



OFFICE OF
**INSPECTOR
GENERAL**
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

**21st Century Post Office:
Non-Postal Products and Services**

Management Advisory

July 16, 2012

Report Number DA-MA-12-005



OFFICE OF
**INSPECTOR
GENERAL**
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

HIGHLIGHTS

July 16, 2012

21st Century Post Office: Non-Postal Products and Services

Report Number DA-MA-12-005

BACKGROUND:

This is the third in a series of reports addressing the impact of the 21st Century Post Office on U.S. Postal Service Customer Services Operations and Retail. Our objective was to assess the opportunity for the Postal Service to provide non-postal products and services at retail facilities. Non-postal products and services are those not directly related to the delivery of letters, printed matter, or mailable packages.

WHAT THE OIG FOUND:

The Postal Service could increase the value of Post Office retail facilities and address community needs by evaluating and offering non-postal products and services. New non-postal products are not currently authorized, but pending legislation could provide additional opportunities. The Postal Service should consider offering non-postal products and services suggested by stakeholders

and those offered by foreign postal systems. Examples of non-postal products and services include expanded government services, public Internet access, notary services, check cashing, and warehousing. Finally, the Postal Service needs to address barriers to offering non-postal products and services and ensure that non-postal products and services are strategically placed at retail locations with sufficient foot traffic to help ensure success.

WHAT THE OIG RECOMMENDED:

We recommended the Postal Service develop a strategy to identify, evaluate and offer the most promising non-postal products and services, including how to overcome identified barriers, when legislation permits.

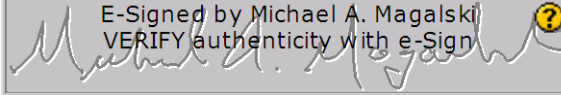
[*Link to review the entire report*](#)



July 16, 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR: KELLY M. SIGMON
VICE PRESIDENT, CHANNEL ACCESS

DEAN J. GRANHOLM
VICE PRESIDENT, DELIVERY AND POST OFFICE
OPERATIONS

E-Signed by Michael A. Magalski
VERIFY authenticity with e-Sign


FROM: Michael A. Magalski
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Support Operations

SUBJECT: Management Advisory Report – 21st Century Post Office:
Non-Postal Products and Services
(Report Number DA-MA-12-005)

This report presents the results of our audit of the 21st Century Post Office: Non-Postal Products and Services (Project Number 11YG039DA000).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Monique P. Colter, director, Facilities, Environmental and Sustainability, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachments

cc: Nagisa M. Manabe
Megan J. Brennan
Corporate Audit and Response Management

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Introduction

This is the third in a series of U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) reports¹ addressing the 21st Century Post Office (Project Number 11YG039DA000). Our objective was to assess opportunities for the U.S. Postal Service to provide non-postal products and services at retail facilities. Non-postal products and services are those not directly related to the delivery of letters, printed matter, or mailable packages. This self-initiated review addresses strategic risk associated with the 21st Century Post Office. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

Because of declining mail volume² and revenue, the Postal Service has been operating at a deficit. To address budget issues and to increase profit, the Postal Service proposed, in its *5-Year Business Plan*,³ to eliminate Saturday delivery, recalculate retirement prefunding obligations, and downsize the workforce. Most of the Postal Service's efforts to eliminate budget deficits focus on cost-cutting initiatives. Adding non-postal products and services to those currently offered could increase revenue and enhance the Postal Service brand.

Conclusion

The Postal Service could increase the value of Post Office retail facilities and address community needs by evaluating and offering non-postal products and services. The Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA) of 2006⁴ prohibits the Postal Service from offering new non-postal products or services. Under PAEA, the Postal Service can only provide the non-postal services it offered as of January 1, 2006. However, pending legislation could provide additional opportunities. The Postal Service should consider offering non-postal products and services suggested by stakeholders and those offered by foreign postal systems to generate revenue. Before implementing non-postal products and services, the Postal Service needs to ensure a business case exists, address barriers to offering non-postal products and services, and ensure that they are strategically placed at retail locations with sufficient foot traffic to help ensure success.

