Cooperative Agreements Process Improvement Team

Implementation Plan

April 2005

Cooperative Agreement Process Improvement Team Implementation Plan

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Cooperative Agreement Process Improvement Team Implementation Plan

Introduction

In response to complaints regarding the APHIS cooperative agreements process the Agency embarked upon a review of the policy, procedures, and practices used in agreements. A core team of APHIS employees led by Dr. Ulysses Lane created and executed a process review work-plan which achieved the objectives of the Agency's leadership. The team identified problem areas, explored opportunities for change, identified potential alternatives to the use of agreements, and developed a set of viable recommendations for Agency action. A final report was issued which presented findings of the study and recommendations for change in the cooperative agreement process.

The Agency Management Team selected representatives from each of the agency's operational divisions to form a working group. This working group has been tasked with developing a plan for the implementation of the recommendations issued in the CAPIT final report.

This document is the CAPIT working group's implementation plan. To ensure that the implementation effort is well managed, the team has developed a set of goals and objectives for each recommendation. The use of goals and objectives will also allow the working group to report on its progress in a meaningful manner.

The working group's progress will be posted on the CAPIT website www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/capit. The cooperative agreement stakeholders can follow the progress of this initiative. The working group has created a bulletin board that will be used to receive comments from our stakeholders. After the implementation is completed this bulletin board can be used by the Agreement Services Center, and the agreements community in general, to openly communicate about the agreements process. This will enhance the Agency's effort to establish and maintain a community of practice within the agreements community.

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Agency Goal 1.A: Improve consistency of cooperative agreements practices across the agency.

The team will incorporate many approaches to standardizing and streamlining the cooperative agreements business process and procedures that were initiated by the PPQ Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS) Program. These efforts will create increased uniformity within APHIS' programs, yielding greater simplicity for cooperators, many of whom manage several cooperative agreements from different APHIS programs. The lack of uniformity currently causes significant administrative burdens for the cooperators. By standardizing and streamlining the agreements, we will ensure the Agency's cooperators can focus more on the execution of the agreements and reducing the administrative burden of reporting, planning, and billing APHIS.

Goal: To retain flexibility, communicate to APHIS and cooperators the various cycles (calendar year, federal fiscal year, state fiscal year or other) available to start and end cooperative agreements.

Objectives:
1. Develop, and discuss with cooperators all possible options.
2. Meet with program representatives and cooperators to identify what agreements will to "other cycle".
3. Contact cooperators to notify them of our intent to change to "other cycle".
    A. Request cooperators to submit work and financial plans 3 months prior to the new cooperative agreement start date.
4. Hold national planning sessions in the quarter prior to the cooperators' submission of work and financial plans.
5. Identify agreements:
    A. Multi-year agreements (cross-cut to Agency goal 2.b and goal 3,)
    B. Determine agreements that will require an interim agreement to bridge the first fiscal cycle
    C. Umbrella agreements
6. Assist programs representatives in planning and coordination efforts quarter
7. Develop a planning and guidance document for cooperative agreements moving to new cycle dates (cross-cut to Agency goal 1.b)

By providing an opportunity to move program cooperative agreements projects start and end dates to a calendar year, or other, cycle APHIS addresses many issues by providing an opportunity to move cooperative agreements start and end dates to a more practical funding period APHIS addresses many issues centered upon finding gaps caused by continuing resolutions. This option does require increased oversight of agreements due to the fact that there is a reduction of three or more months in the appropriated fiscal year in which the agreement is in effect. Program representatives will have to identify what funds will not be used by the cooperators during the early part of the fourth fiscal quarter (third quarter of the agreement) so that the funds can be re-directed for use within APHIS.

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Incorporating optional funding cycles with other streamlining initiatives in the CAPIT process will require a concerted planning effort between APHIS and cooperators. The CAPIT team will work with the ASC and the APHIS divisions in the planning effort that will be required. The outcome of this effort will provide greater planning horizons and more coordinated agreement and fiscal management.

Goal: Standardize formats (for current "paper" work and financial plans, Notice of Award, and Accomplishment reports)

Objectives:
1. Analyze current work plan formats agency wide
2. Work with agreement specialists and representatives from each division to identify the best attributes of work plans
3. Develop a single work plan format for the agency
4. Incorporate plain language into work-plan instructions
5. Analyze both accomplishment and financial reporting formats agency wide
6. Work with representatives from each program to identify the best attributes of accomplishment and financial reporting formats
7. Develop a single reporting format for the agency
8. Incorporate plain language into reporting instructions
9. Work with ASC to develop a standard agreement format that includes all articles
    A. Use a check box for those articles that apply to specific agreement
    B. Single signature
10. Work with ASC to develop an administrative solution whereby cooperators need only sign yearly required forms once
    A. Help ASC determine a solution that allows all agreement specialists to determine if States have signatures on file
11. Work with Goal 2.A team to use standard format for fillable forms
12. Have ASC identify where e-forms will be located so that cooperators and APHIS personnel will have access
13. Communicate form location to cooperators

The CAPIT report identified a need to provide standard formats for forms, work-plans, and reporting by cooperators. The team will work to identify best practices throughout the agency and incorporate these into Agency standard formats. This will ease the

The CAPIT report identified a need to provide standard formats for forms, work-plans, and reporting by cooperators. The team will work to identify best practives throughout the agency and incorporating these into Agency standard formats. This will ease the potential for confusion as well as burden placed on the Agency's cooperators while increasing the uniformity of information collected and managed by APHIS.

As an interim step to an e-solution for cooperative agreements the efforts under this goal will be closely coordinated with the e-solutions objective of incorporating fillable forms into the cooperative agreements development process.   This solution will reduce the time and effort required to put an agreement in place. This solution will act as a bridge between the existing process and the implementation of a full e-solution to cooperative agreements.

