking steps to consider such a bill. A bipartisan group known as the Big Four, comprised of Sens. Tom Harkin (D-IA), Michael Enzi (R-WY), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), and Lamar Alexander (R-TN), has initiated talks on the Senate Education Committee. Senator Michael Bennett (D-CO), who served as the Superintendent of Denver Public Schools before being appointed to his Senate seat in 2009 and winning his 2010 election, is also expected to be a key player. Bennett not only has the actual experience in the education field, but also is a close ally of President Obama and Secretary Duncan, who served as Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools before coming to Washington.

Meanwhile, state-based and grassroots efforts continue to push new education reforms across the country - even in the absence of official action from Congress. Over 40 states are moving towards adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards, which is an historic movement to implement national standards without actually having the Federal government impose them. Michelle Rhee, former Chancellor of D.C. Public Schools, has also launched a new nonprofit organization, Students First, to advocate education reforms (learn more at http://www.studentsfirst.org/). Rhee became a national figure for reformers due to her challenging of the status quo regarding accountability and teacher pay.

A future ESEA is likely to include many of the same aspects espoused by the administration's Race to the Top program, which emphasized four core areas of reform: (1) High academic standards and assessments; (2) Improved use of data among all education stakeholders; (3) Great teachers and school leaders; and (4) Turning around persistently low-achieving schools. In terms of possible grant programs, there will likely be a revision of the existing menu of options to include a greater focus on professional development for teachers, community or nonprofit partnerships with schools, and emphasis on effective use of technology-enabled learning. Investing in Innovation, the Recovery Act grant program open to school districts and nonprofit organizations, may also receive a more permanent basis of support.

President Obama called on Congress to act on ESEA by September - just in time for the new school year. The timeline is likely too ambitious for the glacial pace by which the U.S. Congress typically operates, but given the auspicious early movements on the law by various stakeholders so far, education reform may get to the head of the class yet.

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ENSURING HOMELAND SECURITY

By Vince Siragusa, Grants Development Consultant

Protecting valuable infrastructure has always been a mission for communities and those responsible for their safety.   From medieval moats harboring castles down to the high-tech surveillance, training, and weapons in today's world, efforts are infinite in their attempt to avert the loss of lives and property that can come as a result of natural disasters, man-made hazards, and terrorist attacks.

This quest for security preparedness has become a greater part of our government's attention, fiscal budget, and stated priorities than ever before. The Department of Homeland Security itself has seen its appropriations increase from roughly $20 billion in FY 2002 to $55 billion in FY2010. And while the idea of protecting a way of life is nothing new, the myriad of current threats—and potential fall-out from those events—has arguably never been seen on today's scale.

The ongoing tragedy in Japan has provided us an unwelcome reminder of the overwhelming devastation that a single event can trigger. While reflection may not yet be prudent, given the need to address so many current vulnerabilities and great suffering, we have our own all too

recent domestic events to remind us of the need for ongoing preparedness. Preparation is often complicated by the fact that the 300 million people who make up our own nation's economy and community have become so mutually dependent on others. In many of these instances, there are no such things as geographical or jurisdictional boundaries to contain the catastrophe or limit its consequences. Because of that, successfully implementing security-related projects should leverage funding assistance with a multi-pronged, comprehensive approach in mind.

The first half of inclusive protection comes in the form of preparedness for <u>if</u> something happens. Crack open the guidance document for any security-related grant program and it is likely you will see a focus on training, exercise, mutual aid, information sharing, and equipment. The second half of protection should be tailored around the most appropriate response for <u>when</u> something happens. And if real-time implementation is true to the original intent, we should have a better trained, and better equipped, collection of first responders and community members.

