

# OCIO

# connections



Volume I / Issue #1  
August 31, 2007

### Contents

A Summer of Change & Challenges: Charles Christopherson takes the OCIO Helm	1
More thoughts from OCIO Leadership: Jerry Williams	2
OCIO Connections: Covering the OCIO Community	2
I&O deploys UTN to the SCA	5
A Look at USDA Enterprise Shared Services	6
Hurricane: 2007 Season Premiere	7
OCIO's Emergency Calling Plan	7
Admin News: A Principled Approach to Work	8
Ergonomic Tip	9
But That Wasn't My Intent...the Unintended Impact of Our Words	10
June/July Deployments	11

### OCIO Calendar- Sept.

Labor Day	Sept. 3
Equinox	23
End of FY07	30

Contact Us at:  
ITS Connections  
Kathy Marshall,  
ITS Communications Team Lead  
<mailto:OCIO-Connections@one.usda.gov>

## A SUMMER OF CHANGE & CHALLENGES

### CHARLES CHRISTOPHERSON TAKES THE OCIO HELM

by the ITS Communications Team



Photo: Chuck Christopherson.

Charles "Chuck" Christopherson, Jr. was appointed the new Chief Information Officer (CIO) by Secretary Johanns on July 18, 2007. The Communications Team met with him the following week to get a sense of his vision for OCIO. Through his capacity as USDA Chief Financial Officer (CFO), he is already very familiar with OCIO. The CFO is responsible for fiscal oversight of the Department (including review of OCIO's finances) and manages one of the government's largest and oldest information technology (IT) enterprises, the National Finance Center, which processes hundreds of thousands of payroll and other financial transactions each month.

Mr. Christopherson was a successful entrepreneur specializing in company turnarounds, helping diverse companies become operationally effective and financially sound; he helped establish a large complex construction services corporation; and served as a CFO/Acting Chief Operating Officer during the restructuring of ICG Fiber Optic Technology, which became the second largest network infrastructure installer for Lucent/Avaya. He knows first hand about operations, customer service, and the resources needed to provide them.

Chuck has also accompanied both the Secretary and former CIO Dave Combs to hearings on Capitol Hill. Last February he participated in a Senate hearing that resulted in the

"We will get the right focus on what we do for USDA, setting our department's IT priorities, establishing customer service levels, achieving follow-through!"  
— Chuck Christopherson

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Infrastructure Stabilization Project and jump-starting the next phase of the *Modernize and Innovate the Delivery of Agricultural Systems* project (MIDAS), which will update and migrate hundreds of FSA services that currently run on old AS400s.

We asked *what was ahead for OCIO?* Chuck replied, "There are a number of challenges to contend with, including new budget realities...helping our customers define what they *really* need in terms of an IT system, comprehensive services, and support...and focusing on the resources we *really* need to provide those requirements. Depending on the costs of service and the available budgets, priorities will be set...choices will be made. As we establish needs, our new executive committees can help reconcile any major IT and budget issues."

Integrating operations is a key adjustment that will result in a more effective OCIO, able to respond to evolving needs among our client agencies at USDA. "One example," Chuck explained, "is FSA. It has to complete MIDAS. Congress is giving us money to fix things, but no longer in vast amounts...each stage of the project has a goal and a budget to achieve that goal. We can help re-engineer FSA online services in a more cohesive way, instead of having many expensive, independent projects."

He also reminded us, "Whatever the impact of budget realities, we can't forget our core mission to farmers, rural America, and all citizens- supporting the IT system that delivers USDA agency programs; our front office will make service commitments based on agency needs and our back office workforce will fulfill our promises and our responsibilities."

## MORE THOUGHTS FROM OCIO LEADERSHIP

**“As we improve our service delivery and customer relationships we also need to establish the metrics that verify our service quality in world class terms.” — JERRY WILLIAMS, Deputy CIO**

Jerry Williams takes a very businesslike approach to OCIO customer service. Quality and consistency are at the heart of it. He became Deputy Chief Information Officer in June 2005, about seven months after the ITS convergence and has seen some important changes and opportunities. Jerry said “Establishing service level agreements (SLAs) was an important step for ITS. The SLA process is the beginning of our customer relationships defining customer needs and expectations. It also confirms what we, as OCIO operations, will do to fulfill those requirements.”

### **Amid many accomplishments, there is still much to do.**

Significant achievements include the creation of the ITS Management Oversight Committee (IMOC) and the IT Funding Committee (ITFC). Based on information provided by the ITFC, the IMOC recommends an approved budget, by service area, to the Working Capital Fund Board to ensure the proper funding and resources are provided to support the Common Computing Environment. However, there are still things we need to do. “At the center

of a customer relationship is the confidence that service levels are being met...and quality is achieved. We may be doing these things, but we don't have indicators to prove it,” Jerry continues, “We need to implement a system of metrics to measure our customer satisfaction throughout our operations and pinpoint where we need to improve. This way, we can see where we are going as a service organization.”

“We need a good metrics system. Our operations are a hybrid of specialized technical divisions and a national virtual organization split into state and regional teams. Despite the difficulty of building a suitable metrics tool, it will be a great asset. And one that will help us do our best.”