Goal: Revise Agency guidance/guidelines
Objectives:

  1. Determine if current guidelines are outdated or need to be updated
  2. Coordinate with each of the other CAPIT teams to collect revised documentation impacting the ASC guidance manual
  3. Work with ASC to update all guidance and guideline documents
  4. Work with ASC training staff to create an "Agreements for dummies" guide

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As the CAPIT team implements changes to the agreements process, documentation of the changes will be recorded by the CPAIT working group and be added to agency and guidelines by the ASC. The team will also analyze existing guidance to ensure that it is up-to-date. The team will assist the ASC in making any updates required. Once the CAPIT implementation is completed the team will work with the ASC training staff to develop a simplified guide to agreements. This guidance can be viewed as an "Agreements for dummies" approach that will provide information needed by both Agency agreement managers and cooperators. We will underscore the fact that the information provided does not answer all questions related to agreements, and those individuals that need additional information need to work with agreement specialists and the ASC for detailed information and guidance.

Agency Goal 1.B: Get a consistent message out about expectations and practices

One of the most prominent findings issued in the CAPIT final report related to the lack of consistency in the APHIS cooperative agreement process. This team's effort will focus on clarifying roles and responsibilities, ensuring that guidance is made readily available, and the developing a single message related to how APHIS does business through cooperative agreements. The chief end result is the establishment of Communities of Practice. The team will work to develop a Community of Practice for cooperative agreements, through which APHIS, as well as its cooperators can openly communicate about issues, problems, resolutions, and lessons learned. Through a Community of Practice the information will outward, thus enhancing uniformity and consistency. This will also position APHIS to identify problems within the cooperative agreement process early, thereby allowing the agency to make needed adjustments before problems impact the overall process.

Cooperative Agreement Process Improvement Team Implementation Plan

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Goal: Clarify Expectations

Objectives:
1. Annual Memorandum for the Agreement Service Center that addresses
    A. Customer Service expectations
    B. Clarify expectations and timeframes for announcements, application & award process, monitoring and reporting, closeout, and payments.
    C. Communications – appropriate responses (or were to get answers) and response times for questions
2. Develop and Review distribution list of Agreement Service Center's Memorandums and Manual Updates
    A. Headquarters
        i. All Agreement processing staff
        ii. ADOs & ADODRs
    B. Regions
        i. All Agreement processing Staff
        ii. All ADOs & ADODRs
3. Clear written APHIS wide policy on what responsibilities and authorities lie with the program manager and the ADODR

Clarifying expectations of people, or positions, within the agreements process is a critical aspect in the effort to promote consistency in APHIS cooperative agreements. The team's approach is to clarify and communicate these expectations throughout the agency, as well as, to our cooperators.

These clarifications should yield a degree of simplification and streamlining of the cooperative agreement process. When each stakeholder understands what is expected of them and what they should expect from others, we expect to see a reduction in questions asked at all levels. As the expectations are instilled on the organization the uniformity in methods, approaches, and solutions will promote efficiencies in the agreements process.

Goal: Make guidance readily available

Objectives:
1. APHIS Memo (see Clarify expectations)
    A. Specifying changes with updated documents
    B. ASC maintain list of who needs to receive
2. Website
    A. Easy to find; Link to site (CA/Grants Info Page) from front page of APHIS site
    B. Two "rooms" on website
        i. Address Cooperators

Goal: Make guidance readily available (continued)

Objectives:

1. Annual meeting information
2. Training opportunities – not just redirected to other sites but a brief description of available training; list in-house and commercial training opportunities

3. DUNS number
4. Intergovernmental Review Process & Single Point of Contact
5. Workplans, financial/budget plans
6. Collection of documents used by cooperators (or a link to where documents are located)
7. Common Issues from reviews and recommended resolutions
8. Link to Grants.gov or other site announcing funding opportunities

   ii. APHIS personnel

1. Annual meeting information
2. Training opportunities – not just redirected to other sites but a brief description of available training including who should attend (mandatory versus recommended, new versus experienced personnel); list in-house and commercial opportunities
3. ADO & ADODR responsibilities
4. Agreement Processing Staff responsibilities
5. Process for resolution of issues
6. Collection of documents used by APHIS (or a list with links to where documents are located)
7. Workplans, financial/budget plans
8. Monitoring/Reporting – require reports developed at headquarters and forward out to Regions

  C. Electronic format for all documents (work with the e-approaches and standardization teams)

    i. PDF fillable format forms
    ii. Templates – Awards, Notices, Announcements
    iii. SOPs and flow charts – SOP to list all required documents and forms

3. Online Help Desk
  A. Frequently Asked Questions – poll regional staff
  B. Manned by single point of contact (the new position-not the list that is currently there)

4. List serve
  A. Automatically inform all levels of updated information
  B. Online sign up – message at bottom of front page for online sign in for when updates are posted
  C. Single Point of Contact/training position acts as moderator

stakeholders to ensure that guidance for agreement users is readily available.   The team, working with the ASC will ensure that the available guidance is robust as well as user friendly. Once the guidance is available the team will work to communicate the availability throughout the agency.

One of the findings that the CAPIT report identified was that guidance, training, and feedback have not kept pace with the increased use of cooperative agreements. The team will work to establish a listserve. The primary purpose of the listserve will be a means by which new information regarding cooperative agreements can be communicated uniformly and in a timely manner. Individuals, both APHIS and cooperators, will have an ongoing opportunity to become a member of the listserve. The team will use the listserve as one tool to instill and promote Communities of Practice in the agreements process.

Goal: Hold an Annual meeting (Cross-cut with Agency Goal 4)

Objectives:

1. Response meeting
    A. What – Initial response meeting
    B. Who – last years audience
    C. Where – Washington DC location (January's site worked well)
    D. When – November 05
    E. Why – Review progress of the CAPIT project
        i. review progress of implementation of recommendations
        ii. review planning cycle and meeting times for upcoming meetings
        iii. finalize scope of future meetings
        iv. updates
2. Meeting Planning
    A. What – Annual meeting
    B. Who – ASC, ADOs & ADODRs (or designated persons), Regional Agreements Processors, Cooperators
    C. Where – Washington DC (move to regional locations if the size of the group is to large)
    D. When- target summer to
        i. Adjust for current FY issues identified by reviews
        ii. Planning for moving cooperative agreements to calendar year cycle (will take several years for change)
    E. Why – Agenda Purpose of meeting
    F. The scope of the meeting may require setting up a contract to assist in meeting planning (Open meeting – open to all ASC personnel, agreement processing specialist, ADOs and ADODRs, Cooperators)
        i. Send out an announcement with RSVP
        ii. Two day meeting
            1. Day 1: Morning – Training
            2. Day 1:Afternoon – Sharing concerns, break out groups by business process areas

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Goal: Hold an Annual meeting (Cross-cut with Agency Goal 4) (continued)

Objectives:

                        3. Day 2: Morning – Planning Session – General
                        4. Day 2: Afternoon – Planning Session – By Program Area (WS, VS, PPQ, etc.)

