



Tom Strange

Tom Strange is the president and CEO of The Solution Design Group, a software and information technology firm that developed CapitalVision®, a web-based capital program management solution. He has more than 24 years of experience in the airport industry and has provided consulting and software services to more than 75 airports around the world.

The Virtues of Transparency

We hear a lot about transparency lately, especially in light of the federal stimulus package that is introducing \$787 billion into the national economy. President Barack Obama stressed its importance when he signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) into law in February. "...Our goal must be to spend these precious dollars with unprecedented accountability, responsibility and transparency," he said in his weekly radio address.

I agree. As a taxpayer and parent of two college-age students, I, too, think we must have unprecedented accountability and responsibility.

Of the \$787 billion, \$1.3 billion was reserved specifically for projects and programs administered by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). In mid-October, the FAA indicated on its website that it intends to have all ARRA grant funds committed by February 2010 and all of the related construction completed by February 2011.


ARRA grant recipients must, among other things, comply with Section 1512 reporting requirements. These reporting requirements have changed several times in the last six months as the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has issued detailed guidance clarifying the reporting requirements. The first report postings were to be made on the federal government's publically accessible website, recovery.gov, by Oct. 1, 2009. I have spoken with several airport grant managers about the process and what has and hasn't worked. In many cases, they reported that the guidance from OMB is not very clear and is often confusing. Many of them also say they are glad these requirements are only short-term and they look forward to things going back to normal in just a couple of years.

Personally, I don't think so.

The Obama administration has made a strong commitment to transparency and accountability.

The president made reference to the need for transparency during his campaign, and that commitment has continued into the White House. On his first full day in office, President Obama issued a memorandum on transparency and open government and called for recommendations to make the federal government more transparent, participatory and collaborative. The White House staff has a chief information officer, a chief technology officer and numerous deputies and staff members working toward making all information about government spending available to the public. The administration wants to make sure that the principles of the OPEN Government Act of 2007 are carried out. Examples of the changes include recovery.gov, the White House Blog and numerous other websites for various federal agencies.

So what does that mean for our community? Airports, both large and small, can streamline processes and procedures to make meeting the reporting requirements easier. These improved processes can lead to better program and project management and, in turn, can lower program costs. Airports should also invest in technology to ease the management burden and allow project managers more time to manage projects rather than pushing paper. Airport suppliers and consultants can help the initiative by preparing accurate and standardized invoices. Pay requests should be easily checked and verified, with information outlined in sufficient detail to meet the current and future reporting requirements. When practical, payment documents should be provided to airports in electronic form that can be loaded into their management systems.

Technology can improve and enable processes and provide the transparency and accountability that is needed. It can also make the management of capital programs more efficient and effective, which, in turn, can lower costs. It seems to me, we all win. 

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