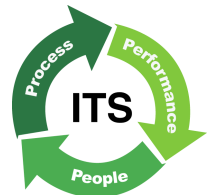




OCIO – Information Technology Services ITS Connections

Volume 2, Issue 1

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Contents

A Tale of Two WebCouncils	1
SMS	3
Infrastructure Definition Division	5
New Faces	7
Printer Supplies Solution	8
Admin Notes: Q&A About Court Leave	9
Katrina Blows Phone Bills Off-Course	10

ITS Calendar

OCIO Security Agreement Due	April 30
Printer Supplies Solution Begins	May 1
USDA Security Literacy & Basics (AgLearn course) FY 2006 - due date	June 1

When will we have ITS policies & procedures?

Why can't we get any answers?

When will the states that are understaffed get their allotment?

How can we provide input?

A Tale of Two WebCouncils*:

The ITS All Hands (Nov 29, 2005) -- The State AOs (Dec. 15, 2005)

2 WEB COUNCILS... one an ITS All Hands meeting and the other with State AOs from FSA, RD, and NRCS, produced remarkably similar concerns, questions, and recommendations about how ITS should improve its overall functions and communications. There were differences, of course, with ITS staff also inquiring about internal personnel and administrative issues and State AOs asking about hardware, more telecom, phone bills, and reimbursement for office space. But both groups converged on the need for:

- *Policies and clear procedures;*
- *Good communications (up, down, and across ITS, between ITS and the agencies, and even within the agencies); and*
- *Ways their input can help form future policies, procedures, and other decisions.*

The ITS All Hands WebCouncil

Rich Roberts convened the All Hands WebCouncil/Teleconference to review the accomplishments of ITS' first year and to get everyone's input about our progress, problems, and future. Participants logged onto the Web-Council site and responded to four questions (all comments can be viewed at http://www.ocio.net.usda.gov/ocio/its_ep/its_communication.html):

- *What has gone well during the first year of ITS operations?* (220 comments)
- *What can ITS do better in the future?* (230 comments)
- *Looking back on the past year, what are your most important insights and lessons learned?* (196 comments)
- *Please input any questions you would like the leadership to address?* (168 comments)

We estimate at least 230 people participated in the WebCouncil portion of the teleconference and contributed a total of 814 comments or questions (although participants were initially asked to sign in, some people requested to be able to participate without signing in. We don't really know how many individuals beyond the first 230 contributed input).

The Infrastructure Governance communications team has been going through the comments to rearrange them by themes; group or synthesize the similar ones; and then channel them to the appropriate people for answers.

* The CoVision WebCouncil

WebCouncils combine the traditional teleconference with a cutting edge, real-time capability for participants to contribute their ideas by keying them into a response box at various points during the session.

The responses are visible for participants to see and expand on - either elaborating on them, providing suggestions or solutions, or presenting a body of topics to be addressed as soon as possible. Although participants are often asked to sign-in, all subsequent comments are posted anonymously. The idea is to promote candor and free, responsible expression.

Preliminary Analysis

We have done a preliminary analysis of the key issues and it is clear there is a lot of cross-over between the categories:

1. **NEED FOR ITS GOALS, POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND STANDARDS** and a process for formulating them that includes input from the field.
2. **COMMUNICATING AND CLARIFYING GOALS, POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND STANDARDS.** Information is needed, it must be useful, and it must be readily available. The delivery methods should also be appropriate to the type of information or message.
But, communications is more than sending information— it is the day-to-day communications among people, up and down the ranks and across branches and divisions, and between ITS and agency customers. Communications should enhance the professional interaction among staff, managers, customers and leadership.

It is hard to consciously enhance that process in the midst of workday pressures and tasks, but we need to figure out how to build it into the normal way we operate.

3. **ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: MANAGING AND SHARING OPERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE.** Collectively, ITS staff have a wealth of knowledge and experience about the agencies and their technology, but folks still know their former agencies better than the other two. We need to set up ways for staff to share their knowledge so everyone can be aware of the particular requirements and IT culture of each agency and customer group. As business expands to new customers, this will be an important asset for ITS. Likewise, there's a desire among staff to become better acquainted with their groups and colleagues in other states and regions. There were also

many questions about training and concerns about when staffing levels will match work-load.