Photo: Jerry Williams, DCIO, (photo by Kathy Marshall).

## OCIO CONNECTIONS: COVERING THE OCIO COMMUNITY

This would have been the 15th edition of ITS Connections, instead it premieres the first issue of **OCIO Connections**, a newsletter with an expanded mission to cover and serve the *whole* OCIO community. Most of us may not know about the other enterprises within the OCIO, so we have put together an overview.



Photos: Left, exterior of the USDA Headquarters, the Whitten Building; right, the OCIO corridor.

**OCIO** was established in 1996 to supervise and coordinate the design, acquisition, maintenance, use, and disposition of information and IT by USDA agencies. The CIO and his immediate staff are the front office of OCIO, providing overall IT leadership for operations, funding, security policies for the Department, special initiatives, and representing us before USDA leadership, the IMOC, OMB, other federal agencies, and Congress.

Traditionally, the CIO and the CFO work closely to assure that IT programs operate in a cost effective way and financial

information is up to date. Currently, Charles Christopherson has streamlined this relationship by serving in both capacities.

### **THERE ARE THREE KEY ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN OCIO:**

- Information & Technology Management (ITM)
- Cyber Security
- Integration & Operations
  - National Information Technology Center (NITC)
  - Telecommunications Services and Operations (TSO)
  - Information Technology Service (ITS)

## INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

Information & Technology Management (ITM) has both visionary and pragmatic roles, analyzing ways to adapt evolving technology and IT trends to the needs of USDA. They provide IT governance, setting rules and standards of use, and also spearhead a variety of eGov initiatives that connect government, citizens, public and private organizations, and the federal workforce.

ITM's different teams and program areas include:

➤ **INFORMATION RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (IRM)**, responsible for managing USDA's Record Management Program including policies, responsibilities, and procedures for record keeping and responsibilities of personnel in various Departmental positions.

➤ **508 COMPLIANCE PROGRAM** provides guidance for ensuring information, documents, and eGov services are accessible.

➤ **MANAGEMENT OF PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVES & DIRECTIVES** in coordination with Agency Leads, that have been identified by the Office of Management and Budget and the President's Management Council. These initiatives directly address expanded electronic government with the goal of significant productivity and performance gains across all Departments. Currently, ITM has been facilitating USDA's planning and implementation of the Homeland Security Presi-



Screenshot of the eGov webpage.

dential Directive-12 (HSPD-12) to establish "Common Identification" security technology for employees and contractors.

➤ **CAPITAL PLANNING AND INVESTMENT CONTROL** is a systematic process to select, manage, and evaluate information technology investments. ITM manages the Department's acquisitions of IT through the acquisition approval process and works with the Agencies to put together their IT investment business cases that are submitted to OMB for approval.

➤ **eAUTHENTICATION AND AgLEARN** are two web-based resources ITM manages. eAuth provides authorized users access to online applications and services. This includes submitting forms electronically, completing online surveys, taking AgLearn courses, and checking the status of your USDA accounts. AgLearn offers thousands of **FREE** online courses for professional development and certifications. There are also courses available for a fee.

For more information go to: <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov>

➤ **ENVISIONING THE IT FUTURE**, In coordination with the Agencies, ITM manages the enterprise architecture for the Department, helping define future IT targets, goals, and plans for achieving them.



## CYBER SECURITY

Cyber Security helps protect USDA from diverse and constantly emerging security threats. It provides governance for OCIO's security initiatives, establishing policies and other guidance for the Department. Cyber Security also partners with 29 USDA agencies, helping with security operations and awareness training.



Photo: Cyber Security produced this Security Expo last January 2007. Design services for the Expo were provided by NITC.



Photo: Phyllis Wong, USDA Inspector General, speaks about security at the Cyber Security Awareness Expo, last January 2007. There were two days of presentations representing the breadth of security issues, best practices, and problem solving.

Cyber Security reports that USDA is a target for threats against agency research resources, personal identifiable information (PII), loan and grant data, and other financial information. Training the USDA workforce to understand OMB security requirements and to learn how to recognize and neutralize ongoing threats is an important focus. Working with the agencies to build and maintain security in non-OCIO managed IT systems is another vital activity.

For more information:

<http://www.ocionet.usda.gov/ocio/security/>

## INTEGRATION & OPERATIONS (I&O)

I&O includes the National Information Technology Center (NITC), Telecommunications Services and Operations (TSO), and Information Technology Services (ITS), the OCIO operations that provide integrated, comprehensive information technology, services, and support across the USDA.



### NATIONAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CENTER (NITC)



Photo: A new z9 Enterprise Class (z9-EC), (Image courtesy of IBM).

NITC is the oldest group at OCIO. Since 1972, NITC has built the USDA computer infrastructure one database at a time. NITC focuses on enterprise services, operating four *Centers of Excellence* that provide comprehensive data management technology and centralized computing services for customers across USDA and for other government agencies. NITC enterprise solutions are developed utilizing government and "best of breed" industry services to provide proficient physical and professional resources for business continuity capability, consistency, and reliability.