3. Agenda - Purpose of meeting
   - A. Training – focus on experienced personnel
   - B. Top 10 issues found on reviews
   - C. Updates
   - D. Sharing concerns
   - E. Issues of cooperators
   - F. Issues of APHIS – ADODR's, ADO's, Processing CA/Grant
   - G. Specialists
   - H. Plan for upcoming year
   - I. Expected time frame for funding notices
   - J. Strategic plan decisions

The team will work with, and support, the ASC in planning the annual agreements meeting. The first meeting held in 2004 provided the agency a significant amount of information which has led to the agreement improvement process. The strategic focus of the meeting will be information sharing and collection which will lead to increased effectiveness of the agreements process. The meeting will afford APHIS with a significant opportunity in establishing Communities of Practice as an organizational attribute that will increase the effectiveness of the people involved in the agreements, thereby increasing the effective yield of cooperative agreements as a tool used by APHIS to achieve its goals.

Goal: Training mandatory. (Cross cut with Training program)

Objectives:

1. Develop communications regarding
   - A. Training policy document developed
   - B. Training tailored to involvement in process
     - i. ADODRs
     - ii. When and how to use assistance (grants, cooperative agreement) or procurement (contracts or purchase orders)
   - C. Regional or Field Processing CA/Grant specialist
     - i. Agreement Service Center Staff
     - ii. Supervisory
       1. accountability – cooperators, ADODRs
       2. national and regional level reviews

Agency Goal 1.C: Improve Follow-up

The CAPIT final report identified accountability as a significant finding in the agreement process review. Specifically, there will be a requirement to change behaviors of those involved in the agreements process. This change of behavior will require management support in the agreements improvement process. In order to achieve management support that yields behavioral change there must be policy and procedures develop that enable management to achieve accountability at all levels.

Goal: Ensure APHIS accountability

Objectives:

1. Establish a standard for response to inquires
    A. Set a two day maximum for Agency response to inquiries
    B. Communicate standard to ensure field employees make contact with customers within two working days, even if it is to update the customer that questions are being researched
2. Communicate standard to ensure Grant/Cooperative Agreement specialists make contact with customers within two working days, even if it is to update the customer that questions are being researched
    A. Work with ASC training staff to incorporate the standard into agreement training, focusing on field staff and specialists
    B. Communicate to the agency that there is a FAQ list web site
    C. Poll agreement specialists for commonly asked questions
    D. Review existing FAQs and work with ASC training staff to ensure that the FAQs are updated and are representative of questions found in the agreement specialist poll
    E. Communicate to all stakeholders what they should expect in terms of response to inquiries
3. Establish standard expectations for each roll in the agreements process:
4. Agreement specialist (region/headquarters)
5. Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO)
6. Authorized Departmental Officer's Designated Representative (ADODR)
7. (ASA) working with the ADODR

One of the primary areas that impact the ability to of APHIS and its cooperators to effectively incorporate cooperative agreements into their respective strategies is communication between APHIS and its cooperators. The CAPIT report identified the fact that central policy development and communication have not kept pace with the need due to the rapid increase in the number and use of cooperative agreements in APHIS.

Uniformity in how APHIS responds to its cooperators is critical. The team's approach is to incorporate a level of uniformity in how and what APHIS communicates to its cooperators. In order to achieve uniformity the team will revisit roles and

responsibilities in the agreements process. We will establish the expectations of each role, communicate the information outward, and ensure that roles and responsibilities are incorporated into agency training.

Our cooperators have voiced concern relating to consistency in how and what APHIS communicates to them. With consistency and accountability our cooperators will be better situated to execute agreements, the outcome of which will be APHIS' ability to achieve its objectives.

Goal: Ensure Cooperator accountability

Objectives:

1. Clarify the APHIS expectations of our cooperators
    A. Review OMB regulations and guidance to establish the maximum allowance related to requirements of cooperators
    B. Publish information on the ASC web site
    C. Ensure that the information is properly included in APHIS agreement training
2. Establish expectations of the ROAR (Recipient Organization's Authorized Representative)
3. Communicate expectations through web site, training, APHIS representatives and promote information use and sharing through Communities of Practice

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One of the most important aspects of using cooperative agreements for both APHIS and its cooperators is that the use of public funds are used in the most effective manner, and that these funds can be properly accounted for. CAPIT will establish consistency in what the minimum expectations are for our cooperators. The team will ensure that this message is consistently employed in training and guidance documents and that this information is readily available to our cooperators, and that APHIS ADODRs and others have access to this information.

CAPIT will work to establish these standards as one of the primary principles in developing and fostering Communities of Practice in the cooperative agreement process.

Goal: Expand reviews

Objectives:

1. Plan reviews for NWRC, CEAH, CPHST on a regular basis
2. Plan an agency level review cycle
3. Plan Regional level review cycles
4. Continue with the Review and Analysis Branch cooperator reviews
   A. Make findings public to be shared with other cooperators, as well as APHIS, so that lessons learned can be used to increase the effectiveness of the agreements process
   B. Institute responsibility for ensuring corrective action to be managed by the ADODR
   C. Publish corrective actions and outcomes so that all stakeholders in the agreements process can gain knowledge
5. Promote dialogue regarding reviews, findings, actions, and outcomes through Communities of Practice

Expanding and institutionalizing a scheduled cooperative review process will provide APHIS with information that will enable the agency to increase its ability to achieve its goals through the use of cooperative agreements. These reviews will identify areas of weakness in cooperative agreements. Using this information, through the review process, recommendations for improvements can be made. This process will, over time, enable APHIS to achieve greater levels of uniformity. This uniformity will arise by communicating review findings, the effect that the findings were having on programs, and recommendations for change. This information can be posted on the ASC web site and will act as lessons learned. Any findings posted on the web site will have any reference to APHIS or cooperator agency removed. The outcome of this approach is an expected reduction in errors and/or repeated mistakes. This outcome will yield a more effective and efficient means to achieving Agency and cooperator goals.