4. **ITS' FUTURE.** This topic was on many minds. It included questions about the ITS budget; service level agreements, MOUs, and other customer focused issues; and overall questions about ITS' long-term direction.
5. **ADMINISTRATIVE AND PERSONNEL CONCERNS.** These included general and specific questions about jobs, promotions, hiring, and other workplace policies; some focused on the grade parity issue and how it is being resolved; and some on resources such as offices and access to vehicles.
6. **CUSTOMERS.** Finally, but by no means last on anyone's mind, were questions about ITS' customers: *what do they think about how we are doing? ... and what do they want?* These comments link back to ITS' future, to having clear goals, policies, procedures, and standards, and to customers being better informed about ITS support procedures and their agency service level agreement.

Customer Input: the State AO WebCouncil

The ITS/State AO WebCouncil also began as a year-end review, with remarks by all the ITS leadership. State AOs from FSA, NRCS, and RD participated in this session both by phone and by web. The AOs contributed questions and comments covering many topics about ITS operations. We received over 263 responses – many of them with multiple parts. Over 54 questions were directed to ITS leadership for response.

Overall, these were positive comments about our first year. Service continued as usual, and it improved in many locations. There were some negative comments that appeared to be specific to a few states and possibly a particular agency. This is being looked into.

The rest of the comments and questions were aimed at how we could work better with the state offices.

The key customer service topics are summarized below.

AOs also asked about hardware, printer support, expanding telecom services, security issues, the operating budget an fee handling, and administrative concerns.

This Q & A report can be downloaded from the ITS Customer Portal:

http://www.ocio.net.usda.gov/ocio/its_cp/index.html

*Look under the heading
ITS-SCA Teleconference Notes
and click on: 12-15-05 Q&A.*

The Key Customer Service Topics

1. **IMPROVED COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN SCA/ITS.** The AOs expressed a strong need for better communications with ITS managers and support specialists. Some AOs mentioned a need for improved communication between agency state offices and their headquarters about IT arrangements. Areas for improvement include getting timely information out about service changes, policies, and projects, and clarifying how state offices can provide input on policy development.
2. **CLARIFYING STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES AND SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS.** Comments focused on clarifying IT roles, responsibilities, and procedures. There was also an emphasis on ways agency state offices could provide input on procedures and service agreements.
3. **CUSTOMER SERVICE.** Questions and comments about customer service covered state and location specific situations as well as broader topics. Here the focus included:
 - Service quality and response issues.
 - Skill levels and training, including the need for all ITS support specialists to know about each agency's particular IT culture & requirements.
 - Need for useful, user-friendly information from ITS specialists
 - Clarifying roles & responsibilities.
 - *Magic* issues.
 - Need to allign staffing to meet demand.

System Management Server 2003 – A tool for all reasons

As the maturity of the SCA network comes into view, an exciting new product is nearing full deployment that will be one of the cornerstones for our continued success. Microsoft System Management Server (SMS 2003) is a large scale, enterprise-wide tool that will benefit all users of the SCA network. SMS will be the core component of enterprise systems management for the entire ITS workstation and server infrastructure. For the first time within the tri-Agency network, SMS will provide remote systems control and configuration capabilities to offices throughout the United States, including all Field, State, National, and Headquarter locations.

Specifically, it provides:

- Asset management capabilities for software and hardware, including remote inventory capability and reporting. This will improve software license management and property control.
- Automated software distribution that can distribute software installations, upgrades, and uninstalls to targeted users without interfering with their work or with network traffic.
- Patch management for ongoing security upgrades.
- Remote desktop management, including assessing use of applications to fine-tune who needs which software.

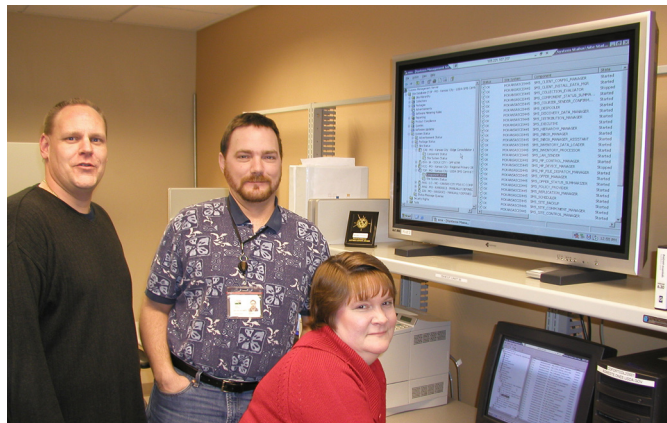


Photo: Patti Jordan, right, with SMS 2003 Operations Team members Matt Cuthbert, left, and Jerry Maquire.

