Pre-Award Risk Assessment and Award Structuring Course

Pre-Award Risk Assessment and Award Structuring is an intermediate, practice-focused course for federal and pass-through entity staff involved in grant review and award decisions. It teaches how to identify, analyze, and document pre-award risk—and deliberately translate that risk into defensible award structures before funds are obligated.

Group classes in Live Online and onsite training is available for this course. For more information, email onsite@graduateschool.edu or visit: https://www.graduateschool.edu/courses/pre-award-risk-assessment-and-award-structuring-course

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Course Outline

Module 1: Purpose and Role of Pre-Award Risk Assessment

- Explain why pre-award risk assessment is a decision-making function rather than a compliance exercise.
- Identify how early program design and award decisions drive downstream performance failures and audit findings.
- Recognize oversight expectations from OMB, Inspectors General, and Congress.

Module 2: Regulatory and Policy Foundations

- Review Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200) requirements related to pre-award risk assessment and award conditions.
- Understand risk-based decision-making and internal control expectations.
- Identify documentation standards needed for defensible pre-award decisions.

Module 3: Core Categories of Pre-Award Risk

- Identify key categories of pre-award risk, including financial, programmatic, compliance, capacity, and external risk.
- Distinguish material risk from routine variation or administrative noise.
- Recognize how different risk types require different management responses.

Module 4: Program Risk vs. Recipient Risk

- Differentiate between risks inherent in program design and risks specific to recipient capacity.
- Identify how program structure can amplify or mitigate recipient risk.
- Avoid over-reliance on audit history or financial metrics as sole indicators of risk.

Module 5: Pre-Award Risk Assessment Methods and Inputs

- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of common pre-award inputs, including applications, audits, and financial statements.
- Distinguish high-value risk indicators from low-value or misleading information.
- Apply professional judgment when data is incomplete, outdated, or conflicting.

Module 6: Analyzing Risk and Reaching Defensible Conclusions

- Assess risk based on likelihood and impact rather than checklist scoring.
- Prioritize material risks that could affect performance, compliance, or stewardship of funds.
- Document risk conclusions clearly to support defensible award decisions.

Module 7: Using Risk to Inform Award Decisions

- Determine when to approve, condition, modify, delay, or decline awards based on risk.
- Align award decisions logically with documented risk analysis.
- Recognize when conditions alone are insufficient to address structural risk.

Module 8: Structuring Awards Based on Risk

- Design special award conditions that are targeted, proportional, and defensible.
- Apply phased or incremental funding to manage risk.
- Use prior approval requirements and authorities strategically.

Module 9: Linking Pre-Award Risk to Oversight and Monitoring

- Translate pre-award risk findings into proportional post-award oversight plans.
- Establish escalation triggers and monitoring strategies aligned with risk.
- Use technical assistance as a preventive risk-management tool.

Module 10: Documentation, Defensibility, and Capstone Simulation

- Identify what auditors and oversight bodies look for in pre-award files.
- Avoid common documentation failures that undermine defensibility.
- Apply course concepts through a capstone simulation involving a full pre-award risk assessment and award recommendation.