Agency Goal 2.A: Implement APHIS e-approaches

There are many opportunities for APHIS to streamline and simplify the cooperative agreement process. This section works within Information Technology to achieve streamlining and simplification goals.

Goal: Use of fillable forms

Objectives:

1. Inventory all forms, formats, and documents
   - A. Identify workflows for each using ASC workflow process charts
   - B. Determine applicability of fillable forms for each
2. Identify all forms that require cooperator information input
   - A. Create fillable forms in both MS Word and PDF format
   - B. Place fillable forms in a single location on the APHIS web site
   - C. Develop policy that requires ASC approval for any alteration to fillable form format
   - D. Inform each cooperator that the forms are available and the internet location of the forms
   - E. Provide a cover memo from the ASC, to be attached to each cooperative agreement, identifying the form location
     Provide step by step instructions that would be attached to the fillable form to ensure that the cooperators have the information required to
   - F. complete each form

The team will work to identify opportunities to use existing, or create fillable forms that APHIS staff and cooperators can use. The use of fillable forms will be an interim step while APHIS pursues fully automating the cooperative agreements process. This interim step will work toward simplifying the agreement formation steps.

Goal: Determine the potential of creating an APHIS cooperative agreement IT system

Objectives:

1. Review other USDA agencies to see if automated system is in use
   - A. Review other agency systems
   - B. Determine if existing system(s) functionality fulfills APHIS needs
   - C. Determine what it would take for APHIS to use existing system(s)
     - i. If a such a system exists, pursue obtaining that system
2. Determine the status of the Federal Government Egrant initiative
   - A. Identify current status

Goal: Determine the potential of creating an APHIS cooperative agreement IT system (continued)

Objectives:

    B. Identify when the system will incorporate non-competitive cooperative agreements
- i. Define APHIS position in the process
- ii. Examine Grants Interface Module in relation to APHIS process
- iii. Examine the recent use of the system for the BSE identification process

    C. Determine if the Egrants system addresses the needs of APHIS cooperative agreements process
- i. Workflow issues
- ii. E-signature
- iii. Tracking and monitoring process
- iv. Reporting
- v. Bridge requirements between APHIS needs and Egrant capabilities

    D. Present AMT with an a decision memo regarding the future use of Egrants and the potential development of an APHIS agreements system
- i. Determination of the life expectancy of an APHIS system based upon Egrants roll out schedule
- ii. Cost benefit of an APHIS system
- iii. Determination if an APHIS system could be a feeder system to Egrants
  1. Will an APHIS based system provide more support for the agency business process, practice, and overall effectiveness if the APHIS system can be a feeder system
  2. Would the requirements of a feeder system be cost prohibitive or yield significant benefit

3. Determine if there is any legislative or standing directive that would preclude APHIS from pursuing an e-solution
4. Decision to proceed or not proceed with establishing system requirements

The team will determine if APHIS can purse an IT solution for automating the cooperative agreement process. Issues that need to be researched include the present status of the Federal Egrant initiative, whether a waiver for an IT solution can be obtained for the system, if the Federal Egrant system will fulfill the needs of APHIS, and if APHIS pursues the creation of an IT solution what existing systems currently used by APHIS could be employed for cooperative agreements. The team will provide the AMT with a decision memo that will provide the information and findings which will allow the AMT to make a decision regarding an IT solution.

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Goal: E-solution planning

Objectives:

1. Establish components of agreement process
2. Create business process map for each component
     A. Staff roles
     B. Cooperator Roles
     C. Who does what when
          i.   Posting of Opportunities
          ii.   Agreement development
          iii.   Work plan
          iv.   Financial Plan
          v.   Negotiation
          vi.   Who does what when
          vii.   Posting of Opportunities
          viii. Agreement development
          ix.   Work plan
          x.   Financial Plan
          xi.   Negotiation
          xii.   Review
          xiii. Approval
          xiv.   Invoicing
          xv.   Invoice approval
          xvi.   Payment
          xvii. Reporting
3. Vet business process to determine sufficiency
4. Identify any gap between APHIS needs and Egrants that will require a bridge (covered under previous goal)
5. Determine E-solution requirements for each component as well as reporting requirements
6. Determine if existing software is available
     A. Analyze USDA's E-work solution for sufficiency
     B. If E-work will provide for APHIS requirements
          i.   Identify any subsystems that would be required to meet the needs of the improvement process
          ii.   Provide cost analysis to estimated open market solution
          iii.   Create cost benefit analysis of using existing system
          iv.   Pursue existing contract modification
          v.   Determine existing funding opportunities
          vi.   Complete contract and funding requirements
          vii.   Proceed to system development
          viii. Obtain Egrants waiver
7. Identify relations with existing or planned APHIS systems
     A. FFIS
     B. ACMS
     C. Identify other systems that may require a relation

Goal: E-solution planning (continued)

Objectives:
8. Work with CAPIT IT liaison
   A. Develop APHIS IT Budget and Acquisition Proposal (ITBAP)
      i. Justification
      ii. Enterprise Architecture
      iii. Other proposal requirements based upon ITBAP guidance
      iv. Determine system requirements
         1. Hardware
         2. Software
         3. IT security
9. Pursue IT and Egrants waiver and system approval establishing system
10. Identify funding sources
11. Identify funding availability

If it is determined that APHIS can gain approval for an automated system the team will analyze the process and build a business process map that will determine how an e-solution will work. We believe that the best approach to mapping and documenting the business process and associated requirements will be to retain the services of a qualified contractor. At the appropriate time, the business process map and requirements will be shared with stakeholders for comment. This will ensure that each of the process points and work flow are correct. This stage of the implementation has critical links with each of the implementation goals contained within this report.

Information gathered in the business process documentation phase will provide critical information that will assist in the decision process for choosing the proper IT solution. It is CAPIT's position that IT systems already in use by APHIS are priorities for consideration. Using existing solutions works to standardize APHIS systems. The standardization of system solutions, their look and feel, enhances the probability of system solution success.

