

**THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN
THE GEORGIA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF HIGHWAY SAFETY AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA'S TRAFFIC SAFETY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION GROUP**

Authors: Carol Cotton, Ph.D., M.Ed. Project Director
Wayland Walker, J.D., M.Ed., Program Analyst
Spencer Moore, Director of Programs and Planning Division
Agency: Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety, Atlanta, Georgia
Institution: Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group, College of Public Health, University of Georgia, Athens
Contact for additional information: Dr. Carol Cotton at 706/542-2804 or cpcotton@uga.edu

The collaboration between the Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GOHS) and the University of Georgia's College of Public Health's Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group (TSREG) spans seven years and three major projects, including a first project to evaluate a change in the traffic law and to determine knowledge and attitudes about that change; a second statewide evaluation project for Operation Zero Tolerance, a demonstration project targeting impaired driving; and a third, ongoing project for evaluating all of GOHS' programs designed to build program evaluation into all aspects of GOHS' organizational culture. Through these projects, TSREG provides technical assistance to GOHS, and GOHS provides training opportunities to students in public health.

GOHS provides education on traffic safety issues and seeks to reduce crashes, injuries and fatalities on the State's highways through program planning and implementation. To effect its mission, GOHS provides some direct educational programming, either through the efforts of its personnel or through contractors for specific initiatives such as media campaigns. GOHS also funds statewide law enforcement mobilizations including "Click It or Ticket" and "You Drink & Drive. You Lose." However, GOHS resources are channeled through grant awards, as GOHS is a conduit for federal money to flow to grantees selected for their educational, law enforcement, or engineering expertise. While GOHS determines broad programming needs in an annual Highway Safety Plan, grantees respond with specific proposals to, collectively, effectuate the Plan. Awards to grantees are made annually for an entire fiscal year and GOHS monitors grantee performance through reporting requirements and occasional site visits. Agency planners also process claims, since all payments to grantees are on a reimbursement basis. Grantees submit final reports at the close of each fiscal year, summing up their accomplishments to date.

TSREG, as part of the College of Public Health, provides research and evaluation expertise through contracts, cooperative agreements and grants. TSREG is able to respond quickly to requests for assistance of this type from agencies across the region. Through a collaborative partnership with TSREG, GOHS has sought to address its historic limitations and build its evaluation capacity. While GOHS did not explicitly set out to adopt an evaluation culture, it appears to be building one. Changes in organizational culture are changes in an organization's ordinary, everyday procedures, and TSREG has documented substantial changes in how evaluation data is collected and utilized by agency stakeholders.

Successes include the development and implementation of plans to monitor and evaluate the accomplishments of multiple grantees in a complex database. GOHS and TSREG have created an exemplary system for documenting the appropriateness of public health and safety expenditures and have presented on the process at national conferences in traffic safety and in program evaluation. Based upon the evaluation of almost 200 grantees, TSREG has provided a macro-level evaluation of GOHS itself in an annual report for the Governor and other stakeholders. "The unexpected" includes

the speed at which GOHS stakeholders have adopted an evaluation mentality and the national recognition that the agency has obtained by employing such procedures.

Difficulties and challenges remain, since two levels of change are necessary, first within the agency itself and, second, among GOHS' grantees. Many grantees have proven resistant to accountability and outcome measures, and have required considerable persuasion from the collaborative partners to change their procedures and reporting. However, all parties have benefited. TSREG benefits by training research assistants in public health programming and evaluation and in placing interns and practicum students periodically at GOHS. GOHS benefits in obtaining a partner which can provide needed professional evaluation expertise and training and which can be consulted on qualifications needed when public health personnel are hired. Grantees which adopt concrete and measurable evaluation procedures can prove their programs' worth and receive further funding. And the citizenry of Georgia benefits as GOHS progresses towards its goals of reducing morbidity and mortality on the state's highways.