Photo: A state-of-the-art data center with rack mounted servers (image courtesy of Python).

NITC also provides application development services, contingency planning & disaster recovery, migration and consolidation of customer applications and data, and security.

For more information: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/nitc/index.html>

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES



Photo: Engineers at the Interoperability (IO) Lab test and optimize changes to the common computing environment.

ITS was created on November 28, 2004, to provide information technology service and support for the USDA Service Center Agencies (SCA): Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development (RD).

About 40,000+ SCA employees use a variety of sophisticated networked applications, enterprise services, telecommunications, and online services to provide over \$55 billion a year in vital programs, including loans, insurance, disaster relief, technical assistance, and information to over 6 million farmers, ranchers, property owners, and citizens of rural America.

The I&O synergy is best illustrated by how ITS, NITC, and TSO work together to support the SCA. NITC and TSO

### TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES AND OPERATIONS (TSO)

is responsible for telecommunications leadership, services, and resources used by USDA's executive offices and 29 different agencies. This includes:



Photo: USDA telecommunication reaches everywhere, as in this photo a Soil Climate Analysis Network research station located at the Fort Reno Agricultural Research Station, Oklahoma. (Photo by Jeff Vanuga courtesy of NRCS).

- ❑ Developing, managing, implementing, and improving the cost-effective and efficient use of Department-wide telecommunications services, technology.
- ❑ Managing and facilitating the migration of existing USDA agencies' networks to the Universal Telecommunications Network (UTN).
- ❑ Implementing, managing, and maintaining USDA's Telecommunications Network Security Program in concert with the USDA Information Technology Security Program.
- ❑ Developing and coordinating technology programs of the Federal Government.

For more about TSO, go to: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/tso/index.html>

provide fundamental USDA-wide enterprise services, networks, webfarms, and telecommunications; ITS is the dedicated service and technology provider to the agencies, whose requirements are complex and widely distributed across the US and its territories.

ITS facilitates access to NITC and TSO services while also providing the agencies with specialized operations (including telecommunications, security, change management, hosting, data management), infrastructure definition, and nationwide technical support for end-users.



Photo: IT specialists on the St. Louis Large Office Technical Support team test a customer's system.

This way I&O keeps the computing environment reliable, secure, and up-to-date, so SCA employees across the country can provide superior support to USDA customers.

For more information: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/its/index.html>

Together, we serve USDA and over the next months, we will be more effectively working together to leverage our strengths and resources. The ITS Communications Team is dedicated to help that happen. Please send us your ideas and concerns as this new era proceeds. We'll try advance your suggestions and find answers to your questions.

# INTEGRATION & OPERATIONS deploys UTN for FSA, NRCS, & RD: 2795 SERVICE CENTER SITES COMPLETED, 100 TO GO

In September 2000, OCIO introduced the UTN initiative. This new data network backbone provides USDA agencies with secure, robust, and flexible telecommunication capabilities and enhanced network support services. The goal is a network that meets the delivery challenges of today and tomorrow.

I&O, through TSO and ITS, has been working collaboratively with other USDA agencies to bring everyone into the UTN. Pam Weber, TSO, reports "This is not a simple process. USDA headquarters offices and 29 agencies have distinct program requirements - such as security, program applications, how they communicate with their customers and counterparts. Many specific considerations that govern how each agency migrates from their old system to UTN."

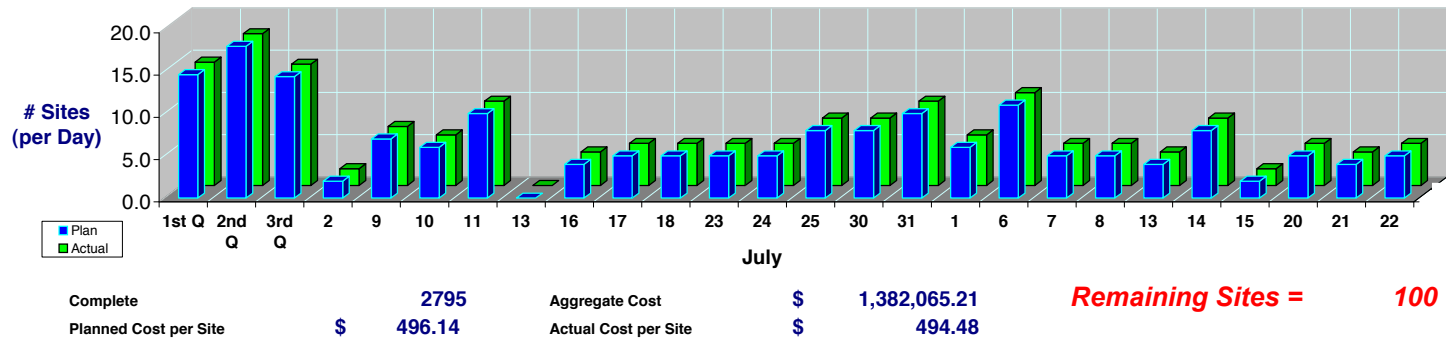
There are three basic phases to this project. First was overall

planning; the second phase began in 2006, with selection of AT&T as the vendor and the replacement of routers and the consolidation of Internet Gateways; the third phase is the migration of the different agencies to UTN.