Goal: Contracting

Objectives:

1. Develop RFP
2. Determine if contract can be linked to existing contract
   A. Work with CAPIT resource Bob Crowther for determination of best approach
   B. If existing contract can be modified, determine cost and pursue existing contract (contracting phase would end here)
3. Hold an RFP comment period (internal to APHIS)
4. Release RFP
5. Create vendor proposal review and scoring team (will be used also for answering vendor questions on RFP, and follow through the contract signing)
6. Identify IT resource for contract execution oversight (team technical representative)
7. Review proposal scores
8. Select vendor
9. Contract award

The team will work closely with the APHIS IT liaison for CAPIT and the team's contracting resource in developing any request for proposal and contract for this portion of the implementation. At the point that an RFP or RFQ is issued CAPIT will identify an IT resource that can assist the team in selecting an appropriate vendor.

Goal: Implementation

Objectives:

1. Build system
2. Create system documentation and user manual
3. Create system training
   A. APHIS training
   B. Cooperator training
4. Establish help desk requirements
5. Identify cooperators who would like to participate in beta testing
6. Identify APHIS programs that would like to participate in beta testing
7. Provide system training for beta testing
8. Initiate beta testing
9. Document problems
10. Correct system
11. Update system documentation and user manual (make available through the web)
12. Create communications plan for system use
    A. APHIS
    B. Cooperators
13. Institute help desk
14. Kick-off system use

The automation of the process work flow institutionalizes the desire of APHIS to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in how it does business. The implementation of the e-solution is the most critical of the CAPIT goals. While building the system is important, the team recognizes that documentation, training, assistance, and proper communication of the system use are critical in the success of the project. The CAPIT working group will ensure that providing agency and cooperator information and support are available.

Agency Goal 2B: Explore simplified approaches to getting work done:

Goal: Innovative and simplified use of acquisitions

Objectives:
1. Define how innovative acquisition planning may simplify the agreement process
2. Explore options with cooperators, acquisition, and budget managers on acquisition opportunities
   A. Enumerate best practices to simplify the acquisition of, equipment, and services in cooperative agreements
   B. Publish best practices guide
   C. Make guide available
3. Meet with potential users to analyze procurement opportunities thereby gaining a full understanding of the user's needs. The team will work with ADODRs, program managers, and acquisition managers to identify a select sample of cooperators that the team can contact to discuss how procurement can be strategically structures and implemented to improve service delivery to cooperators. This information will provide the foundation for developing a business process and supporting guidance
4. Draft a policy for the use of procurement solutions in cooperative agreements
5. Design a guidance document for using acquisitions to supplement cooperative agreements
6. Design a planning guide for the use of acquisitions in the cooperative agreements process
7. Meet with the ASC, acquisition managers, and leadership of the agency divisions to discuss budget and acquisition planning as a strategy in effective cooperative agreement management
8. Meet key representatives from each of the agency units and agreement specialists to provide a presentation on using acquisitions as an efficient mechanism for providing support to the cooperators
9. Revisit the procurement policy in cooperative agreements draft and make revisions where required
10. Submit the policy for review, clearance and approval
11. Provide planning support to agency divisions in order to identify where economies of scale can be achieved and where the highest degree of cost effectiveness can be attained

Cooperative Agreement Process Improvement Team Implementation Plan

Proper budget and acquisition planning provides a potential solution in creating a highly effective strategy in executing certain aspects of cooperative agreements. The strategy in this goal is to establish best practices in acquisition planning, documenting these practices, meeting with a sample of the stakeholders to determine needs, and to develop a planning strategy that can be employed throughout the agency.

The agreements staff and the procurement staff (purchasing and contracting) have many similar processes. Nevertheless, the differences between grants, agreements, and acquisition are confusing to program managers, headquarters and field personnel, and our contractors and cooperators. To improve service delivery to cooperators, and timely delivery of quality products and services, we need to include acquisition right along side of agreements and grants when planning and in training our personnel. It is important that we recognize that acquisition "is not" an alternative to an agreement as suggested at the workshop - when cooperators are involved, specific requirements will usually result in a grant, agreement, or an acquisition depending on the situation. However, the acquisition process may be used in conjunction with an agreement if we are innovative at the onset when deciding on what to negotiate into the agreement. This group will work closely with MRP procurement, who are currently in a similar review and re-engineering process as CAPIT.

The strategy underlying the objectives listed in this section is to evaluate the potential use of procurement as a supplemental solution for cooperative agreements. The team will work with the ASC and agreement specialist to identify cooperative agreements that would benefit from the procurement solutions. The team would then meet with the Agency ADODRs program managers, and contact select cooperators to discuss the procurement solutions and identify their needs and concerns with using the procurement solution.

After gathering the required information the team will develop guidance and policy documents and work with the ASC training staff to develop a training presentation which will be incorporated into the standard cooperative agreement training program. The guidance and training will focus on "when to" and "how to" use procurement solutions. The team should follow any uses of the procurement solutions to identify and resolve any weaknesses in the approach and policy.

The largest hurdle in rolling this solution out effectively is a coordinated and concerted planning effort. The guidance and coordination in the planning effort will most likely take several fiscal cycles before it becomes institutionalized. Lessons learned, opportunities identified, and policy adjustment requirements should be taken from each planning session to provide a continual improvement effort in the cooperative agreement process. The information gathered from all aspects of this endeavor must be communicated outward to both APHIS and its cooperators.

Goal: Fee based agreements

Objectives:
1. Define fee-based agreement
2. Review authorities to ensure no conflict
   A. Resolve any conflict
3. Identify potential program users
4. Draft policy and procedures with ASC
5. Review draft policy and procedures with potential users
6. Finalize policy and procedures
7. Teach identified users and agreement specialists how to use the tool
8. Communicate outward to agency on the use of this tool

In order to establish a meaningful alternative to the standard cooperative agreement, this group will create a definition for the Fee-based Agreement. This team shall review the existing agency authorities to identify any potential conflict with the authorities. If a conflict is identified the team shall work with the appropriate agency staff to draft language which would allow APHIS to use a fee-based agreement.

