# OCIO - Information Technology Services
## *ITS Connections*

**Volume 1, Issue 1**          **February 18, 2005**

### *ITS Calendar:*

OCIO All Hands Video/Teleconferences at 2pm, EST:

Tuesday, April 19
Tuesday,  July 19
Tuesday,   Oct.18

### *Contact Information*

Please send us your story ideas, comments, calendar items, ingenious solutions, questions or answers. Email us at:

ITSConnections@usda.gov

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# Announcing ITS Connections
## *A Note from the ACIO (acting), Rich Roberts*

First of all, let me start off by wishing each of you a Happy New Year.  Our last Newssheet (SCA-IT Convergence #20) was distributed in December 2004 shortly after the Information Technology Services became official on November 28, 2004.  The Communications Team has designed a new look and name for the Newssheet; thus, I present the first issue of "ITS Connections".  Your comments during teleconferences, other meetings, and in notes like Duane's [see page 2] have indicated the need for us to provide good communications.

*ITS Connections* launches a broader communications plan that we believe will help us unify our new organization and build on ITS' identity as a service provider.  As the name suggests, the newsletter is about connecting our staffs housed in many locations so we can learn more about each other as well as what's happening throughout the organization, and relevant information regarding our customers.

## The MOU & Getting the Resources We Need from A to Z*—
### *From Automobiles to Xerox paper* by Stephen Spector, ITS-PMO

There have been occasions when ITS staff could not access vehicles when they needed to go on service calls or they weren't allowed to get office supplies. In most locations this has not been an issue but every now and then it can happen and it can be disruptive and demoralizing. Some managers have mentioned this as a concern during their ITS teleconferences, including the Web Council of January 18 (see "WebCouncil", page 4).

This may have occurred because a few local Service Center Agency (SCA) managers did not understand the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). It was approved by the SCA on November 18, 2004 and it specifies that the SCA have agreed to provide access to available cars and office supplies to ITS as needed… and that ITS would reimburse the associated costs.

Lisa Arcure, Division Director for Administrative Management, says, "We are following up the initial MOU with two initiatives: one, to make sure everyone at the SCA knows how the MOU works; and two, in cooperation with SCA and ITS, to develop procedures to assess, record, and track the cost of specific support provided by the SCA to ITS.  This should take care of any lingering confusion."

**Best Procedure.** To reserve vehicles or get supplies, ITS staff should continue whatever the common practice was prior to convergence.

If there is still confusion, it is vital to not get angry. The SCA are our customers and our hosts even if an agency manager is mistaken.  First, refer him or her to the MOU. If further escalation is needed, contact your supervisor.

Rich Roberts,
ITS ACIO (acting)

*"Somehow, some way, communication within the ITS organization must get better."*
*Duane Marquis*

(*Note from ACIO*, continued from page 1)

The intent of Connections is to be an interactive communications process, a forum to exchange information and share ideas that can improve how we do business. We see it as a platform to recognize exceptional efforts and to learn about extraordinary things ITS people do within and outside of work. To accomplish these goals and to really connect us, it will take your input and participation. To that end, please e-mail your thoughts, comments, story ideas or draft articles to ITSConnections@usda.gov .

The communications vision has four basic parts:

➤ Distribute ITS Connections monthly at first so the communication team members can work with you to develop interesting articles with useful content;

➤ Share specific topics discussed during periodic teleconferences;

➤ Develop a system for distributing fast-breaking information that must be sent immediately (we will soon have a fairly complete list of everyone's email address);

➤ Develop an ITS Intranet which can become our virtual community for ongoing interaction.

Information Technology Services is a new organization and to some people, we came into being rather abruptly. There are lots of things we need to do to become an effective organization and communications is the hub of that process. Please let us hear from you!

## My 2 Cents' Worth

….. one thing I would encourage is more communication of what is happening within ITS. Somehow, someway, communication within the ITS organization must get better. We need to be hearing when positions are being advertised; we need to be hearing who is being selected for positions; we need to be hearing what is going on that is affecting, not only, ITS employees, but also, the ITS organization.

When ITS was first formed things were happening fast and furious and it seemed we were better informed. Now, I'm sure things have slowed down, but it seems to be at a nearly frozen snail's pace or, at least, it would seem that way from the information we are seeing.

When employees are not informed of what is happening, they begin to wonder. And, when they begin to wonder, it always leans toward the not too good side of things. We need to have our noses pulled away from the grindstone long enough to see our future. Give us a glimpse.

