Program Design and Risk Assessment Course (Self-Paced)

Program Design and Risk Assessment is an intermediate course for federal and pass-through entity staff focused on integrating risk awareness into grant program design. The course teaches how early design decisions can prevent compliance issues, reduce burden, and strengthen program outcomes.

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/program-design-and-risk-assessment-course-self-paced

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Course Outline

Module 1: Federal Grant Program Design Lifecycle

- Understand how federal grant programs translate statutory authority and national priorities into operational funding mechanisms.
- Distinguish between program policy, program design, and program execution.
- Identify how early design decisions shape accountability, performance, and risk across the grant lifecycle.

Module 2: OMB's Role in Grant Program Design and Oversight

- Explain the role of the Office of Management and Budget in federal grants governance.
- Understand how the Uniform Guidance serves as a foundational framework for program design.
- Recognize OMB expectations for risk-based program design and oversight.

Module 3: Translating Statutory Intent into Program Design

- Interpret authorizing statutes and appropriations language to define program purpose and scope.
- Design eligibility criteria and allowable activities aligned with statutory intent.
- Balance flexibility and control to support both innovation and accountability.

Module 4: Risk Assessment in Program Design

- Identify programmatic, financial, operational, compliance, and reputational risks at the design stage.
- Recognize how early design choices introduce or mitigate downstream risk.
- Apply pre-award risk assessment concepts to program-level decision-making.

Module 5: Designing Controls into Grant Programs

- Embed risk mitigation strategies into program structure, award conditions, and reporting requirements.
- Use phased funding, monitoring models, and subrecipient oversight to manage risk.
- Align controls proportionately to risk while preserving program effectiveness.

Module 6: Program Design Risk Mapping Case Exercise

- Analyze a realistic grant program design to identify embedded risks before award.
- Map risks to specific design decisions and anticipate how they may escalate post-award.
- Propose targeted design modifications that reduce risk without undermining program goals.

Module 7: Aligning Grant Programs with Agency Strategic Goals

- Link grant program objectives to agency mission, strategic plans, and performance goals.
- Design programs that emphasize outcomes rather than activity counts.
- Use grants as strategic policy tools rather than administrative funding transactions.

Module 8: Program Evaluation Fundamentals

- Distinguish between performance measurement and program evaluation.
- Understand formative and summative evaluation approaches.
- Recognize OMB expectations for evidence-building and evaluation use.

Module 9: Metrics and Indicators for Demonstrating Program Success

- Develop meaningful performance measures aligned with program goals.
- Distinguish outputs, outcomes, and impacts.
- Design metrics that are feasible for recipients and useful for decision-making.

Module 10: Working with Industries and Communities Served by Grant Programs

- Assess recipient operating environments, capacity, and industry constraints.
- Incorporate equity and community readiness considerations into program design.
- Use engagement and technical assistance as preventive risk-management tools.

Module 11: Integrating Risk Assessment, Performance, and Oversight

- Use performance data to inform monitoring and oversight decisions.
- Apply escalation and corrective action triggers consistently.
- Support continuous improvement in grant programs.

Module 12: Capstone — Designing a Defensible Grant Program

- Integrate strategy, risk assessment, performance measurement, and oversight into a single program design.
- Identify and mitigate risks across the grant lifecycle.
- Develop a defensible grant program framework suitable for audit and oversight review.