When complete, SMS will provide greater stability, reliability, performance, security, and manageability for the CCE's 2,700 Windows-based servers and over 50,000 Windows XP desktops and portable computers. According to a report by the Enterprise Management Team, SMS 2003 will provide a tangible return on investment by enabling the USDA Service Center Agencies to better utilize field office IT resources and maximize recent CCE upgrades to the Active Directory, Microsoft Operations Manager (MOM), Software Update Services (SUS), Windows 2003 Server, and Windows XP Update2 desktop operating systems.

SMS, combined with other improvements from Windows 2003 Server, will help solve many of the issues brought up dur-

ing the ITS WebCouncil with State AOs from the agencies. They commented about software upgrade and installation procedures that interfered with their workdays, the accuracy of inventories of hardware, and slow servers.

SMS can conduct installations in the background and when computers are not in use (including laptops and tablets, as long as they are connected to the network); it can maintain an inventory of all hardware on the network; and it can schedule data transfers to minimize the impact of SMS activities on agency servers.

Back to the future

System Management Server (SMS) is much like a Swiss Army Knife. It will be the central tool for application deployment,

security patch management, application usage monitoring, hardware inventory, and software inventory. The pre-ITS ITWG Enterprise Management Team began the planning for SMS in 2003. Early on the project ran into a hitch. SMS 2.0 was the available version at the time and it didn't comply with CCE requirements, so there was a delay of about 9 months until SMS 2003 was released. With convergence, most of the team remained, although they are now

spread throughout ITS: Architecture Definition-IDD, Hosting Operations-IOD, Change Management & Testing-IOD, and TSD (see table below).

System Management Server 2003 Project Team includes:

<p>SMS Operations Team - IOD: Patti Jordan, Kansas City MO Matt Cuthbert, Kansas City MO Jerry Maguire, Kansas City MO Jill Thompson, Oregon City OR Londa Dahlke, GWCC Beltsville MD Jerry Kozlowski, GWCC Beltsville MD</p>	<p>SMS Architecture Team - Gordon Robinett, ADB-IDD, Kansas City MO Herb Peterson, Virginia State Office, VA/WV Group Manager David Purcell, Hosting-IOD, GA Members of Enterprise Management Team</p>
<p>SMS Change Management & Testing Team- IOD Barry Hodge, IOLab Carl Chernisky, IOLab Guy York, IOLab Jay Szlamowicz, IOLab Curt Anderson, IOLab</p>	<p>Beta & Pilot State IT Points of Contact designated by Region Group Manager -TSD (key to the daily activation of the SMS client on the workstations) Ed Dati, Missouri State IT Andy Rubio, Illinois State IT John Walters, Indiana State IT (IN Group Manager) Ken Garcia, Arizona State IT Sam Liu, Nevada State IT Jerold Ryken, South Dakota State IT Steve Wathen, Tennessee State IT Dick Hunter & Dan Heathcote, Maine State IT David Smith, Virginia State IT</p>

Gordon Robinett (Acting Chief, Architecture Definition Branch-IDD), started SMS 2003 on the change management path, and Patti Jordan and Matt Cuthbert (both from Hosting Operations Branch-IOD) are the project leads. Patti reports that “SMS completed its BETA deployment on December 30th with great success. We deployed over 500 clients to 27 selected sites within the state of Missouri.”

“With the help of the State IT personnel in Missouri everything went very well,” Patti continues, “we began our Pilot Deployment on January 4th covering sites in three domains. These sites are in South Dakota, Nevada & Ari-

zona in AgWest; Tennessee, Virginia & Maine in AgEast; and Illinois & Indiana in AgCentral.”

As Matt puts it, “It brings better control and efficiency throughout the system. We can accelerate security patches... and when SMS deploys new software to desktops it can report success rates and pinpoint problems.”

It has been a careful change management process with considerable testing and refinement. The IO lab testing was followed by pilot testing in the field and now SMS is ready to go. Patti says, “We are very excited to finally see this project in deployment. To date we have activat-

ed almost 7000 clients on workstations and servers within the CCE domains. We are currently working on the installation of the secondary site servers in the previously defined *pilot* sites.”

This pilot project should be completed by the week of 10 April with full deployment scheduled to begin the week of April 17th. Patti concludes, “We have spent a lot of time in the last month coordinating the full deployment schedule with TSD Management. And with the help of our ITS co-workers, we hope to see it fully functional in the not too distant future.”

That future begins this Spring.

