Advisory Committee for Business and Operations

the DETAILS

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what's inside

This newsletter will serve as an update on all related NSF business between biannual B&O Advisory meetings.

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NSF's Strategic Plan

NSF's new Strategic Plan (2006-2011) was released on September 30, 2006. The strategic plan was developed through a collaborative process that has involved significant input from staff, the research and education community, and other key stakeholders, including Congress and OMB. Using the recent NSB (National Science Board) Vision document as a guide, the plan retains the essence of the current Strategic Goals while renaming them to be more action-oriented and outcome-based. There should, however, be no significant changes in the internal mapping of NSF programs and budget categories to the strategic goals. The number of Objectives to be evaluated under the Strategic Goals has been condensed. This change should simplify the "nugget" process for goal evaluation purposes. The new plan may also allow us to reduce the number of OMB Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) evaluations. While we have the overall best scores across government in those evaluations, they add considerable workload for NSF staff.

The structure of the new plan fulfills the requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). It includes the NSF mission statement, strategic goals, objectives, means and strategies, external factors that can affect achievement of goals, and the relationship of this entire framework to annual performance goals in the NSF budget. The goals, strategies and assessments are focused at the NSF-wide level, while also describing the roles of merit review, COVs, and Advisory Committees in the overall assessment process.

Administrative Functions Study Update

OIRM's Division of Human Resource Management (HRM) has successfully partnered with NSF directorates and offices in addressing the impact our rapidly changing work processes and workload have on NSF's ability to efficiently perform administrative duties. With considerable input and feedback at all levels, we examined the distribution of administrative functions among staff in the Science and Engineering (S&E) Directorates, and together, have developed strategies to better align those functions, to establish possible alternative career paths, and to increase professional development opportunities for administrative support staff.

Now that we've concluded the "study" phase of AFS, we are collaborating with a steering committee, composed of four Directorate advocates, to design a pilot to test an Administrative Career Model that identifies potential career paths for employees, aligning administrative functions to support NSF's mission and strategic goals. We will continue to share our progress in the development of this next phase NSF-wide, conducting employee exchange sessions and holding briefings with directorate and division-level leadership, to keep everyone up-to-date on the progress of implementation and to obtain and address additional feedback.

Budget and Performance Integration

NSF continues to earn a green rating on the President's Management Agenda (PMA) scorecard for its efforts in Budget and Performance Integration (BPI). This initiative sets government-wide standards to ensure that agencies' budget priorities are closely linked to program performance. NSF's efforts in this area have emphasized improvements to tracking the costs of large facility projects, upgrades to the Enterprise Information System (EIS), (for release later this summer), and direct links between budget line items and the Financial Accounting System (FAS).

One major activity under the BPI initiative is evaluating programs using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART). OMB developed PART to provide a systematic method for assessing the performance of program activities across the federal government. Each year, about 20 percent of an agency's programs must undergo PART review. NSF is the only agency to receive the highest rating of "Effective" in all of its PART program evaluations by OMB.

Of nearly 800 federal programs that have been evaluated by PART, only 15 percent have been rated as effective. These outstanding results both reflect your diligent work and NSF's competitive awards process that helps ensure relevance, quality, and performance. These key components are representative of the Administration's R&D Criteria.

AcademyLearn: NSF's Learning Management System

AcademyLearn is a web-based learning management system used for developing, managing, and optimizing organizational skills and talent across the Foundation to increase workforce productivity and aid in agency operations. The goal of AcademyLearn is to vastly improve the ability of all NSF employees to register or take internal or external training.

AcademyLearn will enable NSF to:
• Deliver training to anyone, anytime, anywhere
• Maintain records and report on the training delivered
• Distribute training through centralized scheduling and administration

AcademyLearn is being implemented in phases. Phase I was completed in April, 2006. This phase gave all NSF employees and IPAs access to AcademyLearn where they currently have access to approximately 2,000 professional and personal development online courses in SkillSoft's Business Skills, IT, and Government Focused course libraries.

Phase II consists of having NSF's proprietary e-business online tutorials available via AcademyLearn. This phase started in April, 2006, and will be ongoing since new tutorials are constantly being created.