The team will meet with the appropriate representative from each of the agency's divisions to identify any program that would benefit from the use of a fee-based agreement. The potential users will be contacted to discuss what attributes of a fee-based agreement would provide an agreement tool that would benefit their program. The responses from the program responses will be incorporated into a draft policy and procedures. The policy and procedures draft will be reviewed by the ASC to determine sufficiency. The ASC comments will be incorporated into a final policy and procedures statement.

Goal: Simplified agreements

Objectives:
1. Research how the agency can put in place a simplified agreement
   A. Determine how simple the Agency can make the agreement
   B. Establish a uniform threshold value for simplified agreements
2. Develop and document a process for simplified agreements
   A. Establish a reduced agreements package by combining numerous forms for signature into one
   B. Set a threshold to define small awards
3. Meet with Anita Ridely on existing policies regarding small awards
4. Draft policy and procedures with ASC
5. Review draft policy and procedures with potential users
6. Finalize policy and procedures
7. Work with ASC training staff to develop training
8. ASC trains identified users and agreement specialists how to use the tool
9. Communicate outward to agency on the use of this tool
10. Review feed back and usage
11. Adjust program as required

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The final CAPIT report identified the fact that more than 20 percent of the agreements in FY 2003 were under $10,000. This fact coupled with survey feedback from cooperators that sometime the amount of effort required to enter into a cooperative agreement was not worth the effort. From the perspective of the cooperator, determining all of the administrative costs involved in establishing, executing, and reporting on cooperative agreements produces a significant cost to benefit ratio.

The team will investigate the potential opportunity for creating a simplified process that will reduce the administrative burden for both our cooperators and APHIS. If it is determined that a simplified approach can be established the team will develop a procedure and policy that can be utilized by the agency.

Goal: Umbrella agreements

Objectives:
1. Meet with key PPQ staff to gain full understanding of umbrella agreements
2. Design and umbrella agreement presentation
3. Meet with divisions and provide presentation
4. Identify current users of the CAPS umbrellas. Interview a sample of the users to learn how they are managing the agreements
5. Identify a sample of potential users of umbrellas to discuss the solution and gather feedback to incorporate into the program
6. Develop a how to document
7. Create a planning guidance document
8. Create how to document for entering obligations into FFIS
9. Create a how to document for cooperator invoicing
10. Draft policy and procedures for ASC
11. Work with ASC to develop training
12. Offer to facilitate division planning sessions
13. Communicate umbrella usage outward
14. Collect feed back from cooperators and APHIS
15. Review feed back and usage
16. Adjust program as required

The APHIS **C A P S** program developed a unique approach to consolidating disparate cooperative agreements under what is termed an umbrella agreement. The CAPIT review identified the umbrella agreement as an opportunity to achieve greater efficiencies in the cooperative agreement process for APHIS. This solution reduces the number of potential cooperative agreements that would be processed by APHIS, thereby lowering the overall workload. Additionally, by grouping like agreements together the cooperators benefit by lowering the number of agreements they have to apply for. Using this approach where applicable will significantly streamline the cooperative agreements process as well as enhance coordinated agency planning.

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The implementation strategy for umbrella agreements is grounded in part by promoting division based planning to determine grouping opportunities where programs with similar objectives can be placed within a single agreement. Care must be taken to ensure that the development of such agreements is standard within the agency. Procedures for entering multi-line obligations in the financial system reflect the funding requirements of the cooperative agreement. Standard billing procedures for the agreements must be communicated to cooperators to ensure that invoices submitted against the obligation are sufficient such that payment against multi-line obligations is correct.

The outcome of the multi-year agreements are reduced administrative work loads for both APHIS and its cooperators. ADODRs should find a reduction in oversight requirements through the consolidation of activity under a single agreement.

Goal: Use other agency agreements

Objectives:
1. Establish agency policy of checking with cooperators to see if they have existing cooperative agreements with other agencies that have similar objectives
2. Meet with Anita Ridley on policies regarding interagency agreements
3. Create procedures for defining the steps required to use other agency cooperative agreements
4. Define steps in APHIS close-out requirements while using another agency's cooperative agreement
5. Work with ASC training staff to incorporate policy and procedures into standard training
6. Communicate outward to agency on the use of this tool

APHIS can achieve efficiencies in the cooperative agreement process by establishing interagency agreements with other agency agreements that have a similar relationship with the same cooperators. Once it is clear that the relationship is similar, APHIS can enter into an interagency agreement. These agreements may offer an opportunity for APHIS to reduce the time and effort of both the agency and cooperator to put an agreement in place.

The team will create a 'how to' document that will be made available to the agency. This coupled with incorporating this solution into training and communication outward through the agency will enhance the uniformity, consistency, and potential process simplification.

Agency Goal 2.C: Shift Processing Workload to Regional Staff

One of the six major findings in the CAPIT study is that the processing of cooperative agreements has become decentralized due to the increase in the number of agreements. With numbers up, APHIS hired more cooperative agreements/grant specialists. Agreements specialist are staffed in the major programs and in both regional offices, however, some processing is done at the front line level. Another major finding of the study revealed that the APHIS cooperative agreement processes are inconsistent across the Agency. There are different ways of planning, sharing information, communicating, processing paperwork and how finances are monitored and reported.

Goal: Streamline the process

Objectives:

1. Shift processing workload of agreements to the regional office:
    A. Design the Agency standard process
        i.   Hold working meeting with all cooperative agreements specialists to design "perfect" process
        ii.   Use PPQ ER as a 'model'
        iii. Test changes to current process on current front line processors
        iv.   Write new processing policy
    B. Establish and communicate roles and responsibilities for everyone in the agreements process
        i.   Agreement specialist (region/headquarters)
        ii.   Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO)
        iii. Authorized Departmental Officer's Designated Representative (ADODR) – more focus on managing projects and measuring/reporting results
        iv.   AO/ASA working with the ADODR
        v.   ACS focus more on policy development, guidance and training
    C. Communicate and publish new Agency standard.
        i.   Include new standard process on website for benefit of customers, as well as employees
    D. Work with ASC training staff to incorporate the new standard into agreement training, focusing on field staff and specialists.

