

**Office of Inspector General
Research and Analytics**

Report #C-1516-021

November 2016

Executive Summary

In accordance with the Department of Education’s (department) fiscal year (FY) 2015-16 audit plan, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted a consulting engagement with the Division of Florida Colleges, Research and Analytics Unit. The purpose of this consulting engagement was to ensure that the department is effectively meeting the contractual requirements in the development of the Leveraging, Integrating, Networking, Coordinating Supplies (LINCS) application. The goal of the LINCS project is to define, build, test, and implement a mobile device application that is operated across states to deliver education and workforce data. This data will allow potential college students to explore their interest across selected college programs, find information about jobs related to selected programs, and identify current career opportunities in the jobs marketplace. During this consulting engagement, the department assigned key personnel to the project team; developed a project charter, objectives, and timelines; and held periodic meetings with senior staff to ensure the completion of all deliverables per the contract terms.

Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

The scope of this consulting engagement included the project development of LINCS for the period of November 18, 2015, through June 30, 2016. The objective of this consulting engagement was to ensure the department took appropriate steps to meet the project deliverables.

To accomplish our objective we reviewed applicable laws, rules, and regulations; interviewed appropriate department staff; reviewed policies, procedures, and related documentation; reviewed the LINCS contract; and evaluated management controls.

Background

The Division of Florida Colleges (division) is a department team who acts as a support system for Florida College System institutions. The division provides leadership and advocacy for the 28 institutions in an effort to promote continuous improvement and education innovation within the Florida College System.

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act amended the Trade Act of 1974 to authorize the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grant Program. In March 2010, the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act provided \$2 billion in funding over four years to the TAACCCT program. The TAACCCT

grants provide community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education with funds to expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career training programs that can be completed in two years or less; are suited for workers who are eligible for training under the TAA for Workers program; and prepare program participants for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations.¹

In 2014, Broward College used \$500,000 of their federal TAACCCT grant funds to contract with the department for the development of the LINCS application. Per the LINCS statement of work, the project began November 1, 2015, and ends April 28, 2017. The goal of the LINCS project is to define, build, test, and implement a mobile device application that is operated across states to deliver education and workforce data. This data will allow potential college students to explore their interest across selected college programs, find information about jobs related to selected programs, and identify current career opportunities in the jobs marketplace. The target audience is non-traditional students that may be employed while deciding whether to pursue a college education, or graduating high school students that may not prefer a traditional university. The LINCS application will be accessible through a variety of operating systems and devices.

Current Activities

The OIG initiated an audit of the grants program administered by the Division of Florida Colleges, Research and Analytics Unit, as well as interdepartmental interactions for the period of July 1, 2014, through November 30, 2015. During the preliminary information gathering, we determined the selected grants were contracts with Florida colleges and little to no activity had taken place towards completing the deliverables. Due to the inactivity, senior management requested the OIG change the audit to a consulting engagement to add greater value to the program and department.

In order to provide guidance and make recommendations, we met with the Division of Florida Colleges; the Florida College Foundation; the Division of Accountability, Research, and Measurement (ARM); and the Division of Information Technology (IT). We discussed contract progression, the application vision, and project timelines to assess adherence to the contractual deadlines. On May 25, 2016, the division signed a contract with ARM to provide staff to lead the project team. The project manager met with the division to clarify the vision of the mobile application, identify the target audience, and determine the capabilities and functionality of the program.

The LINCS contract included seven milestones and their respective deliverables. The milestones included start up; infrastructure development; the cross state smart-college-choices portal launch; the one-stop resource expansion of cross state smart-college-choices portal; collaboration on portal enhancements; prototype of portal enhancements; and the portal enhancement launch and close out. In addition to the contract milestones and deliverables, the division developed seven project objectives to include:

¹ <https://www.doleta.gov/taaccct/>

- Identifying required project management and systems development life cycle (SDLC) deliverables;
- Establishing an internal workgroup and briefing on the LINCS project;
- Defining functional requirements and developing a functional requirements document (FRD);
- Identifying, analyzing, and documenting all current and projected data sources and reports required to support LINCS;
- Drafting an interface data exchange (IDE);
- Developing operational requirements and documenting concept of operations (CONOPS); and
- Iterative building and implementing.