In one of the largest UTN projects, ITS has managed the migration of FSA, NRCS, and RD service centers—a total of 2897 sites across the country, which began last fall and will finish in November 2007.

TSO reports that the following agencies have also completed their shift to UTN: Cooperative State Research Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), and National Finance Center (NFC). The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is almost done and other agency migrations are in progress or are still in their planning stage.

**UTN MIGRATION - THE SERVICE CENTER AGENCIES** (Chart produced by John Gambriel, Project Manager, IGD-PMB, Aug. 25, 2007)



- The key improvements from the UTN include:**
- Continuous network monitoring, stability, and sufficient capacity to ensure quality service and attainment of Departmental and agency mission goals.
  - Ensure business requirements drive telecommunications service requirements. Prepare today for the service and support requirements of tomorrow.
  - Best value telecommunications service to USDA offices and agencies to ensure best business practices for the Department.
  - A secure enterprise network infrastructure that protects USDA information, safeguards the physical network, and ensures continuity of operations.
  - Telecommunications network planning and management tools for USDA leaders to use for decision-making and providing strategic direction to the world-class telecommunications service partner.
  - Metrics to measure success for the following attributes: robust, reliable, and secure.
  - A telecommunications Service Level Agreement framework for service performance parameters and billing for services used.

UTN Project Teams for Service Center Agency Deployment	
<b>TSO</b>	<b>NTSO Director:</b> Michael Thomas <b>NTSO Deputy Division Director:</b> Pam Weber <b>UTN Technical Team Lead:</b> Dan Crosson
<b>ITS</b>	<b>Project Management:</b> Infrastructure Governance Division- John Gambriel <b>Design &amp; Architecture:</b> Infrastructure Definition Division (IDD)- Scott Snover, Division Director; Architecture Definition Branch (ADB): Gordon Robinett, Chief; <b>UTN Integration and Design:</b> IDD-ADB-Tom Rudnick and Dave Williams; IOD/TOD, Bob Grizzoffi, Gary Davis, and Diane Kamm. <b>Implementation &amp; Testing:</b> Infrastructure Operations Division (IOD)- Carol Henson, Division Director IOD/Telecom Operations Branch (TOB)- Ande Mascarenas, UTN Manager IOD/TOB UTN Order Management: Theresa Anderson, Gary Mareschal IOD/TOB UTN Migration Team: Mark Hirst, Patrick McLaughlin, Richard Ralph, David Rhoades, Judy Rhoades, Ron Schmidt, Steve Smith, Justin Vallejo IOD/TOB Legacy Circuit Disconnects: Bobbie Budgett, Becki Schreckenghaust IOD/TOB Network Outage Support: Larry Hashaway, Matt Hogue, Michael McCray, Bob Schneider, Justin Vallejo <b>Customer Support &amp; On-Site Logistics:</b> Technical Support Division (TSD)- Larry Brooks, Division Director, & TSD staff including Patrick Cummings, and all of the TSD teams throughout the country.

# A Look at USDA Enterprise Shared Services

From Bruce Pacot,  
NITC Marketing Team

## Enterprise Shared Services (ESS)

is a suite of development aids, platforms, and applications that facilitate USDA efforts to deliver citizen-centric online information and services. Business applications of USDA agencies and offices are hosted in I&O's shared environment at NITC, using controlled IT hosting and operations procedures designed to support applications on the ESS infrastructure.

John Walter, ESS Manager, explains, "The ESS platforms provide our agency customers with integrated web-based capabilities in an enterprise platform." ESS also provides a single point of access to all USDA information and services, and a prominent outlet for announcing upgrades to programs and services.

## Transforming Technology to Serve USDA Agencies, Offices & Customers

USDA is transforming itself to deliver its information and services around common lines of business and customer expectations. With two primary goals in mind, USDA created the ESS to facilitate this transformation to:

### ESS Service Offerings

- Web Portal Hosting
- Web Application Hosting
- Web Content Management
- Document Management
- Search Engine

- Deliver information and services around customer goals, business requirements, and end-user needs.
- Leverage investment in information technology to eliminate duplication and maximize efficient use of resources.

The ESS approach reduces application development and operational costs by leveraging economies of scale, product standardization, and avoidance of redundant effort. The outcome is streamlined information and service delivery.

### The ESS principled approach

USDA developed the ESS business, technology, and data principles to help agencies maximize efficiency and improve customer satisfaction with their web-based services:

- **Business principles** are integrated, coordinated, and standardized busi-

ness processes allowing NITC to deliver improved service to its customers. ESS enables greater cross-agency collaboration, use of shared solutions and best practices.

- **Technology principles** are in place to promote consolidation and standardization of technology where appropriate. This results in significant increases in efficiency, while reducing costs to USDA.
- **Data principles** support the collection, storage, and use of data at USDA. By following these data principles, agencies and offices are able to maximize data sharing and minimize costs associated with duplicate data management efforts.