Agency Goal 3: Explore other opportunities

Goal: Review sufficiency of authorities

Objectives:
1. Review all APHIS authorities relating to cooperative agreements
2. Establish contacts in other USDA agencies that have an agreements program
   - A. Interview other USDA agency contacts
   - B. Review authorities and approaches used by these agencies
   - C. Analyze approaches and determine applicability to APHIS
3. Identify weakness in APHIS authorities
4. Identify other agencies approaches using existing authorities coupled with agency policy
5. Pursue APHIS authorities or develop new policies as needed to adopt recommendations in the CAPIT report
6. Communicate findings outward through the agency
7. Communicate outcome of legislative authorities and/or policy implementation outward through the agency

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Reviewing the sufficiency of agency policies and the exploitation of these policies are interrelated. The team shall analyze the existing agency authorities and determine if any other USDA agency has additional authorities that would benefit APHIS. If it is determined there are additional authorities which exist in other USDA agencies the team will pursue avenues to gain these authorities or submit proposed authorities for APHIS.

The team shall review the existing APHIS policies and review other USDA agency policies to determine where new or additional policies will allow APHIS to exploit its existing authority. The team will analyze policies internal and external to APHIS to determine sufficiency in implementing all aspects of the Improvement Process.

The team will communicate their findings and final actions outward to all APHIS operations that the policies impact. The team shall work with the ASC training staff to ensure that the policies and authorities are incorporated into cooperative agreement training and guidance.

Goal: Exploit existing authorities (Cross cut with review of the sufficiency of authorities)

Objectives:
1. Review all APHIS authorities relating to cooperative agreements
2. Establish contacts in other USDA agencies that have an agreements program
3. Interview other USDA agency contacts
4. Review other agency authorities and approaches
5. Identify weakness in APHIS authorities
6. Identify other agencies approaches using existing authorities coupled with agency policy
7. Draft enabling agency policies (go to #7 of Review sufficiency of existing authorities)

See review the sufficiency of authorities.

Goal: Explore new Authorities

Objectives:
1. Identify any area that new agency policy will not suffice for enabling the implementation of recommendations of the CAPIT report
2. Work with PPD-RAD to draft legislative language for the 2007 budget submission
    A. Multi-year funding request for cooperative agreements
        i. Establish standard amount to request
    B. Pass-though authority for congressionally directed funding
    C. When appropriate agency policy should be pursued prior to legislative solutionsResearch other agency policy and procedures for multi-year agreements
3. Have draft language reviewed and cleared
4. Submit language with 2007 budget submission
5. Research other agency policy and procedures for multi-year agreements
6. Draft policy and procedures for multi-year agreements (cross-cut with #7 of exploiting current authorities)
7. Meet with ASC to review draft policy for multi-year agreements
8. Amend and finalize multi-year agreement policy and procedures
9. Contact select cooperators to discuss and analyze the impact of the use of multi-year agreements
10. Work with ASC training staff to develop presentation and training for the multi-year agreements
11. Meet with Agency divisions to provide decision guidance on programs that will utilize multi-year agreements
12. Develop policy and procedure for multi-year funding if applicable
13. Determine level of multi-year funding required to enable continued operations during periods of continuing resolutions or other funding lapses
    A. Create policy for determining required level of multi-year funding
14. Work with BPAS and other staff to create language for yearly submission

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The CAPIT team will analyze all applicable authorities and policies to identify areas within the implantation plan which will require new or amended agency policy, and where applicable, draft and pursue legislative enabling authority.

When, and where, within reason, the team will make every attempt to install enabling policy or legislation to achieve the streamlining objectives contained within this plan. Prior to pursuing enabling actions the team will provide substantial analysis of the use of any process to determine the extent of potential process use and establish a quantifiable benefit that will support seeking additional enabling policy and/or legislation.

The team shall ensure that the final outcomes of new policy and/or legislation are incorporated into the ASC training and guidance and that information is communicated throughout the agency in a timely manner.

Agency Goal 4: Training Program

Goal: Clarify the training position

Objectives:

1. Establish what the leadership vision and mission is for the position
   A. Work with CAPIT team to develop mission
2. Determine position workload
   A. Short range workload
   B. Long run workload
   C. Determination of cross function activity (grant specialist activity)
      i. Project work loads and if (when) work load changes
      ii. What are the triggers for engaging in cross function work
3. Develop a mission statement for the position
4. Analyze the Training Development Branch position description
   A. Determine overlaps of ASC position and TDB
   B. Assess potential conflicts
   C. Determine actions for resolution of conflicts
      i. Work with CAPIT to draft agency policy to address conflicts
   D. Work with PPD-PEM staff to fully understand the use and promotion of Communities of Practice

The Agreement Services Center has recently established a training position. To achieve the greatest effectiveness, and subsequent benefit, from this position the team will provide guidance in establishing the requirements of the position. This effort will assist the training specialist in grounding their effort in addressing the findings issues in the initial CAPIT report. There will be a concerted effort to maximize the agency resources such as the APHIS Training Development Branch. The consolidated effort in training will position the agency, its staff, and all stakeholders to engage in a Community of Practice. The Community of Practice will allow the process to achieve its greatest effectiveness and efficiency through standard approaches and communication within the area of cooperative agreements.

Goal: Define the audience and their needs

Objectives:

1. Levels
   A. Agreement Specialist
   B. ADODR
   C. Program Manager
   D. Administrative Support Assistant working with ADODR

Goal: Define the audience and their needs (continued)

Objectives:

       E. Cooperator
          i. Work with stakeholders to identify cooperators who could provide assistance in determining what needs to be included in training
         ii. Use those identified as beta testers for training solutions
2. Define the roles and responsibilities of each level
    A. Draft/revise roles and responsibilities
    B. Allow PLG to review roles and responsibilities
    C. Ensure that there are no conflicts in roles and responsibilities with agency policy, regulation or legislation
         i.   Work with authorities group for determination
    D. Institute roles and responsibilities as policy and standard practice
    E. Communicate roles and responsibility to APHIS and cooperators
3. Determine what level of knowledge/experience is mandatory for each position
4. Perform a needs assessment at each level to determine the needs in training
    A. Work with PPD-PEM to create a survey
    B. Issue survey, collect data, analyze, and incorporate into training products
    C. Analyze needs of/for training against existing training resources

The CAPIT final report identified training as one of the largest issues within the agreements process. The report determined that there are varying training needs and requirements depending upon who is working on the agreement and what stage of the process the work is taking place. Defining the roles and responsibilities is critical in order to achieve standardization within the process. Once these roles and responsibilities are determined the requirements of each position will establish the needs in training, after which, training modules can be created and presented.