SMS 2003 – Key Features

Software Distribution

Ability to automatically distribute software throughout the USDA CCE enterprise - to both servers and workstations.

Able to differentiate which programs are applicable to a particular computer, based on a set of attributes, and only present the appropriate software for download and installation.

Ability to identify systems that can install a specific program – i.e. which systems have the enough disk space to install the available software.

Provide a summary of what software has been deployed, including the number of successful installs and number of failures.

Roll-back capability – removal of a software package after it has been installed.

Asset Management

Hardware Inventory - SMS can:

Automatically collect hardware information at set intervals.

Group similar systems together based on hardware inventory information.

Generate reports from information collected during hardware inventory.

Software Inventory - SMS can:

Automatically collect software information at set intervals.

Detect different versions of software installed on computers

Group similar systems together based on software inventory information.

Generate reports from information collected during software inventory.

Software Metering - SMS can:

Monitor a list of software programs users execute, to better manage software requirements.

Add rules for software programs to be metered.

Generate reports from information collected during software metering.

Security Patch Management & Operating System Patching

Ability to automatically distribute Patch(es) and security roll-ups throughout the USDA CCE enterprise - to both servers and workstations.

Ability to differentiate which patches are applicable to a particular Operating System and only present the appropriate patches for download and installation

Ability to identify systems that need a specific patch – i.e. which systems are vulnerable to the problem that the patch addresses.

Provide a summary of what patches have been deployed – the number of successful installs and number of failures.

Roll-back capability – removal of a patch after it has been installed.

Windows Management Services Integration

Remote Diagnostics/Remote Control

Ability to perform secure remote-control diagnostics of Windows workstations and servers. End-users must be notified of impending remote control sessions and grant permission to personnel performing the session.

Ability to track when a remote control or remote diagnostics session was initiated and by whom.

Name Resolution

The solution implemented must be able to leverage existing infrastructure at the USDA and not require WINS for name resolution

Security

Server Security

The number of accounts created for implementing a solution must be minimal and not require Domain Administrator privileges.

Ability to delegate tasks within the management system and not require an “all or nothing management mode”

Systems must conform to USDA CCE Security Standards.

A Defining Role- The Infrastructure Definition Division



Photo: The Fort Collins Infrastructure Definition Division and Architecture Definition Branch, Left to right front row: Linda Muchow, Cindy Beebe, Katherine Ihli; back row: Scott Snover, Bill Elliott, Tom Rudnick, Corey Wright and Jim Sheppard.

It is the job of the Infrastructure Definition Division, IDD, to define the ongoing growth and evolution of the ITS infrastructure and computing system. IDD has two branches to accomplish these distinct but related tasks:

- **The Architecture Definition Branch** selects the new hardware and software that, pending change management review and tests, will best satisfy the requirements of our customers and work securely on our network
- **The Service Definition Branch** focuses on the best ways ITS can support these changes and provide customer service.

A little background - CCE was Just the Beginning

When ITS was created back in November 2004, the Common Computing Environment (CCE) was already set up by the agencies. Through the Service Center Modernization Initiative (SCMI) and the IT Working Group, they had built a shared network and selected their various hardware and software components.

As Scott Snover, Director of the Infrastructure Definition Division, describes it, “When the Common Computing Environment was conceived the Service Center Agencies had to figure out how to design a system that they could share – that all their essential programs could operate

on. They also needed to select equipment and software that would be common to all agency employees and locations – for more efficient support, training, and purchasing; and for improved integration, deployment, and operations.”

Interoperability is now a way of life, but it didn't use to be. The agencies had different hardware, software, IT cultures, and technology walls. Gene Renken, former Architecture Definition Branch Chief, followed up on this, “SCMI was about getting the agencies to focus on the benefits of a common system.... It made communications within and across agencies possible, both for the agencies and

their customers.”

This initial infrastructure was just the beginning of a system that is constantly changing, evolving, and growing. Everything in the CCE has a lifecycle. When something becomes obsolete it is replaced by new and improved equipment and software; when new capabilities are requested, they have to be tailored to the existing and evolving system – so that all changes must be considered in terms of the current as well as the future enterprise. And with changes ranging from the shared infrastructure on down to each individual end-user's computer, there are also changes to how support is provided.

At the Division Level: Envisioning Change

As the name describes, IDD is about defining the ITS infrastructure: how it is put together; what components, hardware, and software are used; and what services are needed to meet the business needs of the agencies.