Phase III will be performed in stages. The first segment of Phase III will allow learners to browse, request, enroll, and complete no-cost learning opportunities that are offered internally at the Foundation. This stage is scheduled to be completed during the summer of 2006. The second segment of Phase III involves the integration of AcademyLearn with the NSF Financial System, FAS, and will allow learners to request external training via AcademyLearn. At the end of Phase III, AcademyLearn will replace the legacy Training System (currently accessed via the NSF WinStation).

eTravel Enhancements

eTravel is one of the original 24 President's Management Agenda (PMA) initiatives. The project is designed to provide an end-to-end travel management system for all federal agencies. In partnership with GSA and EDS, NSF implemented its current travel system, FedTraveler, in April 2005. NSF has experienced technical, logistical, and operational issues with FedTraveler. Concerned we were expending valuable staff time, energy, and resources on a flawed travel system, we conducted an extensive review of all technical issues associated with this federally mandated travel system. A number of other federal agencies experienced similar issues with both the implementation and management of FedTraveler. Along with these federal agencies, we brought your feedback and concerns to the group, identified inefficiencies in the system, and provided a comprehensive list of issues to GSA.

In September 2005, GSA developed a corrective action plan to address our collective issues and has taken steps to enhance FedTraveler from all perspectives. EDS has collaborated with NSF in addressing FedTraveler inefficiencies and is working to bring FedTraveler into compliance with the GSA Master Contract. The Interagency EDS Users Group, of which NSF is a vocal partner, continues to monitor the progress of the system, identifying new issues and making recommendations for improvements and enhancements.

In addition to our proactive role externally, we have taken steps internally to improve customer satisfaction with FedTraveler by continuing to publish *Ask Neville*, an online newsletter and web presence, and the *Blue Skies* monthly newsletter. We have also established a Requirements Review Board (composed of representatives from each directorate), and are developing a FedTraveler "local experts" users group throughout NSF. In an effort to continuously improve the system, we are offering open exchange sessions to seek out customer feedback.

For the past year and a half, NSF has used the FedTraveler system for all vouchered travel activities, and along with a number of federal agencies, continues to work with FedTraveler and EDS to improve the system. The next element of this end-to-end solution is the interface with the Finance and Accounting System (FAS), providing automatic obligation and submission of reimbursements, streamlining the travel planning and reimbursement processes. We have recently initiated a critical phase of automating NSF's travel system by integrating the FedTraveler System with FAS. Just as NSF leverages eJacket to eliminate paper proposals, we will further automate FedTraveler to create a paperless travel process. Changes to travel plans and expense reports, a formerly manual process, will be replaced by an electronic one. The phased integration of FedTraveler and FAS will occur over several months this fall and winter. OIRM and BFA will beta test the integrated system, and we will provide additional materials and guidance, as well as demos of the enhanced FedTraveler throughout this integration effort.

Grant Financial Survey

In an ongoing effort to provide the highest standards of customer service in financial and award management to our growing grantee community, we conducted a grantee survey in 2005.

The objective of the survey was to assess and measure the effectiveness of NSF's post-award financial management processes, and to solicit customer feedback as a means of identifying areas of improvement. The survey concentrated on the FastLane system's online financial functions, and its responses were used to develop recommendations for improvement based on input received directly from our valued grantee community. Overall, the survey demonstrated that the grantee community was highly satisfied with the customer service they received and the grantees appreciated the ease of use of the system.

It was yet another step in our continuing efforts to make transactions with our stakeholders more user-friendly, while increasing the effectiveness and integrity of our internal operations. NSF plans to use the grantee feedback to develop new and improved business processes to further streamline our financial award systems.

Improper Payments Information Act

The Improper Payments Information Act (IPIA) of 2002 and OMB guidance require agencies to review all programs and activities, identify those susceptible to significant erroneous payments, and determine an annual estimated amount of erroneous payments made in those programs. NSF contracted with McBride, Lock, and Associates, Certified Public Accountants, to conduct an annual statistical review of NSF's Federal Cash Transaction Report (FCTR) transactions received from grant recipients.

The Division of Financial Management and Division of Institution and Award Support worked closely with the contractor throughout the review. The results of the review and the extrapolation of results to the $4.2 billion universe of NSF's IPIA program payments determined IPIA rates of 0.0248 percent or $1.05 million. NSF's results are well below the $10 million IPIA Act requirement for reduction plan reporting.

NSF's electronic process for cash draws and FCTR payments is highly automated and accurate. Our grant payment process in paying eligible grant recipients has been near perfect—99.9 percent—for many years and is one of the most accurate in government. Therefore, our IPIA initiative focuses on the awardees' proper use of taxpayer funds. These statistically favorable results demonstrate the effectiveness of NSF's end-to-end award management process.