Goal: Revise/Develop the content of the training modules

Objectives:

1. Module (revise based upon requirements analysis under Goal 2)
    A. Cooperative agreement / Grant (Priority)
    B. APHIS specifics for cooperators
    C. Cooperative Service Agreement
    D. Interagency agreement
    E. Memorandum of Understanding
    F. Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA)
    G. Overall Federal assistance

Goal: Revise/Develop the content of the training modules (continued)

Objectives:

2. Train-the-Trainer training
3. Standardize a training requirement for Agreement Specialist for attending MCI Grant Certification Curriculum within one year of start date
4. Perform a needs assessment at each level to determine the needs in training
    A. Work with PPD-PEM to create a survey
    B. Issue survey, collect data, analyze, and incorporate into training products
5. Analyze needs of/for training against existing training resources
6. Identify IT resources available to create proper training product for cooperators
    A. Secure IT resources required
    B. Identify appropriate media(s) for the training
    C. Work with resource to develop training product
    D. Distribute and/or make available to cooperators
7. Incorporate Communities of Practice approach to training
    A. Work with PEM staff to understand Communities of Practice philosophies
    B. Incorporate Communities of Practice into training products
    C. Continually work to promote the advancement of Communities of Practice in the Cooperative Agreements process
    D. Provide notice of training opportunities available
        i. Indicate to cooperators that they can attend APHIS training at their expense

Once the team has assessed the training needs they will assist the Agreement Services Center training staff to revise existing, or develop new, training products. To achieve the greatest return in investment the Agreement Services Center will establish a Train-the-Trainer program. By increasing the number of training qualified personnel, the greater the training program reach will be. The team will also assess various media through which training can be achieved. He agency is sensitive the cooperators training needs, and also there limits on fiscal resources. Travel to an APHIS training session may not be feasible for some of the agency's cooperators. Use of the internet may provide viable solutions that enable PAHIS to reach a greater audience,

Cooperative Agreement Process Improvement Team Implementation Plan

Goal: Implementation of Training Program

Objectives:

1. Provide a pre-announcement of ASC training to include mission objectives and what the stakeholders can expect to come
2. Determine the number and type of training that will be completed per quarter
    A. Determine when training other that cooperative agreements can begin
    B. Agency-wide notification (APHIS all email) that training information is available in the web site
3. List serve quarterly news letter
    A. Identify IT availability of Listserve
    B. Identify type of user for targeted notifications
    C. If IT list serve is not available
        i. Determine cost of list serve solution
        ii. Investigate other alternatives
    D. Review other APHIS news letters for format and content that can be applied to ASC news letter
    E. Review and revise current recipient list of ASC annual letter
4. Establish Training schedule
    A. Riverdale, Raleigh, Fort Collins, Ames, Minneapolis
    B. Video conference training
5. Roll out alternative training solutions
    A. Web based
    B. CD based
    C. Web Seminar
    D. AgLearn for USDA employees paid by NFC
6. Analyze needs of/for training against existing training resources
7. Identify IT resources available to create proper training product for cooperators
    A. Secure IT resources required
    B. Identify appropriate media(s) for the training
    C. Work with resource to develop training product
    D. Distribute and/or make available to cooperators
8. Incorporate Communities of Practice approach to training
    A. Work with PEM staff to understand Communities of Practice philosophies
    B. Incorporate Communities of Practice into training products
    C. Continually work to promote the advancement of Communities of Practice in the Cooperative Agreements process
    D. Provide notice of training opportunities available
        i. Indicate to cooperators that they can attend APHIS training at their expense

Cooperative Agreement Process Improvement Team Implementation Plan

The success of the training initiative implementation requires that the potential users of the training products know of their availability. The team will analyze all available means of communicating the information to all of the agreements process stakeholders. The team will assist the Agreement Services Center Trainer in all aspects of the implantation including, IT resources, training schedules, use of Communities of Practice, and determination of how long cooperative agreement training remains a priority. The training position will eventually provide training products for all of the agreement tools available to APHIS.

Goal: Feedback, guidance, and evaluation

Objectives:

1. Review current website
   A. Tool kit
   B. Step-wise flow chart on completing cooperative agreements
   C. Frequently asked question list
      i. Continual updates based upon feedback from processes, recurring questions to ASC and Agreement Specialists, and training sessions
      ii. Organized by, subject, cost principle or by initial question
2. Annual meeting (cross-cut with major goal 1.b)
   A. Determine Dates
   B. Determine subject matter
   C. Develop agenda
   D. Reserve location and execute logistics as determined
      i. Work with the Facilities and Conference staff
   E. Make notifications of event
3. Work with the training and development staff to create a Training Evaluation form

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The team will assist the Agreement Services Center training position is creating the best model for receiving and retrieving feedback from stakeholders in the agreement process. This information will be used to refine not only training, but how the agency responds to the needs of our stakeholders. Finally, the team will assist the Agreement Services Center in developing the content of the annual cooperative agreement meeting.

Cooperative Agreement Process Improvement Team Implementation Plan

CAPIT WG -- TRACKING SHEET for CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

GOALS/OBJECTIVES	Planning	Budgeting	Announcement	Application & Award	Monitoring & Reporting	Closeout	Payments	Training & Guidance	Communication
Goal 1: Improve consistency across the agency especially in training and guidance	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Obj. 1-1: Standardize APHIS practices	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Obj. 1-2: Get a consistent message out about expectations and practices	X		X					X	X
Obj. 1-3: Improve follow up	X				X	X	X		
Goal 2: Streamline the process	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Obj. 2-1: Implement APHIS e-approaches	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
Obj. 2-2: Use more simplified approaches for getting work done	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Obj. 2-3: Shift processing workload to regional staffs	X		X	X	X	X	X		
Goal 3: Explore other opportunities	**X**		**X**	**X**					
Goal 4: Training Program	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**