"We began developing ESS in 2002," John said, "and our first project was working with the Office of Communications to develop USDA.gov. This is the access point for the Department's huge and complex Web presence. Some of our ESS customers include Office of the Inspector General, FSA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Forest Service, and Food Safety & Inspection Service."

For more information, contact NITC/ESS at: <mailto:NITCESS@usda.gov> or go to: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/nitc>

USDA Enterprise Shared Services: A Sampling of Projects

USDA Agency & Office Project Highlights	Farm & Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS) FSA "MIDAS" Project.	Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) Inside FSIS (Intranet Site)	USDA Office of Communications (OC) USDA.gov	Office of the Inspector General (OIG) USDA.gov/oig/
ESS Platform Resources Selected	Document Management (in development)	Web Application Hosting Web Content Management Search Engine Global delivery	Web Application Hosting Web Portal Hosting Web Content Management Search Engine Global delivery	Web Application Hosting Web Content Management Search Engine
Project Description	The FSA document management system will house 8 million documents (business files and digital rights documents) from external Fiduciary and Farm record applications each year for several offices.	This is the FSIS Intranet site for agency communications.	USDA.gov, an online access point to all USDA agencies and offices, and an information source for Department news and services.	This is the OIG Public website.

## The 2007 HURRICANE SEASON: READINESS REMINDERS

The 2007 hurricane season officially started June 1, 2007, and will last until November 30, 2007. According to the National Hurricane Center, hurricane hazards come in many forms: storm surge, high winds, tornadoes, and flooding. In an average 3-year period, roughly five hurricanes strike the US coastline, killing approximately 50 to 100 people anywhere from Texas to Maine. This means it is important to have a plan that includes all of these hazards. Look carefully at the safety actions associated with each type of hurricane hazard and prepare your family disaster plan accordingly.

The first and most important thing any-

one should do when facing a hurricane threat is to use common sense.

Hurricanes are categorized by wind strength using the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale. A **CATEGORY 1** storm has the lowest wind speeds, while a **CATEGORY 5** hurricane has the strongest. These are relative terms, because lower category storms can sometimes inflict greater damage than higher category storms, depending on where they strike and the particular hazards they bring. In fact, tropical storms can also produce significant damage & loss of life, mainly from flooding.

**PREPARE A PERSONAL EVACUATION PLAN**  
Identify ahead of time where you could

go if you are told to evacuate. Choose several places--a friend's home in another town, a motel, or a shelter.

Keep handy the telephone numbers of these places as well as a road map of your locality. You may need to take alternative or unfamiliar routes if major roads are closed or clogged.

Listen to National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Weather Radio, local radio, or TV stations for evacuation instructions. For more information check out the following web sites:

FEMA's hurricane information is at - [http://www.fema.gov/hazard/hurricane/hu\\_before.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/hazard/hurricane/hu_before.shtm)

Homeland Security's Readiness info is at: <http://www.ready.gov>

## OCIO's EMERGENCY CALLING PLAN

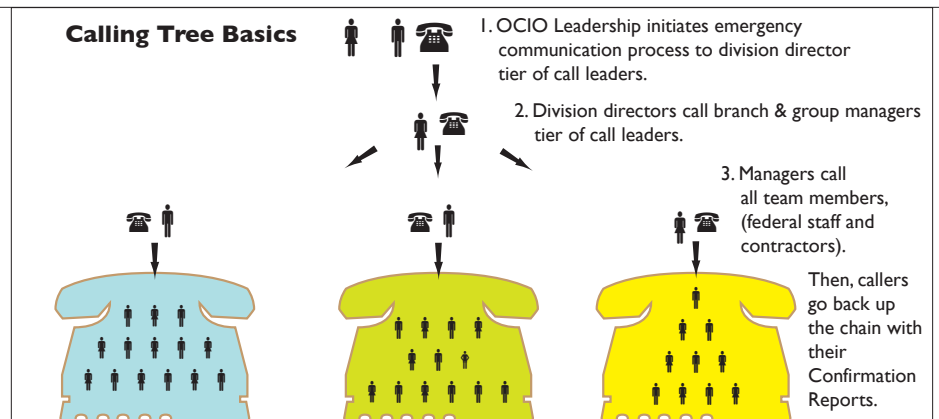
OCIO learned many things about emergency communications following Hurricane Katrina. As part of our Continuity of Operations (COOP) initiatives, our COOP Team has completed the OCIO Emergency Communications Plan in time for the hurricane season. As Greg Gage, the ITS COOP Team leader, explains, "The ability to successfully communicate during times of crisis is essential and requires:

1. A plan for communicating that anticipates the unexpected.
2. Accurate contact information.
3. Making sure that every manager, employee and contractor understand their role in the process.
4. And testing and perfecting the plan to ensure that it works as intended."

**THE PLAN.** OCIO will use a **CALL TREE** to distribute information quickly throughout the organization.

### ACCURATE CONTACT INFORMATION.

Recently every ITS manager, supervisor, and Contracting Officer's Technical Representative (COTR) was asked to provide current contact information for every employee and contractor on their team. The information will be kept secure and goes only to those who need it.