The Infrastructure Definition Division is responsible for specification and continual improvement of the ITS

enterprise environment and service lines that fulfill the business requirements of our different customers and deliver the HW and capabilities they need. IDD is the first stage in change management, implementation and deployment.

To do this, the Division manages the monitoring, forecasting, acquisition, and assurance of infrastructure capacity

and availability in response to business demand, as well as managing the requirements process. Along with the Security Policy Branch (IGD) and the Operations Security Branch (IOD), this division also ensures that security requirements and considerations have been accurately determined and incorporated into all aspects of the infrastructure environment.

Architecture Definition Branch: Forward to the Future

The Architecture Definition Branch (ADB) has a staff of eleven that plans, designs, and configures the ITS CCE enterprise technical architecture including all hardware and software covering telecommunications, web farms, data centers, and user computing

& services —servers, desktops, office automation, messaging, peripherals, and remote computing devices. This includes assuring compatibility and security throughout the enterprise, assessing customer demand and system capacity, anticipating and recommending

improvements, and helping define Service Level Requirements. And ADB initiates the change management process that flows through testing at the IO Lab, field testing around the country, and final deployment.

Scott describes the many dimensions of problems and solutions, "Some offices may have slow email at certain times and figure it's the server acting up. The system may have been fine for what the agencies needed 5 years ago, but today's complex applications like ArcGIS or large SQL database operations can take a lot of bandwidth away from many other activities. The solutions for solving these current issues must also look to the future."

"The original purchase of 3,000 ITS servers are at the end of their 5 year life-cycle. This will be our biggest challenge going forward," says Gordon Robinett, the Acting Architecture Definition Branch Chief, "We are looking into new technologies for the future SCA network. The new servers and appliances we test and select will have much improved capacity and speed for current

and projected demands. The plan is to deploy them in 2007, but that is contingent on the budget.

The combination of new servers and using XML to transmit data will really speed things up." Other improvements that are underway now, such as SMS and Windows 2003 Server, will also streamline operations.

At the office level, ADB works with the agencies and ITS Service Line Managers to determine end-user requirements. The Branch has a list of hardware choices to satisfy those needs. For instance, there are three levels of workstations: basic computers for most people, high end for special requirements, such as ArcGIS, and notebooks and tablets for specialists in the field.



Photo: The Kansas City Architecture Definition Branch, left to right: Gordon Robinett, Patricia Fayne, Dale Carpenter, Cheryl Pallas, and Dan Duckworth.

Many people don't realize that there is still flexibility to upgrade these selections according to the specialized needs of the end-user. ABD has also devised a new ITS procurement catalogue and schedule (that moves from a single bulk purchase per year, that requires pre-ordering a fixed number of units), to a blanket purchase agreement that allows agency offices to order equipment when it is needed.

Service Definition Branch: Translating Service into Knowledge

Service Definition Branch (SDB) works with Service Line Managers, ITS Customers, and other divisions to identify customer needs, requirements, and specifications for the infrastructure services to be offered by ITS. This helps define and document the technical requirements for both Service Level Agreements between our customers and ITS, and Operational Level Agreements within different service providers across ITS. SDB is also responsible for monitoring and measuring performance of the offered services to ensure compliance with the service level agreements (SLAs) and operations level agreements (OLAs). SDB is also responsible for establishing, publishing, and



Photo: Kelly Stelmach, Branch Chief- Service Definition

maintaining the ITS Service Catalogue.

Currently the branch has just Kelly Stelmach, Chief, Steve Delman, and Mike Huddle, but it should grow to about six, which is a good thing because it has a number of formidable tasks that are key to USDA's vision for ITS. Kelly, already an expert in customer service, is taking her background in ITIL and IT best practices into the real world of enterprise management. Kelly says, "We are working with the Infrastructure Operations Division and the Service Line Managers to translate everything ITS does into a useful Service Catalogue that matches common tasks and services to the estimated cost of accomplishing them.

The Service Catalogue is part of the *overall fee for service* concept that ITS and our customers are moving to in FY2007. This will help make the cost of IT measurable and rational for the SCA and the USDA."

It will also link the cost of services to a realistic set of metrics, that is, an estimate of the time it really takes to provide quality service. These costs will get formalized in a chargeback system that will become the basis for the SCA IT budgets and service level agreements that will pay for ITS. Another initiative from SDB is the *ITS Cookbook*, which will be a comprehensive and practical guide to ITS procedures for customers. This will answer another major need that end-users have asked for: clear instructions for getting hardware, software, supplies, support, and various other ITS services.