¹ *21st Century Post Office: Aligning with the National Broadband Infrastructure Initiative* (Report Number DA-MA-12-002, dated January 23, 2012) and *21st Century Post Office: Opportunities to Share Excess Resources* (Report Number DA-MA-12-003, dated February 9, 2012).

² Mail volume declined from 213 to 168 billion pieces (or 21 percent) from 2006 to 2011.

³ *Plan to Profitability, 5-Year Business Plan*, dated February 16, 2012.

⁴ Public Law 109-435, Section 102(c) (2).

Potential Non-Postal Products and Services

In order to remain viable and provide services to the public where there is a need (once legislation permits), the Postal Service should consider offering non-postal products and services, such as those suggested by stakeholders. As a part of this consideration, officials would have to initially determine whether the product or service is profitable. As summarized below, proposed legislation and prior OIG reports have recommended several non-postal products and services. In addition, postmasters we surveyed suggested products and services the Postal Service could offer in communities to help their Post Office sustain a viable presence. In addition, foreign posts offer a wide array of products and services. Stakeholders have suggested that the Postal Service offer products and services similar to those that foreign posts offer.

Non-Postal Products and Services Suggested in Proposed Legislation

In 2009, the Postal Service asked Congress⁵ to change the law so that it could offer non-postal products and services to generate additional revenue. Several bills⁶ have been introduced in Congress to change current laws and allow the Postal Service to sell new non-postal products and services. In addition to removing prohibitions for selling non-postal products and services, these bills suggest new products and services the Postal Service could offer in order to generate revenue. These suggestions include:

- Public Internet access services.
- Notary services.
- Advertising at Postal Service facilities and on Postal Service vehicles.
- Banking services such as check cashing.
- Facility leasing and warehousing services.

The 21st Century Postal Service Act (S. 1789), which passed in the Senate on April 26, 2012, does not specifically suggest ideas for new non-postal products and services the Postal Service could offer. Instead, S. 1789 proposes introducing a commission to provide strategic guidance and foster innovative thinking to address challenges facing the Postal Service.

Non-Postal Products and Services Suggested by the Office of Inspector General

The OIG has offered suggestions for products and services in prior audits and white papers. These reports suggested the Postal Service:

⁵ November 5, 2009 testimony of then-Postal Service president of Mailing and Shipping Services before the House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia.

⁶ Legislative bills introduced include Senator (Sen.) Joseph Lieberman's 21st Century Postal Service Act (S. 1789), Sen. Thomas Carper's POST of 2011 (S. 1010), Representative (Rep.) Darrell Issa's Postal Reform Act of 2011 (House of Representatives (H.R.) 2309), Rep. Peter DeFazio's Postal Service Protection Act (H.R. 3591), Sen. Bernard Sander's Postal Service Protection Act of 2011 (S. 1853), Rep. Maxine Waters' Protecting Post Offices Act of 2011 (H.R. 3916), Rep. Gerald Connolly's Reform the Postal Service for the 21st Century Act (H.R.1262), and Rep. Elijah Cummings' Innovate to Deliver Act of 2011 (H.R. 2967).

- Expand government services at retail sites on behalf of federal agencies to facilitate E-Gov initiatives⁷ in addition to passport services and selective service registration. Expanding government services would increase public access to these services and provide additional revenue to the Postal Service.⁸
- Assist the National Broadband Infrastructure initiative through partnerships with commercial Internet service providers (ISPs). Specifically, the Postal Service could provide facilities and land for expanding the broadband infrastructure. Such ventures could make Internet services available and more affordable for the underserved and increase revenue for the Postal Service.⁹
- Provide electronic currency transactions to underserved markets in the form of prepaid cards. Most electronic payment tools require users to have a bank account or credit card. Otherwise, payment options for underbanked individuals, such as low-income families, new immigrants, the unemployed, and the non-creditworthy would generally include only cash and checks.¹⁰

Non-Postal Products and Services Suggested by Postmasters

We surveyed postmasters¹¹ for suggestions of products and services the Postal Service could offer to help post offices sustain a viable presence in communities. The ten most popular products and services suggested by postmasters are summarized in [Table 1](#).