**EVERYONE HAS A ROLE DURING AN EMERGENCY.** Managers, supervisors, and COTRs all have specific roles and clearly defined **CALLING RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES**. There are also failsafe procedures in case people with calling responsibilities cannot be reached or cannot make their calls. Employees and contractors (non-managers without calling responsibilities) also have a role to play - you must respond to the emergency call and provide whatever information is needed concerning your situation.

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

"To ensure the **CALL TREE** works, we will test it periodically and without notice, because crises aren't pre-scheduled. Someone at the top of the tree initiates the drill. Then each manager, supervisor or COTR with **CALLING RESPONSIBILITIES** performs the tasks

as instructed. Time is critical and calls should be made right away," Greg emphasizes. The only time commitment for non-managers is the minute or two it takes to answer the call or call back in response to a message; then each call manager calls back up the chain with a confirmation report.

The first OCIO-wide test was on August 27. Greg says, "For the first full test, ITS did exceptionally well calling people, and every one should be congratulated. Confirmation reports didn't always get back to us with real numbers and we had a undercount...Lessons learned!" Greg also emphasizes, "It's vital for everyone at OCIO to understand how the Emergency Call Tree works. The goal is that everyone is contacted and accounted for during a crisis. Thank you, in advance, for helping us perfect our communication process!"

# A Principled Approach to Work

There are 14 general principles that should guide our behavior as Federal employees. Here they are, as described in 5 CFR 2635.101:

1. Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws and ethical principles above private gain.
2. Employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
3. Employees shall not engage in financial transactions using non-public Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
4. An employee shall not, except as permitted by subpart B of this part, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business with, or conducting activities regulated by the employee's agency, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the employee's duties.
5. Employees shall put forth honest effort in the performance of their duties.
6. Employees shall not knowingly make unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
7. Employees shall not use public office for private gain.
8. Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
9. Employees shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
10. Employees shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
11. Employees shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
12. Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those—such as Federal, State, or local taxes—that are imposed by law.
13. Employees shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.
14. Employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards set forth in this part. Whether particular circumstances create an appearance that the law or these standards have been violated shall be determined from the perspective of a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts.

If we use these as our guiding principles, chances are good we will have a long and successful career.

This is the first in a series of articles about ethics-related issues—now that I've laid the foundation, I'll explore specific issues in more depth in upcoming newsletters. If you have questions about whether any activities may pose a problem, please contact your supervisor or Michael Tolle, ITS Employee Services Branch Chief. You may also want to visit a couple of websites that offer a wealth of information:

- The Department Office of Ethics user-friendly website—  
<http://www.usda-ethics.net/>
- The U.S. Office of Government Ethics website—  
<http://www.usoge.gov/index.html>

## TSP Update

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is going back to mailing annual participant statements next year after discovering only 16 percent of people with money in the plan bother to check their account balances. Some people never check their TSP balance. By providing an annual mailing, TSP officials hope participants will check their balances at least once a year, so they can check up on their investments and rebalance accounts, if necessary.

Go to [TSP.gov](http://TSP.gov) for additional information or to check your balance.

Note - You can view:

TSP rates at <http://www.tsp.gov/rates/monthly-current.html>.

TSP share prices at <http://www.tsp.gov/rates/share-prices.html>

### THE NEW TSP TICKER- July 2007 (as of July 31)

#### A WAY TO KEEP TRACK OF YOUR TSP INVESTMENT

FUND	G	F	C	S	I
July 31, 2007 close	\$12.05	\$11.35	\$16.26	\$19.62	\$24.07
July Change:	↑ 0.50%	↑ 0.80%	↓ (3.10%)	↓ (4.57%)	↓ (2.39%)
Year to date/07	↑ 2.90%	↑ 1.89%	↑ 3.63%	↑ 4.58%	↑ 08.33%
12 Month stat	↑ 4.97%	↑ 5.68%	↑ 16.14%	↑ 17.27%	↑ 22.93%
FUND	L 2040	L 2030	L 2020	L 2010	L Income
July 31, 2007 close	\$17.81	\$17.00	\$16.26	\$15.09	\$13.18
July Change:	↓(2.52%)	↓(2.13%)	↓ (1.75%)	↓(0.92%)	↓ (0.23%)
Year to date/07	↑ 4.83%	↑ 4.62%	↑ 4.36%	↑ 3.85%	↑ 3.29%
12 Month stat	↑ 16.33%	↑ 14.86%	↑ 13.47%	↑ 10.71%	↑ 7.59%





## U Asked IT

Tech Tips from the  
Nebraska TSD Team



# ERGONOMIC TIP FOR CARPAL PAIN

### QUESTION.

Do you have any suggestions on how to reduce problems related to carpal tunnel syndrome? Are there any recommendations on what we can do at our terminals to help with posture and hand/wrist placement?

### ANSWER.

Some signs and symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome are:

- ☞ Tingling or numbness in your fingers or hand when driving, holding a phone or newspaper, or upon awakening (especially in thumb, index, or middle fingers). A tendency to drop objects due to numbness in fingers.
- ☞ Pain radiating from wrist up your forearm or down into your palm or fingers. This usually occurs on the front (palm) side of your forearm.
- ☞ More numbness or pain at night than during the day. May be bad enough to wake you up.
- ☞ A constant loss of feeling in some fingers. This occurs if the condition is advanced.

