Session title: Local Agency Rountable
Date and time: Sunday December 8, 13:30
Moderator: Sabine Romero, Ethics and Compliance Team, City of Austin Law Department
Rapporteur: Rosalie Readman

Session summary

This round-table meeting provided an opportunity for exchange concerning recent developments in each participant's agency. The session also included an opportunity to share ethics programming successfully implemented in each jurisdiction.

The use of technology was a recurrent theme throughout the exchanges. First of all, technology emerged as an important tool to use for training. Several agencies have developed or are working on developing online training programs. Online training has the advantage of being able to accommodate the large volume of people to be trained by each agency. By all accounts, this type of training would mesh with a more personalized approach. For example, organizations contact the agencies to develop a training program focusing more specifically on their needs after general training is made available online. Once completed, online training also seems to foster exchanges given that trainees are more aware of the issues and more inclined to directly contact agencies in order to ask questions.

Including technology in investigation techniques was another theme raised during the session. Technology specialists have been added to meet new monitoring requirements. Moreover, the use of technology to improve the service offering was mentioned repeatedly, for instance as regards new ways to contribute to political parties online, disseminating the amounts spent by them, or new websites that facilitate user navigation.

An improvement in communication through technology also took shape through the use of social media such as Twitter or ongoing contact between agencies and their clients by such means as newsletters or Smartphone apps.

Discussions also focused on the need to harmonize regulations so as to maximize efficiency. For example, a group of participants touched upon the harmonization of regulations in order to improve application and understanding, in a state where different cities had disparate regulatory frameworks.

Another priority for several agencies in the last year has been implementing new ways to ensure that rules are respected. In this regard, one participant recounted how stiff fines were meted out to lobbyists who failed to meet deadlines for filing their reports.

The issue of close contact between resources and clients was also described as an important element in successfully raising awareness about rules of ethics. Accessing

resources concerning ethics should be simple and affordable so that clients develop the reflex of consulting when in doubt instead of relying on their own devices.

Finally, discussions on these different issues mainly highlighted the fact that agencies are constantly evolving so as to improve their practices and meet new challenges in matters of ethics.