Understanding problems, designing comprehensive solutions

Wrapping it all up, Scott explains, "We bring a broad-brush perspective to ITS. We first need to understand problems and needs, which can be a complex mix of issues. Then we recognize where the deficiencies are and develop solutions.

Everything is connected, so all aspects of the enterprise must be brought into the equation of change: servers, web farms, networks, applications, work stations, and people."

Stepping back one sees architecture defi-

inition and service definition as the blueprint for ongoing progress to the ITS system. But IDD operates in concert with the rest of ITS to determine what is needed and to design comprehensive, long term, and cost-effective solutions.

New Faces @ITS

This is a new feature that welcomes new employees to ITS. Any Division or Branch with new employees can send us a biographical paragraph, picture optional, and we will gladly include it.

The Administrative Management Division welcomes 4 New Members:

Mary Conner and Ray Moreno have joined the Asset Management Branch as a Property Management Specialists. Mary and Ray are responsible for activities involving personal property acquisition, utilization, disposition, accounting and control for ITS. These activities include policy development, leading special studies, and providing technical advice on issues about personal property management.

Mary Conner began her Federal career in 1982 with USDA Farm Service Agency. She started as a Data Transcriber and within a few months became a Communication Clerk. She was reassigned to the Property Management Branch as a Property Control Clerk and later promoted to a specialist. Mary has over 23 years of experience in the Property Management field. Mary will be located in Kansas City, MO.



Photo: Mary Conner

Ray Moreno joined the Federal government in 1993 with USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in the Cooperative Education Program as a mail clerk in the Area Office in Fort Collins, CO. In 1995 Ray was promoted to Supply Technician and in November of 1996 to a Property Management Technician. In October of 2005 the Realty Specialist for ARS vacated the position and Ray has been acting in that capacity. Ray received his B.S. degree in Accounting from Colorado State University in 1994. Ray will be located in Fort Collins, CO.



Photo: Ray Moreno

Lynn Williams has joined the Asset Management Branch as a Realty Specialist. Lynn's primary responsibility is managing ITS space issues. In addition to maintaining an inventory of space which ITS employees occupy, Lynn will work with the Service Center Agencies and General Services Administration whenever existing space is reconfigured, new space is solicited, or any space issues arise. Lynn should be notified on all ITS-related space issues.

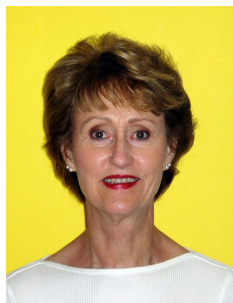


Photo: Lynn Williams

Lynn began her Federal career in 1988 with the Agricultural Research Services. She began working in the Property Section of the Area Office in Ft. Collins, CO as a Personal Property Technician. In 1996 she became a Realty Specialist in the

same office and worked in that capacity until November, 2005 when she joined ITS.

Phyllis Hall joined the ITS Administrative Services Division - Human Resources Branch as a Human Resources (HR) Specialist in the Employee Services Branch and will be involved in the full range of Employee Services Branch activities. She comes from USDA Rural Development (RD), where she was employed for more than 21 years, with the last 10 of those years in HR. After graduating from the University of Missouri, Phyllis worked briefly in the private sector, then began her Federal career in 1983 as an Archives Technician for military records at the St. Louis National Personnel Records Center. She transferred to Farmers Home Administration, a predecessor to RD, in 1984.

Phyllis describes herself as a "Jill of all HR trades" with experience in staffing, classification, employee relations, employee benefits, incentive awards, retirement, management studies, policy writing, and project management. She is also legendary for her fabulous homemade baked goods, not that we've seen any of those since she joined ITS.

Infrastructure Governance Division

John Gambriel joined Infrastructure Governance Division-Program Management Branch in February 2006. John is in the Project Management Office where he helps implement greater project management discipline throughout ITS. He moved over from the Office of Cyber Security, OCIO where he served in various management capacities including, Policy, Privacy, Physical Security and Special Projects.



Photo: John Gambriel

He began at USDA in July 1998 and served as the Director of Infrastructure and Security in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Financial Systems, where he was responsible for the design, development and deployment of the Foundation Financial Information System secure telecommunications infrastructure. His government career began in 1991 at the IRS serving as a Computer Specialist, Technical Team Lead and technical infrastructure architect of the Automated Financial System before serving as Branch Chief. Before entering government service he worked for a major transportation company in multiple capacities, including systems administration and implementation.