We met with the project team monthly to ensure the project remained on schedule and the design and development of the application was progressing. Over the course of the engagement, the project team completed the planning phases and created a project charter.

As of August 31, 2016, the project team had completed five (71%) of the seven project objectives. The completed objectives included defining the project work pattern and SDLC deliverables; establishing the internal integrated project team, customers, stakeholders, and project staff; defining the functional and operational requirements; defining data sources for LINCS; and drafting and distributing the IDE to states. The development of CONOPS is in progress, and the iterative building and implementation is 24% complete. Per the project manager, project outcomes are based on the internal department schedule, which may not directly map to the sequence in the deliverables agreement between the department and Broward College, but results in completion of the project by the contractual due date. The LINCS project is currently on target to be finished by the required completion date of April 28, 2017.

Currently, the mobile application is in development testing which is comprised of unit testing, integration testing, and system testing. Once developmental testing is completed, ARM will perform field testing, utilizing local college and university students, to ensure the system is user friendly and easy to access. The department anticipates beginning the testing phase for the mobile application in October 2016. The department will then perform quality assurance testing, which focuses on requirements for the system, to ensure queries are working properly.

The application will include an interactive feature that allows the user to input their zip code and desired radius (how far they are willing to travel to attend a state college). The application will then run a query identifying all colleges in the preferred area. The user can select the desired colleges and view the programs the colleges offer. In addition to the programs, the user can view the degrees available in the chosen fields, the cost to obtain each specific degree, and the hours required to graduate. The application is intended to be a one stop resource for information and may include links to college websites and information related to occupations, job vacancies, cost of living in geographic regions of the state, types of graduate employment, and earnings data.

The LINCS contract requires the acquisition of data from California, Illinois, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas to be utilized in the application. The department has been engaged in conversations and webinars with the states listed in the contract to develop and fulfill the deliverables, but does

not yet have signed agreements. The project team spoke to the Broward project manager, who verbally stated the division is not permitted to substitute any other state for one of the states listed in the contract. In response, the LINCS project sponsor plans to send out official letters to the partnering states in a final attempt to confirm all participants in the project and document the responses or lack thereof.

Future Activities

In 2014, the College of Central Florida used \$199,000 of their federal TAACCCT grant funds to contract with the department for the development of XCEL -IT. The XCEL-IT development project has a begin date of November 1, 2015, and an end date of June 30, 2017. The department has begun the initial process meetings for the XCEL-IT contract.

The project focuses on providing college administrators with outcome and workforce data on graduates. The contract includes five required measures: employment rate of graduates by program; employment retention rate of graduates one year following program completion; the average earnings of graduates one to three years following program completion, by program; annual graduation rate for all students enrolled by a program; and transfer rate/continuing education for all programs. ARM and the division are in the planning phase of this project.

Recommendations

We recommend the department continue to implement the current LINCS project plan in order to meet the target goals and successfully complete the contract deliverables. We also recommend the department document their efforts to fulfill the deliverables, including communication with the Broward project manager.

We recommend that the department complete development of a project charter, goals, and objectives for the XCEL-IT contract.

Closing Comments

The Office of the Inspector General would like to recognize and acknowledge the Division of Florida Colleges, Florida College Foundation, ARM, Division of Information Technology, and staff for their assistance during the course of this audit. Our fieldwork was facilitated by the cooperation and assistance extended by all personnel involved.

To promote accountability, integrity, and efficiency in state government, the OIG completes audits and reviews of agency programs, activities, and functions. Our audit was conducted under the authority of section 20.055, F.S., and in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, published by the Institute of Internal Auditors, and Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General, published by the Association of Inspectors General. The audit was conducted by Keith Bennett and supervised by Tiffany Hurst, Audit Director.

Please address inquiries regarding this report to the OIG's Audit Director by telephone at 850-245-0403. Copies of final reports may be viewed and downloaded via the internet at <http://www.fldoe.org/ig/auditreports.asp#F>. Copies may also be requested by telephone at 850-245-0403, by fax at 850-245-9419, and in person or by mail at the Department of Education, Office of the Inspector General, 325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1201, Tallahassee, FL 32399.