There are no proven strategies to prevent carpal tunnel syndrome. To help lessen the chance and severity of occurrences, some recommendations are listed below.

Reduce your force and/or grip. Most people use more force than needed to perform tasks involving the hands. When using your keyboard, for instance, hit the keys more softly.

When using pen/pencil, try using an over-sized, soft grip adapter and free-flowing ink. These items help to minimize your grip and pressure used to put ink to paper.

Take “hand” breaks. Give your hands and wrists a break by gently stretching and bending them. For example, when you are on the phone or during your breaks, you can rotate/bend your wrists.

Watch your form (wrist position). Avoid bending wrists way up or down. A relaxed middle position is best. For optimal wrist position when using a keyboard/mouse, adjust your chair so your forearms are level with the keyboard (keyboard is at elbow height or slightly lower so your wrists aren't bent when typing). Using a wrist pad in front of your keyboard/mouse and/or wearing a wrist guard also help to level your wrist placement and alleviate wrist fatigue. Avoid using your arms too close or too far from your body.

Improve posture. Incorrect posture causes your shoulders to roll forward. When your shoulders are in this position, your neck and shoulder muscles are shortened, compressing nerves in your neck. This can affect your wrists and fingers.

Keep your hands warm. You are more likely to develop hand pain and stiffness if you work in a cold environment or if your hands/fingers have a tendency to be cold. If your hands are cold, put on fingerless gloves that keep your hands and wrists warm.

- ▶ Entire body faces the computer screen and keyboard
- ▶ Computer screen is slightly below eye level
- ▶ Feet flat on the floor
- ▶ Thighs parallel to the floor
- ▶ Shoulders and neck relaxed
- ▶ Back straight
- ▶ Wrists straight
- ▶ Arms bent at a 90° angle



# BUT THAT WASN'T MY INTENT: UNDERSTANDING THE UNINTENDED IMPACT OF OUR WORDS

THOUGHTS ON PERSONAL COMMUNICATION *from Lisa Dau, MA, CEAP, LP, Sand Creek Group*

**MANY OF US HAVE BEEN IN SITUATIONS WHERE A COWORKER, SUPERVISOR OR FRIEND SAID SOMETHING THAT FELT INSULTING OR HURTFUL OR LEFT US FEELING ANGRY.** Sometimes, but not always, what we hear is about our own perceptions and attitudes versus what was actually said. For example, if you are angry at someone you may choose to only hear certain parts of what the person is saying or easily misinterpret what is being said.

Oftentimes however, the impact of someone's communication is more about what was said or even more importantly, how it was said. To be an effective communicator we not only need to be aware of what we are saying and how we are saying it, but we also need to be mindful of the impact our communication can potentially have on others. We can have good intentions behind our communication, but if we don't use effective words or if we choose to use a negative or blaming tone, for example, the impact can be quite significant on the other person, or on others overhearing the comments. The person on the receiving end may shut down, become defensive, attack back, lose trust, etc. all of which are detrimental to any relationship.

## CONVEYING WHAT WE THINK AND FEEL, FOR BETTER OR NOT

As humans, we have many tools at our disposal to communicate our thoughts, feelings, needs and reactions. Our choice of words, tone, attitude, body language, voice volume, timing, inflection, etc. are all tools we use to communicate. We can use these communication tools effectively as well as ineffectively. When we use them ineffectively, we usually end up with conflicts, work relationship issues, unresolved issues, and people angry at or distanced from us.

For example, if you are angry at a decision a supervisor made, you may choose to use ineffective communication such as sarcasm, making flip comments, or by calling the supervisor out of their name. While using such communication strategies may make you feel better at the moment, they are actually quite destructive to yourself and others. Even if your intent was to blow off steam, the impact of your actions or communication on others is what is most important.

The words you use, the tone of voice, your non-verbal body language, etc. all have an effect on others, even if your comments are only overheard and not directed towards anyone in particular. Also, by having a negative or blaming tone, using hurtful words, using aggressive body language and so forth put you in a negative light in the eyes of others. They may begin to distance themselves, become argumentative with you,

label you as difficult and sometimes even become retaliatory.

In summary, it is important to keep in mind not only what and how you want to say something, but also on what the impact will be on the person receiving or overhearing your comments. You can have good intentions behind what you say, but it's the impact on the other person that's critical.

### SOME QUICK TIPS:

1. If you're angry, take a time out before saying anything.
2. Think through what and how you want to say something and also how the recipient may hear and respond to what you're saying.
3. Avoid provoking or strong words (E.g. Profanity, words of threat or intimidation, slurs, name calling, etc.) as these will typically create a strong negative or defensive response in others.
4. Label feelings (E.g. "I feel angry, because \_\_\_\_.") versus conveying them through attitude or tone. This helps make it very clear to yourself and the other person what the issue is and how you're feeling about it.
5. Avoid using "why" questions as they can be provoking and come across as blaming. Instead use, "Help me understand." Or "Can you provide more information about how that came to be?"
6. Limit the use of the word "you" in conversations as use of that word can come across as finger pointing or blaming to the other person. Instead of saying, "You made the mistake." Say, "Let's look at how this happened so we can avoid it in the future."
7. If someone tells you that something you said was offensive or crossed the line:
  - Listen without interruption to what the person is conveying.
  - Reflect back that you heard and understand what their concern is (you don't have to agree with what they're saying, just indicate that you heard).
  - Apologize for anything you did that crossed the line.
  - Move the conversation to talking about how to resolve the situation.
  - Get assistance if needed.