New Faces, *continued from page 7*

Greg Montgomery recently joined ITS as the Branch Chief of the Project Management Branch (PMB). The PMB is established to provide support, training, and Project Management discipline for projects undertaken throughout ITS. In addition, the PMB will be responsible for directly managing specific projects. Greg currently has the lead for the ITS Contracts Project, an effort to re-align the large number of ITS support contracts.



Photo: Greg Montgomery

Originally from Arkansas, Greg began working at USDA over

30 years ago while in high school as a field reporter for ASCS (the pre-cursor of FSA). Greg's technical career began in 1984 as the Automation Coordinator for the state of Arkansas. He oversaw the introduction and installation of the first computers in the agency's county offices.

Greg then moved to the agency's National Office in Washington DC, and then to OCIO in 1994 as a telecommunications specialist. During his tenure at OCIO, Greg has had lead roles in a number of technical disciplines including telecommunications, data management, architectures and finally cyber security. Greg transferred to ITS from OCIO's Cyber Security Office where he managed staff, developed contracts, and had the lead role on a number of initiatives that USDA continues to use to address Federal security requirements.

Other welcomes:**Administrative Management Division:**

Ginny Caldwell (WDC) and **Christine Mikkelsen** (Fort Collins) join the Financial Services Branch.

Infrastructure Governance:

Jim Santoni, Financial Management Branch Chief (WDC).

Technical Support Division:

Jarred Decker to TSD-LO-Lincoln, Nebraska.

Moves

Jennifer Gallagher and **Kristine Hines** have moved to the Operations Division (KC office) from Hosting Operations.

Gene Renken has moved to OCIO. **Gordon Robinett** is acting Branch Chief for the Architecture Definition Division.

Retirements:

Paul Hirth has retired from IOD-Information Management Branch.

Coming May 1: Printer Supplies Solution

April 6, 2006 was the closing day for bids from vendors competing to provide the printer supply solution ITS has been working on for months.

Over the last year, getting printer supplies in a timely way has been one of the major frustrations at Service Center Agency offices and among ITS support specialists. It was an especially passionate topic during the AO WebCouncil. But, given a range of over 600 models of printers, the vast number of supply products involved, and over 3000 offices to support, a quick answer was not possible. Furthermore, many offices wondered why they couldn't solve the problem themselves. As usual, there's more that meets the eye.

ITS took over responsibility for printer cartridges because many offices were buying cheap, low quality supplies that ended up damaging their printers.

As Technical Support Division Director Larry Brooks explained, "The challenge has really been threefold: getting the high quality supplies appropriate for all customer printers, timely delivery, and value pricing. Getting all three into one solution has been a high priority for TSD. The TSD branch chiefs and I have been working on this for months." Larry also credits Debbie Sanders, the ITS Contract Service Team lead at the Office of Procurement and Property Management (OPPM). "Her strategic vision and practical contracting skill made this solution possible."

The Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA)

The bids for the ITS BPA for printing supplies are competing to provide:

1. **The best prices** for the high quality supplies we require. We expect savings of at least 40% compared to our current arrangements.

2. **A quick ordering solution** that allows either ITS or our agency customers to submit supply requests. These can be placed, directly to the supplier, online or by telephone.
3. **Quick turnaround**, with direct delivery to end-users within one to two days, for most locations. And there is also a *green* feature: all used ink or toner cartridges get recycled by the vendor.

Later this month the blanket purchase agreement will be signed and this solution will be in place on May 1, 2006.

Instructions for getting printer supplies will be posted once this program is launched. Go to "Getting Help" on the ITS Web site -- http://www.ocionet.usda.gov/ocio/its_cp/index.html

Admin News: Q&A About Court Leave

Note: This guidance is generally applicable, but any relevant provisions in negotiated agreements must be followed.

Most Federal employees are entitled to court leave for serving as a juror or witness.

The following information provides answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about this leave entitlement:

What is court leave?

Court leave means paid time off without charge to leave for service as a juror or witness. Eligible employees can use court leave for jury duty or for serving as an official witness for the Government.

Who is eligible for court leave?

Full-time and part-time employees are eligible. Intermittent employees are not eligible for court leave.

What is jury duty?

Jury duty refers to the time served by an employee who is summoned to serve as a juror in a judicial proceeding. Employees who serve jury duty are eligible for court leave.

Am I eligible for court leave if I am a witness?

