

## Federal Times

### **Project Horizon - A new approach to interagency planning**

By SID KAPLAN

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The events of recent years have demonstrated that we live in a period of accelerating change and unprecedented uncertainty. From the perspective of the federal government, these events shed stark light on the true costs of the decades-long rise of stove-piped organizational structures, outdated decision-making procedures, and strategic planning processes that often are fragmented even across agencies with clearly linked strategic goals. In many ways, these same strategic planning processes are still focused on "fighting the last war" rather than preparing for the unforeseen challenges ahead.

From the chief financial officer's perspective, these developments make it clear that effective financial management increasingly requires foresight, agility, and the ability to plan proactively and effectively across agency boundaries. Furthermore, in order to capture the true benefits of budget-performance integration, the government requires an increasingly unified view of its challenges and opportunities, and the tools available across the government to meet them.

The need for a new approach to long-term interagency planning is particularly clear for agencies whose missions have significant global components. Globalization has blurred the boundaries between national and international policy, to the extent that more than 30 agencies now operate internationally. The new demands of homeland security and the rapidly evolving challenges of international affairs are converging increasingly into a linked set of global challenges containing critical diplomatic, military, financial, homeland security, commercial, legal, environmental and health components. Agencies previously considered mainly domestic now have vital global responsibilities with clear links to traditional foreign policy agencies.

Although agencies share highly interrelated goals, they lack coordinated plans to achieve them, creating both strategic vulnerabilities and operational inefficiencies. Last year, seeing these needs, the State Department's Office of Strategic and Performance Planning, an office reporting to the CFO, together with the Homeland Security and Defense departments and several other agency partners, initiated Project Horizon.

Project Horizon brings together senior executives from global affairs agencies and the National Security Council to conduct long-term, interagency strategic planning. The purpose of the project is to develop realistic interagency strategies and identify capabilities in which the government should invest in order to prepare for the unforeseen threats and opportunities that will face the nation during the next 20 years. It uses a scenario-based strategic planning technique considered a best practice in both the private and public sectors. The Coast Guard used the same method to support long-term planning. It is a technique by which organizations develop and test strategies using

a systematically created range of alternative futures or scenarios, and is a proven means of creating strategic and operational alignment across diverse and even conflicting organizations.

In this methodology, scenarios are detailed, systematically developed descriptions of operating environments that an organization might face five to 25 years in the future. Scenarios are the structure for planning workshops to get strategies cross-tested for robustness and multipurpose use across a range of futures. This approach differs from traditional strategic planning by not assuming the future.

Project Horizon is jointly funded and governed by these participating organizations: the Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Labor, State, and Treasury departments, and the Environmental Protection Agency, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Millennium Challenge Corp., National Defense University and Agency for International Development. The National Security Council is also an active participant.

Project Horizon will yield a structured set of interagency strategies, associated considerations, and action plans for: interagency capabilities and tools; organizational models and processes; management and operational models; knowledge, skill and training requirements; and strategic planning approaches and goal frameworks. It is anticipated that Project Horizon's strategies will address a range of interagency planning issues including global security, development, trade, health, resource management and humanitarian relief. Project Horizon also will deliver a strategic planning toolkit that will enable participating agencies to apply the methodology within their organizations, and the foundation for an ongoing interagency strategic planning process that will inform government strategic plans. It is our expectation that this initiative will enable our organizations to be better and more jointly prepared for the unforeseen challenges and opportunities ahead.

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