HR Service Team Update

Based upon the 2005 OIRM Customer Satisfaction Survey and anecdotal feedback, OIRM is taking proactive steps to provide enhanced, integrated services, and to help serve NSF's business needs in a more efficient and effective manner. To that end, OIRM's Division of Human Resource Management (HRM) is moving to an integrated Service Team approach to serve all NSF organizations. Each Service Team is committed to partnering with and serving their respective Directorate to plan and anticipate human capital requirements. We will also streamline and enhance our coordination and communication efforts, ensuring our customers receive timely responses and reducing dwell time on HR actions. We successfully completed a Service Team pilot with the Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences (MPS) in April 2006 and conducted an evaluation of the pilot in May. Lessons learned and best practices were incorporated into phase one of the Foundation-wide roll out. In June, a Customer Account Representative from HRM was assigned to each Directorate and Office. Each Customer Account Representative will:

• Understand the business and human capital needs of each Directorate and Office

• Work *collaboratively* with the Directorate or Office to develop strategies and plans to manage their long-term human capital issues

• Work *proactively* to address immediate needs, serving as a liaison to improve communication and coordination with the Directorate or Office

We will continue the phased implementation of the Service Teams through the coming year. The concept will be coupled with enhanced tools (new staffing plans), processes (improved recruitment and on-boarding), and technologies (FTE tracking) to improve overall customer service and support. We are committed to providing NSF with the tools, resources, and support needed to effectively manage its human capital efforts.

Internal Control

Responsibility for the Stewardship of Federal Funding: Our agency's ability to demonstrate that its staff work to achieve the mission and support the controls needed to ensure the integrity of operations, is fundamental to the receipt of Federal funding. Management conducts an annual review of these controls to support the assurances made by the agency Director in the Performance and Accountability Report. This annual report is submitted to the public at-large, the Executive Office, and Congress.

The Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act (FMFIA) was adopted in 1982 to implement these basic safeguards. FMFIA is implemented through Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-123: *Management's Responsibility for Internal Control (A-123)*. A-123 requires that each agency ensures compliance with laws and regulations, adequate controls over financial reporting, and efficiency and effectiveness of operations related to these issues.

In FY 2005, the NSF Director designated the Accountability and Performance Integration Council (APIC) as a senior assessment team. APIC reports to the Chief Operating Officer, who also serves as the NSF Deputy Director, and briefs the Senior Management advisory Roundtable. In addition to these formal groups, each individual working at NSF has responsibility for understanding and meeting all requirements related to internal controls.

During FY 2007, NSF will offer training and education to provide each of you with this essential information so you can, in turn, fulfill your stewardship responsibilities to ensure the Foundation's continuing success.

Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-12

On August 27, 2004, President Bush signed Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 12, requiring implementation of a single Government-wide standard for "secure and reliable forms of identification issued by the Federal Government to its employees and contractors" who access Federal facilities and IT systems. The overall goals of HSPD-12 are to improve security and reduce threats of terrorist acts by improving the quality and security of the forms of personal identification used to access Federal facilities and systems.

HSPD-12 instructed the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to develop a standard for secure and reliable forms of identification credentials. Identity credentials must meet the control objectives delineated in HSPD-12:
•   Issued based on sound criteria for verifying an individual's identity
•   Strongly resistant to identity fraud, tampering, counterfeiting and terrorist exploitation
•   Can be rapidly authenticated electronically
•   Issued only by accredited providers (agencies can self-accredit)

NSF (led by OIRM) has already met the first HSPD-12 deadline (October, 2005) which was to institute a more stringent checks and balances method for issuing ID cards (fingerprint checking is one of the outcomes of the Directive). GSA is taking the lead for securing vendors who can deliver the ID cards and systems that meet the NIST guidance. The Presidential Directive states that agencies must have new systems for issuing the new standards-based credentials in place by October 27, 2006. NSF will benefit from elimination of two different, proprietary physical access systems at Stafford Place I and Stafford Place II, to be replaced by a single security system and credential that meets HSPD-12 requirements. In addition to credentials for all new employees and contractors, we will replace (and upgrade to Smart Cards) the credentials used by the current staff of 1500.   On October 25, 2006, NSF was proud to issue its first HSPD-12 compliant badge to Dr. George Strawn, NSF's Chief Information Officer.

We welcome your feedback!
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