



Grants Compliance Specialists: Behind the scenes, helping the grant process work

July 2016 Snapshots

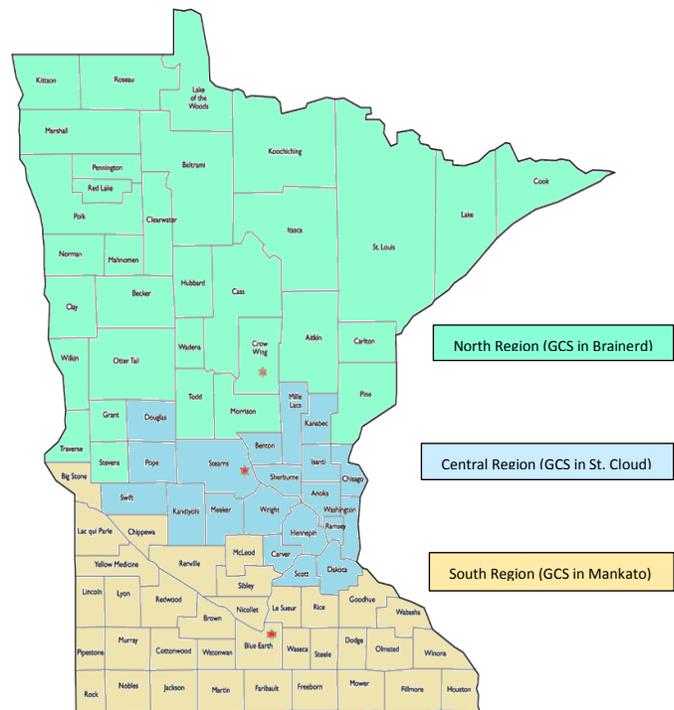
Grants Compliance Specialist (GCS). The title's a mouthful, and can sound a little intimidating, but in reality BWSR's GCSs are an important resource for the agency and its local government partners alike.

The positions came into being in 2013 after BWSR implemented the Grants Monitoring, Reconciliation and Verification Policy or the GMRVP in June of 2011. Two GCSs were hired in the fall of 2013, and a third joined the staff in 2016. The GMRVP is a three-pronged approach to grants oversight at BWSR. In addition to monitoring all BWSR grants annually, and paying competitive BWSR grants on a 50/40/10 payment schedule, BWSR verifies a 10 percent sample of all BWSR grants from the corresponding year of the previous biennium (for example, FY 2014 grants are being reconciled in calendar year 2016) in annual site visits. The GCSs take the lead on the verification process. They write up the results, and help LGUs resolve compliance issues found during the verification.

When they are not reconciling grant expenditures, GCSs are engaged in helping Local Government Units (LGUs) manage the administrative side of the grants. This includes training, phone conversations, or office visits. They are available to do formal training in a group setting to help LGUs adhere to BWSR policy and pertinent state statute as related to agency grants. They have done presentations at area trainings as well as at the BWSR Academy.

The training can also take the form of office visits, often with the Board Conservationist. GCSs act occasionally as financial consultants, recommend best practices for internal controls, risk assessment, governance, and interpreting grant policies and procedures. These office visits allow LGU staff an opportunity to ask specific questions in a more comfortable setting than a big group training may provide.

The time spent on these visits benefit both BWSR and our partners. They give BWSR the opportunity to get feedback on what's working and what's not, which helps provide improvements to the grants process and guidelines. It gives BWSR staff a better feel for the issues LGUs work through on a daily basis, which in turn can be used to help develop broader trainings. The office visits also help



BWSR's three Grants Compliance Specialists work around the state to help local government partners. Jeannette Austin is based in Brainerd, and serves the Northern Region. Linda Donnay serves the Central Region and works out of the St. Cloud office. Julie Krebs is the Southern Region GCS, and works out of the Mankato office.

determine what training is wanted and have a better understanding of the questions posed to BWSR. When GCS visits identify LGU processes that are working well, those best practices and lessons learned can help other LGUs facing the same issues.

In addition to the tools and training offered, the GCSs assist with developing examples and templates for LGU partners to minimize administrative demands in the oversight of the BWSR grants. Two such templates made available to the LGUs are sample time-tracking systems and a billing calculator. One LGU reported that the time tracking template made reporting “much easier” and is an excellent tool for those needing to bill for services. The billing calculator has simplified their budgeting exercises and eased the pain of arriving at a billing rate for staff members.

Grants Compliance Specialists are an important resource for LGUs. They not only assure compliance with state rules and policy but are a part of the team to help put conservation on the ground (and water, too).