I would suggest some kind of weekly/bi-weekly email newsletter from Rich to talk about what is happening. (Yes, another thing for your plate!!)

Just my 2 cents worth.

Thanks!

Duane Marquis
Acting State IT Manager – Nebraska
OCIO ITS Technical Support Division

**Send your *2 Cents' Worth* to:**
**ITSConnections@USDA.gov**

## Team Shirts Build ITS Team Spirit In Louisiana

*By Frank Ramsey, "Acting" ITS Manager - Louisiana*

IT Convergence has been a frightening experience for many IT Specialists. We all had concerns about how the new ITS organization would function. Common questions were: "Where will we be located? What will happen to us? What will our new job be? Who will my new boss be? Will we be "out-sourced"? What will happen to my career?" It's natural to be a little afraid and to be concerned about the future. Change can be scary.

As an "Acting" ITS Manager, I could sense the fears and uncertainties that we were all dealing with. I could clearly see a loss of spirit; that sense of belonging to a close-knit family was now missing. In an effort to pull the ITS Staff together as a team and create a new sense of identity, I purchased each member of the ITS Staff a embroidered red polo shirt.

There is no doubt that it has made a difference. Some team members are talking about buying additional shirts in different colors. Some have suggested wearing the same colored shirts on special occasions so that the ITS Staff stands out as a unique team.

We have definitely begun to develop a new sense of who we are. We are USDA-OCIO ITS. We have certainly

LA ITS Team -- Left to Right: Theresa Harts, Norma Cates, Brian Walker, Phyllis Yearby, Frank Ramsey, Scott Lindsay, Tricia Hayes, and Dixie Hebert.

gained lots of attention from our former agencies too.

Comments of "Don't ya'll look sharp" are common. The NRCS State Engineer was so impressed that he has ordered special shirts for his Engineering Staff.

Teamwork and team spirit are contagious. Sometimes you just have to look for something that provides that little spark to get things started. I have no doubt that as we progress through this transition period, we will become more comfortable with our new environment. Someday soon, we will all be very proud to work for USDA-OCIO as an ITS Staff member.

Keep your spirits up, and make yourself and your team proud to be ITS.

USDA-OCIO ITS STAFF

**Send your ideas on how ITS can build our team image to: ITSConnections@usda.gov**

## Magic Stats *from the Service Desk*

The mission of the ITS Service Desk is to provide support on the technology used by ITS customers. We use software technology called Magic Service Desk, a call tracking, knowledge base, browser-based support automation tool. It also lets us provide ITS Connections with *Magic Stats*, a monthly review of the top 11 types of service calls.

For the month of January, 14,749 tickets were recorded and 8,397 work orders were generated. Of this number, 1,026 of the contacts were from public customers and the remaining contacts were from USDA employees.

| TOP SERVICE CALL CATEGORIES: January 2005 | | |
|---|---|---|
| SUBJECT | TICKETS | WORK ORDERS |
| FSA Legacy Software | 2373 | 998 |
| Security | 1793 | 353 |
| Network | 1037 | 660 |
| AS 400 | 752 | 361 |
| NRCS Legacy Software | 735 | 292 |
| RD Legacy Software | 548 | 340 |
| Servers | 500 | 1386 |
| Hardware (General) | 358 | 221 |
| HW – PCs | 1016 | 1081 |
| HW – Laptops | 684 | 876 |
| HW – Printers | 541 | 202 |

# WebCouncil Brings Candid Comments to Virtual Meetings -
## Senior Management is Listening...Reading... and Responding   By Bill Yoder, ITS-PMO

Before ITS went live, Senior Management began conducting a series of meetings and workshops to provide orientation, training, and status updates to acting managers and other Senior staff. These sessions also help ITS senior managers understand and address the issues that all ITS personnel are facing. Because candid comments and suggestions are a vital part of this process, ITS used *CoVision WebCouncil*, an electronic meeting tool, to support several of these meetings.

WebCouncil enables ITS to conduct teleconferences that allows people who are listening on the phone (and not just those who are talking) to participate actively by typing their responses to web-based questions.

Teleconferences conducted using Web Council are truly interactive affairs during which dozens of participants are able to provide concurrent, candid, and anonymous input and direction to meeting managers.