As various vulnerabilities and threats

HOMELAND SECURITY BUZZWORDS – A FEW BUZZWORDS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN DEVELOPING GRANT PROPOSALS :

- *All Hazards*
- *CBRNE*
- *Continuity of Government Operations*
- *Data/Communication Interoperability*
- *Enhancement*
- *Dual-use*
- *Preparedness*
- *Mitigation*
- *Response*
- *Recovery*
- *Return on Investment*
- *Cost-efficient*
- *Process Flow*
- *Crisis Management*
- *Vulnerability*
- *Risk Assessment*
- *Audit*
- *Priorities*
- *Critical Infrastructure*
- *Key Resources*
- *Memorandum of Understanding*

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are targeted, be cognizant that hazards pose two potential problems. While the immediate impact of a negative event may quickly come to mind, also recognize that many hazards must be addressed with respect to a cause and effect relationship. The same earthquake that might only last a few moments might give rise to dam failure. In turn, mudslides might occur making the roads impassable, inevitably impairing local evacuation efforts and so on. A consequence may rear its ugly head far after the initial issue presents itself—and, whenever possible, should be prepared for accordingly.

Adequate homeland security extends far beyond just keeping the nation safe against some enemy—both in grant application and project implementation. As various efforts from thousands of the country's communities will collectively provide for a safer nation, recognizing your role in plugging a gap in national homeland security may help you to garner more support than primarily focusing your application on what your project can achieve locally. Respecting and isolating aspects of your local grant project that tie in with the "big picture" will more likely get your application noticed and your project funded.

WWW.GRANTSOFFICE.INFO

Need help learning about what grants are available for your various projects and organization? Grants Office has developed a series of informational websites that are perfect for getting you started on your grantseeking.

We currently have 15 topical information websites, covering grants-related information on everything from homeland security to healthcare to education, and more!

Each website features the top grants for each category, provides summary information on all recently released grants from Federal, state, and foundation sources, and allows you to register for upcoming or view previously recorded webcasts (for a list of all upcoming events, see page 10).

To get started, visit www.grantsoffice.info and select which websites best suit your organization. You can also sign up for email alerts regarding pertinent grant information or upcoming events.

Best of all - it's FREE!

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE:
What's Happening in Washington

In order to avert a Federal shutdown, President Obama, Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH), and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) reached a final deal on FY2011 appropriations. The final funding agreement will cut $38.5 billion from FY2010 levels and represents over $70 billion less than the Obama administration initially requested for 2011.

Among the programs eliminated:

- Career Pathways Innovation Fund
- Green Jobs Innovation Fund
- YouthBuild
- Enhancing Education Through Technology
- Improving Literacy Through School Libraries

Among programs facing large cuts (amount cut in millions):

- Teaching American History ($73)
- Distance Learning and Telemedicine ($16)
- COPS Programs ($296)

One program that did manage a somewhat unlikely revival was the administration's Race to the Top, to be funded at $700 million for 2011.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 2011 Webcasts

- **April 19, 2011:** Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG)
- **April 26, 2011:** Energy Efficiency Funding for Municipalities

May 2011 Webcasts

- **May 17, 2011:** Exploring the Telehealth Network Grant Program (TNGP)
- **May 24, 2011:** Justice Assistance Grants (JAG)
- **May 26, 2011:** Engaging AHRQ for Health IT, *sponsored by Cisco*
- **May 31, 2011:** Keeping Schools Safe: COPS Secure Our Schools (SOS)

June 2011 Webcasts

- **June 9, 2011:** Funding Higher Ed: Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP), *sponsored by Cisco*
- **June 14, 2011:** Tribal Funding Overview
- **June 21, 2011:** Grantwriting Series: 10 Tips for Getting More Tribal Grants
- **June 28, 2011:** Competitive Department of Energy Grants
- **June 30, 2011:** Funding for Rural Healthcare Initiatives, *sponsored by Philips*

July 2011 Webcasts

- **July 19, 2011:** Funding to Bridge the Digital Divide
- **July 21, 2011:** Building Interoperability Coalitions, *sponsored by Tait Radio*

Register for upcoming or view previous webcasts at http://grantsofficeevents.webex.com

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