⁷ E-Gov uses Internet-based information technology to enhance citizens' access to government information and services.

⁸ *21st Century Post Office: Opportunities to Share Excess Resources* (Report Number DA-MA-12-003, dated February 9, 2012).

⁹ *21st Century Post Office: Aligning with the National Broadband Infrastructure Initiative* (Report Number DA-MA-12-002, dated January 23, 2012).

¹⁰ *Digital Currency: Opportunities for the Postal Service* (Report Number RARC-WP-12-001, dated October 3, 2011).

¹¹ Ninety postmasters surveyed attended the 108th Annual National League of Postmasters convention held July 31-August 3, 2011, and represented all Postal Service areas (Capital Metro, Eastern, Great Lakes, Northeast, Pacific, Southern, and Western).

Table 1. Products and Services Suggested by Postmasters

Products and Services	Number of Responses
Fax services	25
Photocopy services	23
Notary services	22
Miscellaneous government services	18
Passport services ¹²	8
Greeting cards ¹²	8
Internet or wireless fidelity	6
Banking/automated teller machine (ATM)	4
Community support/center	3
Gift cards, job services, public telephones, and money transfers	2 ¹³

Source: OIG survey at the 108th Annual National League of Postmasters convention, July 31-August 3, 2011.

One postmaster suggested the Postal Service stop giving away supplies and charge a small fee for boxes.¹⁴

Non-Postal Products and Services Offered by Foreign Postal Systems

In a 2011 report,¹⁵ the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) provided the Postal Service with lessons learned from foreign posts' strategies to generate revenue when faced with declining mail volume. Among other efforts, foreign posts introduced products and services not directly related to Postal Service activities to increase revenue. The GAO reported that foreign posts were generally successful in offering commercial products — such as financial, investment, and travel services — along with toys, iPods, and calendars at their retail locations.¹⁶

Many foreign posts offer banking, insurance, communication, and similar services. One bill¹⁷ before Congress suggests the Postal Service consider foreign posts' efforts in combating the effects of declining mail volume by offering similar products and services and physical delivery of email correspondence to individuals who do not have Internet access.

¹² These services are not offered at all post offices.

¹³ Each item received two responses.

¹⁴ In fiscal year (FY) 2010, the U.S. Postal Service spent more than \$158 million in manufacturing, shipping, and fulfillment of Express Mail[®] and Priority Mail[®] packaging supplies.

¹⁵ *U.S. Postal Service Foreign Posts' Strategies Could Inform U.S. Postal Service's Efforts to Modernize* (Report Number GAO-11-282, dated February 16, 2011).

¹⁶ The OIG recognized in its prior work that not all non-postal opportunities that foreign posts explore correlate with the Postal Service's infrastructure (*Postal Service Revenue: Structure, Facts, and Future Possibilities*) (Report Number RARC-WP-12-002, dated October 6, 2011).

¹⁷ Postal Service Protection Act of 2011 (S. 1853).

Many foreign posts have been granted the ability to manage their operations like a business. This enables them to offer products and services, such as banking and insurance in their home countries. Foreign posts — such as Poste Italiane (Italy), Correios de Portugal (Portugal), Royal Mail (United Kingdom), Swiss Post (Switzerland), and Japan Post (Japan) — offer products and services, including savings accounts, insurance, and financial services, such as bill payment, in addition to other services. Table 2 illustrates some of the products and services that foreign posts offer.

Table 2. Products and Service Offered by Foreign Posts

Products and Services	Swiss Post	Poste Italiane	Japan Post	Royal Mail	Correios de Portugal
Insurance ¹⁸	X	X	X	X	X
Bank/savings accounts	X	X	X	X	X
Utility bill payment	X	X		X	X
Loans ¹⁹	X	X		X	
E-Gov services ²⁰				X	
Prepaid cards	X	X		X	
Fax services		X			
Mobile phone payments	X	X			
Retirement planning	X				
E-Bill payment	X	X			
National lottery tickets				X	
Foreign and local money orders	X	X		X	X
Home phone service and broadband				X	
Local travel tickets				X	
Online shopping ²¹	X				X

Sources: Swiss Post, Poste Italiane, Japan Post, Royal Mail, and Correios de Portugal websites.