It depends. You are entitled to court leave if you are summoned as a witness in a judicial proceeding in which the Federal, State, or local government is a party. You are not entitled to court leave if you are summoned as a witness in an official capacity on behalf of the Federal Government. In this instance, you are on official duty. You are not entitled to court leave for juror or witness service in a nonofficial capacity on behalf of a private party unless a Federal, State or local government also is a party.

How do I request court leave?

You will need to submit a copy of your jury duty, court summons, or other written documentation to your supervisor along with your WebTA request for court leave. The WebTA Transaction Code is "Court Leave."

After serving as a juror or witness, you should ask the court for a certificate of attendance or similar evidence stating that you served on the specified date(s).

Must I return to work if I am excused from jury duty or witness service?

It depends. You must inform your supervisor if you are excused from jury duty or witness service for 1 day or more, or if you are excused for a substantial part of the day. In such cases, you should either return to work or use other paid or unpaid leave as appropriate. Your supervisor will decide if you should return to work.

How is my leave credited if I am summoned for jury duty while on annual leave?

The time you served on jury duty should be changed to court leave.

What should I do with the jury duty or witness service fees I receive?

By law, the fees you receive must be credited against any pay you receive from ITS. Therefore, if you use court leave, you must reimburse ITS for the fees you receive for your service as a juror or witness. However, you may keep any fees you receive that are paid specifically for expenses.

Can I retain jury duty or witness service fees if I serve on a non-workday or holiday?

Yes, you would retain the court fees for the non-workday or holiday.

Can I cash the jury duty or witness service check?

Yes, if you have deductible expenses, you can cash the jury duty or witness service check and write a personal check or money order, minus any expenses, payable to USDA-CIO. If you had no deductible expenses, you should submit the entire jury duty or witness service check to ITS.

Where do I send the jury duty or witness service check?

You should mail the check to:

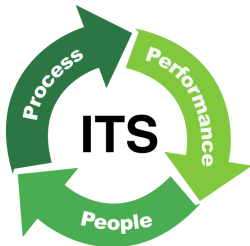
USDA-Office of the Chief Information Officer
Attn: Marcia McCarthy
Room 4105 South Building
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

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Katrina Blows Telephone Bills Off-Course

On December 15, the morning of the first ITS/SCA State AO WebCouncil, an email came in saying the sender would love to participate, but telephone service was cut off to his office that day and he wouldn't be able to hear anything. There were also a few similar comments that came in on the WebCouncil message space. The assumption that ITS was not paying bills may not have been an ideal way to start the virtual meeting, but the WebCouncil was a perfect opportunity to correct that impression, get out the message of what really occurred, and explain how it was being handled.

What actually happened begins with Hurricane Katrina's disruption of the National Finance Center in New Orleans – but it detours into a look at America's decentralized phone system and its many small local service providers. And finally, there's a lurch into the unexpected – the arrival of delinquent phone bills to agency offices – bills that were paid and managed somewhere else.

Katrina blew out TUMS, the Telephone and Utilities Maintenance System at NFC. TUMS automatically receives and pays telephone bills. Because the bills were always paid through this ITS & NFC/TUMS arrangement, when bills for unpaid service started arriving at SCA offices around the country they were sometimes ignored. As some of us know, the phone companies, big or small, don't like big, unpaid bills. Meanwhile, NFC could not receive bills – and consequently it couldn't pay them.

Some large and small providers are alert to anomalies with customers like the hundreds of local USDA offices suddenly not paying their bills – they can recognize patterns and

their customer accounts people may (or may not) check in about the problem. Some companies, both large and small, may not see any patterns – they only see unpaid bills, ignored warnings, and then they just cut off service without any further research.

It was not possible to know where these problems would occur – or predict which companies would cut off service – until something happened at state offices and ITS began receiving complaints.

Another factor: updates to the vendor databases

During the transition of Telecom payments to TUMS, agencies informed their providers about updating the new address for telephone invoices. Not all companies followed through. The mix of the Katrina disruption with the some invoices going to the wrong address simply confused things even more.

As soon as this problem began ITS sent out notices to agency offices about what to do if there is a problem. ITS also assigned staff in New Orleans to help NFC in processing invoices for payment.

Agency offices that still have or suspect a problem should have your telecom vendor contact ITS at 816 926 6744 and either mail all invoices to:

OCIO/ITS/IOD/TOB,
Attn.: Commercial Transition Team
6501 Beacon Dr.
Kansas City, MO 64133-4676

or fax them to:

OCIO/ITS/IOD/TOB,
Attn.: Commercial Transition Team
Fax # 816-823-1982.