The CoVision WebCouncil approach has been used for Q&A sessions with acting managers and other senior IT staff to understand how the staff are dealing with change, to identify issues that need to be addressed, and to solicit ideas regarding how the Division Directors and other senior staff can better manage ITS.

The ideas and information gathered during these calls have provided critical input to the ITS planning process. Though progress may appear slow, ITS management is working behind the scenes to address or act upon many of the needs that have been identified during these sessions.
For example, some of the key concerns that Acting Managers and other senior ITS staff identified in these sessions are listed below, along with some of the actions that ITS management has initiated to address these concerns:

*"The ideas and information gathered during these calls has provided critical input to the ITS planning process."*

➢ **"We need improved communications from ITS management at all levels and this communication should be in all directions"** – ITS is developing an overall communication plan that includes this newsletter, planning for an ITS intranet site, and setting up a distribution system for getting urgent information distributed immediately, and an ITS-wide all-hands WebCouncil is being planned.

➢ **"We need more clearly defined job responsibilities and greater role clarity"** – ITS is providing all staff members with updated position descriptions and is working toward rolling out the performance management program. Less visibly, ITS management is working toward establishing permanent postings to all positions and resolving some remaining ambiguities regarding how the divisions and Service Level Managers will work together to meet SCA needs.

➢ **"We need to develop a unified identity for ITS… We are no longer members of separate SCA"** – ITS is working to build an ITS identity through this newsletter, by providing managers with coaching and training in managing virtual teams, and by developing and deploying new and consistent strategies for addressing and managing problems. This will be a major focus of the Organizational Development Branch in the Governance Division, a branch that is only now being staffed up.

➢ **"We need to clarify our relationships with SCA"** – Although many staff members still spend several hours each week doing tasks associated with their old jobs, ITS is gradually moving past "transitional courtesy" to transition those tasks to other SCA staff members.

Other issues raised in these workshops included the need to align job levels to be more consistent and more appropriate to current roles; the need to clarify administrative procedures and improve the level of administrative support; the need for technical training – especially for staff in unfamiliar roles; and the need to balance the apparent disparity in staffing and workload among Branches and Divisions. These issues are typical of the problems that arise in this sort of reorganization. ITS management is aware of these issues and wants staff members to know that management is doing everything they can.

Stan Gray, Director of the Governance Division, commented: "We are listening. We want to hear everyone's concerns…Some issues we can act on quickly and the impact is immediately visible. For instance, everyone should see the newsletter and feel its impact on communications. Other issues take more time and need to be addressed behind the scenes. It may sometimes seem like progress is slow, but we are moving as quickly as we can to address all of these issues…"

## Admin Updates: Travel Cards, FedTraveler, & SF50s

*From Lisa Arcure, Director, Administrative Management Division*

### ITS Travel News

The ITS Section at the Controller Operations Division (COD) reports two features in its travel support for ITS: Bank of America Travel Cards and FedTraveler.com.

**Travel Cards.** All ITS personnel who had travel cards at their previous agency now have Bank of America Travel Cards (this transition should have happened automatically). ITS staff members who don't have cards can apply for them at
https://www.gcsuthd.bankofamerica.com/forms/applications.asp
Click on **Individually Billed Account** to download an application form. When ITSS receives the application, it will request the travel card from Bank of America. Any questions concerning the travel card application can be answered at the ITSS Inquiry Line 504-426-5050.

## Your Active Role in Performance Management *By Frank Riley, LMI*

Year one in a new organization can be a real challenge for employees and supervisors alike. Employees have uncertainties about what is expected of them and how they will be evaluated. Supervisors are concerned about giving clear directions regarding what needs to be done to meet customer requirements.

**FedTraveler**. FedTraveler.com, an EDS service, now handles ITS' reservations for official travel, including transportation, lodging, and automobile rental. All employees should have received an e-mail containing a Member ID and PIN. If you haven't received the FedTraveler notification and have pending travel requirements, contact ITSS:

ITSS Contact Numbers —

➢ Inquiry Line   504-426-5050

➢ Fax                504-253-5916

➢ E-mail           ITSS@usda.gov

### SF-50s

SF-50s are notices of personnel action. All current ITS staff will be receiving a set of three SF50's over the next few weeks:

➢ One for convergence that covers your transfer from the SCA to ITS

➢ One with your new personnel description

➢ One defining your salary

### BPD HR Contact Information and More

The BPD WebTA /ITS Homepage, at
http://arc.publicdebt.treas.gov/DWP/fs/fsagocio1.htm, offers an up-to-date HR contact directory, job vacancy announcements, downloadable forms, and notices.