SingPost (Singapore) offers a wide array of products and services that include payment, financial, telecommunication, insurance, government, and storage. [Table 3](#) documents the products and services SingPost offers.

¹⁸ Insurance includes life, home, and car.

¹⁹ Loans include mortgages, credit cards, and personal loans.

²⁰ E-Gov services include passport and driver's license applications.

²¹ Online shopping for non-postal items, such as electronics, gifts, books, and music.

Table 3. SingPost Products and Services Available

Financial Services	Government Services	Payment and Other Services	Telecommunication Services	Storage Services	Remittance Services
Offers financial planning solutions.	Offers traffic and parking fine payment service.	Offers basic banking transactions, such as depositing and withdrawing cash with an ATM card.	Offers prepaid mobile, telephone, and broadband cards.	Offers long- and short-term storage service for personal and business use.	Offers worldwide money transfer options to more than 200 countries.
Offers personal loans.	Offers dog license renewal service.	Offers bill payment service to various sources (utility, medical bills, credit cards, and loans).	Accepts telecommunications services on behalf of providers.	Sells packing materials, such as bubble wrap, boxes, and tape.	
Offers home loans.	Accepts payment for income and property taxes.	Offers airline ticket purchase.	Offers mobile payment and transfer of money.	Facilitates transportation needs via a third party.	
Offers multipurpose loans.	Accepts payment on behalf of the court system for obligations resulting from personal bankruptcy and company liquidation.	Makes donations on behalf of customers, to charities, such as the National Kidney Foundation and the Salvation Army.		Offers storage billing and payment options via the Internet.	
Offers assistance with credit lines for liquidity and cash flow management.	Issues Singapore identification cards.	Top up ez-link transport card.			
	Provides passport services.	Drops off and collects International Business Machine laptops for repair, update, and sale.			
		Pays education fees, such as tuition and entrance exam fees.			
		Offers foreign and local money and postal orders.			

Source: Singapore Post website.

Barriers to Offering Non-Postal Products and Services

The Postal Service faces many barriers to offering non-postal products and services. Besides legislative restrictions, these barriers include stakeholder opposition, the lack of adequate foot traffic, and current wage levels at retail units. The Postal Service could offer non-postal products and services if it would address these barriers.

- Many of the foreign posts' innovations and initiatives were possible, at least in part, because of actions taken by their governments and regulators. Some posts have been allowed to offer a broad array of products and services to meet their customers' needs and interests. It should be noted that many of the actions taken by foreign posts took time to produce results and gain stakeholder support.
- Stakeholder opposition to the Postal Service offering non-postal products and services has impacted such offerings in the past. Many believe the Postal Service should not offer products and services that compete with products and services already offered by the private sector. However, the Postal Service was successful in receiving the Postal Regulatory Commission's (PRC's) approval of gift cards as a postal product. The Postal Service received PRC approval by establishing that selling gift cards at Postal Service retail facilities provides convenient access to a product often sent as a gift through the mail in greeting cards and could be considered a form of correspondence.²² Establishing a nexus between gift cards and the use of the mail provided a basis for classifying gift cards as a potential postal product.
- Higher than market benefit and wage levels make it difficult for the Postal Service to compete with commercial entities, but providing additional products and services could help the Postal Service cover costs at retail units.
- The Postal Service believes that customer foot traffic is too low to effectively offer non-postal products and services at retail locations. As noted in prior OIG reports, non-postal products and services — such as offering government services on behalf of federal agencies, offering broadband Internet service, and providing electronic currency transactions to underserved markets — could increase foot traffic.

Strategic Placement of Non-Postal Products and Services Based on Foot Traffic

A strong customer base is needed to profit from selling non-postal products and services at retail units. Between FYs 2010 to 2011, Postal Service foot traffic decreased about 13 percent.²³ In addition, based on its own research, the Postal Service acknowledges that retail units do not have sufficient foot traffic to profitably offer non-postal products and services, such as banking and insurance.

²² PRC Docket Number MT2011-2, Market Test of Experimental Product - Gift Cards, dated April 28, 2011.