*If you have questions or comments, contact OCIO Connections or*

*Lisa Dau, MA, CEAP, LP  
The Sand Creek Group, Ltd. - Employee Assistance Program  
1-888-243-5744  
lisa@sandcreekeap.com  
www.sandcreekeap.com*

## DELIVERED: JUNE & JULY DEPLOYMENT HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE IO LAB.

Below are a few of the major ITS/SCA project deployments out of a total of 56 projects deployed in June /July 2007 (these include numerous security patches and software upgrades).

Project Name	Agency/Initiator & ITS Release Manager	Deployment Description
<b>ArcEditor v.9.2 –</b> ArcEditor is a powerful GIS desktop system for editing and managing geographic data. ArcEditor includes all the functionality of ArcView and adds a comprehensive set of tools to create, edit, and ensure the quality of your data. It functions with the latest version of ESRI's ArcGIS 9.2 Desktop suite. Properly installed on a laptop or tablet, this new version will allow mobile versions of ArcGIS Desktop to be truly effective for NRCS personnel in the field.	NRCS - Jim Carrington Release Manager - Frank Hoepfel	ArcEditor 9.2 was deployed via the Team Services website as a self-extracting executable that follows the Standard Installation Guide.  We enjoyed close collaboration with Soils Scientists in Rhode Island, Nebraska and Colorado to ensure our delivery met their needs.
<b>Enterprise Content Management (ECM) - Word Plug-in / SMS – (for WDC &amp; St. Louis)</b> ECM Word Plug-in - SMS Pkg - Manual pkg already exists on Team Services, application has been previously tested and certified. This is a SMS Pkg Creation Only.	RD - Edward Koenen Release Manager - David Pfaffenberger	This project was unique in that it only targeted specific workstations in the Washington DC and St. Louis Large Offices. This particular Plug-in to Word was a specific add-on component to the ECM application. Previously, this application had to be installed manually.  Now, with SMS the application was automatically installed on all workstations that had ECM installed. If ECM is installed on any new workstations in WDC or STL, the Word Plug-in will automatically be installed on the new machines, too
<b>FSA Data Compressor v4.1.13.0 Client –</b> This is an enhanced version of the application that compresses the GIS databases.	FSA - Deborah Staples Release Manager - David Hyde	FSA Data Compressor v4.1.13.0 Client was a special one-time deployment to manage special-case records for FSA's Land Use application.
<b>Cisco Agent Desktop V.71.0.22 – (St. Louis Call Center)</b> Cisco Agent Desktop V.71.0.22 - Upgrade from current CTI application. Current application is not XP SP2 compatible and has kept 500 workstations in STL from upgrading to XP SP2.	Enterprise-wide - OCIO/ITS - John Pretti Release Manager - David Pfaffenberger	When XP SP2 was deployed, there were about 500 workstations in the St. Louis-Large Office that we had to exclude from that delivery. The Call Center had to upgrade its software to make it compatible with XP SP2.  SMS enabled us to both pinpoint which machines had the outdated software (so we could keep XP SP2 from being installed prematurely) and simultaneously use SMS to install the Cisco Agent Desktop on the Call Center workstations and make them XP SP2 compatible.
<b>ArcReader v.9.2 –</b> This is an upgrade of ArcReader, an easy-to-use desktop mapping application that allows users to view, explore, and print maps and globes. ArcReader delivers interactive mapping capabilities that access a wide variety of dynamic geographic information produced by NRCS, FSA, and RD.	NRCS - Frank Geter Release Manager - David Pfaffenberger	ArcReader v.9.2 was distributed through the DFS Share. This allowed IDB to distribute this 180mb package without having to create and mail CDs. This saved 2 extra weeks and a lot of money in CD duplication and mailing costs.
<b>Compatibility Pack: Word, Excel &amp; Powerpoint 2007</b> By installing the Compatibility Pack in addition to Office 2003, end users are now able to easily open, edit, and save files using the new Word, Excel, and Powerpoint 2007 file formats. The Compatibility Pack can also be used in conjunction with the Office 2003 viewers to view files saved in these new formats.	Enterprise-wide – Corey Wright, IDD Release Manager - David Pfaffenberger	<i>The Compatibility Pack was distributed through SMS automatically to all XP Workstations. This saved the Technical Support Division many hours installing the package manually.</i>



### OCIO Connections

<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/index.html>

Published by

OCIO Communications Team  
 ITS-Infrastructure Governance Division

Email:

<mailto:OCIO-Connections@one.usda.gov>

Volume I / Issue #1  
 August 31, 2007