The Employee Performance Management Program (EPMP) is one tool for overcoming these apprehensions. The first step in using the Program is to complete an individual performance plan. For most ITS employees, you should have already met with your supervisor to discuss your performance plan and put it into action.

The plan consists of five generic competencies and three to five job specific elements. Competencies will give you an understanding of the skills, abilities, and behaviors that need to shape your performance and help you to become successful in ITS. The job-specific elements and standards link to customer expectations. Together, these guidelines determine how you will be evaluated on the technical functions of your job. Where contract language addresses these policies and procedures for bargaining unit employees, contract language prevails.

Another important feature of the performance plans is personal development. Transferred employees bring various backgrounds and training to their new and expanded assignments. For many, additional professional development may be needed to perform the full range of duties. The personal development part of the plan helps you and your supervisor to list some skill or knowledge areas that require updating during the performance year. It is a good way to get the training and certifications you may need.

Please take an active role in the process of establishing performance plans. These plans can go a long way, both toward easing the transition to a new job in the start-up year of a new organization and toward helping you to gain new skills and professional goals.

# Employee Assistance Program – Not Just for the Holidays
*by Sheila Greene, ITS Management Analyst*

Occasional changes, in work or personal life, are exhilarating and challenging. Past that point, rapid, unpredictable change is simply wearing and stressful. Stress (psychology) is defined as an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal that people experience in situations that they perceive as dangerous. Some symptoms of stress are depression, anger, anxiety, fear, over eating, sleep disturbances, or substance abuse.

The USDA's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), part of Health and Human Services' Federal Occupational Health Program, is a service that provides USDA employees with:

1. A 24/7 hotline for a wide range of mental health and wellness issues such as anxiety, stress, depression, or substance abuse

2. Financial counseling

3. Legal counseling (for non-work related problems). Users' privacy is safeguarded through state-of-the-art technology, similar to that used to secure online credit card purchases.

EAP support for Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) Information Technology Services (ITS) employees for FY 2005 will be provided as follows:

| Employee's Prior Agency | EAP Provider | Contact Information |
| --- | --- | --- |
| NRCS & RD | Sandcreek Group | 1-888-243-5744 |
| FSA Field Offices | Compsych (Fedsource) | 1-888-290-4EAP<br>1-800-697-0353 (TTY) |
| FSA Headquarters | Magellan Health Service | 1-800-222-0364 (FOH)<br>1-888-262-7848 (TTY) |

The hotline telephone number is: 1-800-222-0364. Please access www.foh4you.com for specific information on your EAP services, valuable health and wellness information, self-help tools, and more. When you call they'll ask what agency you are with — use your prior agency.

## Excerpt from MOU - Terms of Agreement III: Office space, Office Property and Supplies, Vehicles & Transportation....

**B. Office Property and Supplies - Purchasing Arrangements**

…… during the first fiscal year of operations, transferred personnel will continue to obtain miscellaneous desktop office supplies from the host Service Center Agency. ITS will credit $200 to the reimbursable agreement of each partner agency for each FTE transferred from that agency to cover these costs for FY2005. This arrangement will be reviewed and may be revised for future years based on an analysis of actual costs incurred for office expenses.

If larger or more expensive office supplies are needed, such as replacement furniture for existing staff or supplies for new ITS employees, the ITS Administrative Officer (AO) will be authorized to request those items from the lead SCA (in accordance with guidelines to be established by ITS) and the SCA will assist in obtaining the items. In most cases, these purchases should be obligated directly against ITS funds….

**C. Vehicles and Transportation - Continued Access to Vehicles on Day One**

Since the locations serviced by the SCA are widely distributed across the country and are frequently too small to warrant full-time IT support staff, the IT infrastructure personnel will require the use of vehicles to reach these remote locations. Upon convergence, ITS will not have its own fleet of vehicles, nor will it have the administrative infrastructure to manage vehicles. To avoid service disruption, the SCA agree to provide vehicles for ITS use…..

….If no vehicle is available to meet an ITS need, ITS personnel shall obtain access to a vehicle from other sources in accordance with ITS policies and Departmental guidelines.

SCA will track usage and expenses in accordance with guidelines to be developed jointly by the SCA and ITS.

To see the complete MOU, go to http://www.its.ocio.usda.gov/