²³ Based on the Postal Service's total customer visit accounts for FYs 2010 and 2011, visits 1.07 billion and 935.7 million, respectively, from *Postal Facts 2012*.

We acknowledge that there is not a universal solution for offering non-postal products and services throughout the Postal Service's entire retail network and that not all retail units are candidates for offering such products and services. While the amount of foot traffic at a retail unit may not be sufficient to profitably offer banking and insurance products, that same unit may be able to viably offer other products, such as fax and photocopy services. The Postal Service needs to evaluate each new product and service it intends to offer to ensure that it will be profitable. The Postal Service also needs to determine how much foot traffic is necessary at a retail location in order for the product to be successful. Strategically placing products and services at retail locations with sufficient foot traffic would increase the likelihood of success and would be instrumental in allowing the Postal Service to generate much needed revenue.

Recommendation

We recommend the vice president, Channel Access, in coordination with the vice president, Delivery and Post Office Operations:

1. Develop a strategy to identify, evaluate, and offer the most promising non-postal products and services, including how to overcome identified barriers, when legislation permits.

Management's Comments

Management agreed with the recommendation. Specifically, management identified key steps to follow to identify and evaluate possible non-postal products when legislation permits. These efforts will involve a cross-functional approach, including product development, finance, legal, and information technology. See [Appendix B](#) for management's comments, in their entirety.

Evaluation of Management's Comments

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the recommendation in the report.

The OIG considers the recommendation significant, and therefore requires OIG concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective action is completed. This recommendation should not be closed in the Postal Service's follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendation can be closed.

Appendix A: Additional Information

Background

To increase revenue, many foreign postal systems are offering commercial products — such as financial, investment, and travel services — along with toys, iPods, and calendars. Previously the Postal Service offered a variety of non-postal products, such as photocopying and prepaid phone cards. At that time, laws allowed the Postal Service to, “provide, establish, change, or abolish special non-postal or similar services.”²⁴

The PAEA repealed the Postal Service's authority to offer "non-postal services" and prohibited offering any new non-postal services. Prior to passage of the PAEA, the Postal Service had virtually limitless discretion to offer non-postal services. Former Title 39 U.S.C. 404(a)(6) granted the Postal Service the specific power to provide, establish, change, or abolish special non-postal or similar services. Under PAEA, the Postal Service can only provide the non-postal services it offered as of January 1, 2006. After that date, the Postal Service can only offer — with PRC approval — non-postal products and services that include delivery of letters, printed matter, or mailable packages, including acceptance, collection, sorting, and transportation or other ancillary functions. The PRC also considers whether there is a public need for the service, whether the private sector can meet the public need, and whether the product would be a competitive or non-competitive postal service before granting approval.²⁵

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to assess the opportunity for the Postal Service to provide non-postal products and services at retail facilities. To answer our objective, we:

- Researched current laws related to selling non-postal products and services.
- Examined foreign postal system websites and reviewed prior audit reports and white papers to determine the products and services other countries offer.
- Analyzed pending legislative bills and proposals to determine whether support for selling non-postal products exists with lawmakers.

²⁴ Title 39 U.S.C. § 404(a) (6) in effect before the PAEA of 2006.

²⁵ The Postal Service is authorized under current legislation to conduct market tests of experimental postal products with PRC approval. This provision was included in PAEA to allow the Postal Service to create innovative postal products and services in order to adapt to changing customer needs and changing information and communication technologies. Since the passage of the PAEA, the Postal Service has filed, and the PRC has approved, seven market tests of experimental products including: Collaborative Logistics, Samples Co-op Box, Alternative Postage Payment Method for Greeting Cards, Marketing Mail Made Easy (now called Every Door Direct Mail Retail), Mail Works Guarantee, First-Class Tracer, and gift cards.

- Surveyed 90 postmasters attending the 108th Annual National League of Postmasters convention to determine which products or services could be offered at post offices to sustain a viable presence in communities.

We conducted this review from July 2011 through July 2012 in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on June 5, 2012, and included their comments where appropriate.

We did not rely on computer-generated data to support the audit findings.

Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Report Number	Final Report Date	Report Results
<i>The USPS Global Card: A Conceptual Analysis of a Smart Card Platform</i>	RARC-WP-12-006	2/13/2012	This paper introduced the concept of a Postal Service-offered smart card that could provide consumers with an access key to current and future postal services and other government and commercial applications. The card could be enhanced over time to also provide consumers with an increased level of security and privacy in daily transactions, information management, and data storage wholly unmatched by today's alternatives. Beyond security and privacy improvements, the smart card design would allow the card to act as a convenient portable platform for multiple application solutions including identification, authentication, and data storage. The paper did not offer any recommendations.
<i>21st Century Post Office: Opportunities to Share Excess Resources</i>	DA-MA-12-003	2/9/2012	The report found that the Postal Service would benefit from sharing its resources with other government entities, while generating revenue and reducing costs. Excess floor space and potential labor resources could be used to perform transactions with other government agencies, which could expand the reach of government departments to citizens. Management partially agreed with our recommendation. Specifically, management agreed to develop and implement a strategy to share surplus resources with federal agencies. However, they did not agree with part of the recommendation to share resources with state and municipal agencies.

Report Title	Report Number	Final Report Date	Report Results
<i>21st Century Post Office: Aligning with the National Broadband Infrastructure Initiative</i>	DA-MA-12-002	1/23/2012	The report examined the viability of a partnership between the Postal Service and commercial ISPs. Such an agreement would lower the cost of entry for ISPs into sparsely populated areas. A public/private venture would bring the Post Office's value cost curve down and make ISP operations more affordable. The Postal Service disagreed with our recommendations, citing a need for significant funding to further infrastructure development and incentivize ISPs in rural markets.
<i>U.S. Postal Service Foreign Posts' Strategies Could Inform U.S. Postal Service's Efforts to Modernize</i>	GAO-11-282	2/16/2011	The report examined initiatives foreign posts have implemented to improve mail delivery and retail networks in addition to modernization strategies that could be useful in improving the Postal Service's financial condition and customer service. The Postal Service generally agreed with the GAO's findings.
<i>U.S. Postal Service Strategies and Options to Facilitate Progress toward Financial Viability</i>	GAO-10-455	4/12/2010	The GAO assessed the viability of the Postal Service's business model and strategies to address challenges to its business model and recommended actions Congress and the Postal Service must take to facilitate progress toward financial viability. The Postal Service generally agreed with the GAO's findings.

Appendix B: Management's Comments

KELLY M. SIGMON
VICE PRESIDENT, CHANNEL ACCESS



July 10, 2012

LUCINE M. WILLIS

SUBJECT: 21st Century Post Office: Non-Postal Products and Services
(Report Number DA-MA-12-DRAFT)

Management agrees with the recommendation in this audit report. We have addressed below our response.

Recommendation:

We recommended the Postal Service develop a strategy to identify, evaluate and offer the most promising non-postal products and services, including how to overcome identified barriers, when legislation permits.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with the recommendation. The following key steps will be followed to identify and evaluate possible non-postal products in the future:

- Define: Collect ideas from various sources, including customers, develop and discuss the value proposition and price concept for an idea. If approved, move to next phase.
- Analyze: Assess feasibility, conduct customer outreach as needed, and build business case. If approved, move to next phase.
- Build: Develop requirements, make systems changes if needed, develop launch plans, communicate plans to customers and vendors, and file with Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) if needed.
- Test (optional): Test product to determine viability in the market, and file final results with PRC.
- Launch/Manage: Implement product/price change and provide ongoing product management

These efforts involve a cross-functional approach, including product development, finance, legal, and information technology.

Target Implementation Date:

Implementation of this process will begin if legislation is approved.

Responsible Official:

The Vice-President, Channel Access is responsible for implementation of this process.

This report and management's response do not contain information that may be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).


Kelly M. Sigmon

475 L'ENFANT PLAZA SW
WASHINGTON DC 20260
202-268-2252
FAX: 202-268-6269
WWW.USPS.COM

-2-

cc: Nagisa M. Manabe
Megan J. Brennan
Dean J. Granholm
Sally K. Haring