

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY -  
INDIAN AFFAIRS



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TRIBAL CONSULTATIONS

APRIL/MAY 2012

# Executive Summary

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This final report represents Bronner's recommendations for the Indian Affairs Support Services organization. The recommendations contained in this report, as requested by the government's statement of work, are based on a comprehensive analysis of peer agency best practices and the adaptability of said practices to Indian Affairs.



# Background

The Department of the Interior has a unique responsibility among federal agencies to administer a broad array of programs and services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Under treaties signed by the United States of America, Tribal Nations are entitled to the services and resources administered by the Department through the Bureaus managed by the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs.

Similar to other federal agencies, the organizational structure of Indian Affairs has changed and evolved over time. Tribal Leaders reported that some of the government's changes have resulted in more responsive service to the Tribes, while others have resulted in the creation of additional challenges. One organizational change that continues to generate substantial debate was the decision in 2004 to centralize the management of Indian Affairs administrative support services in the Headquarters Office. Resources that were previously managed by the BIA Regional Directors were, at the time of the centralization, realigned into a new organization led by a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Management (DAS-M). The DAS-M organization was created, according to interviews with DOI and Indian Affairs personnel, to mitigate a lack of internal controls that existed under the earlier de-centralized model. Conversely, many Indian Affairs employees suggest that the centralization needlessly created a new bureaucracy that restricts information sharing and reduces the efficiency of support to Tribal Nations.

In early 2011, senior Department officials concluded that an impartial analysis of the DAS-M organization was necessary to determine the appropriate series of "next steps" for the Indian Affairs organization. A team of executives from within Indian Affairs was established to oversee the analysis and monitor the performance of the independent contractor, Bronner.

During the first phase (task) of the independent analysis conducted by Bronner, a baseline of DAS-M operations was prepared for the Department's review. In addition, feedback was sought from key groups regarding the structure and performance of administrative support services in Indian Affairs. Those groups included:

- ▷ Tribal Leaders
- ▷ Senior Department Officials
- ▷ BIA and BIE Executives, Managers and Employees
- ▷ DAS-M Executives, Managers and Employees

It is significant to note that, while external feedback was provided from a range of sources, much of that feedback was related to an overall frustration with the federal resource environment and not to the organizational structure of support services within Indian Affairs. Internal feedback, however, revolved around the following core themes:

### **PROGRAM-SUPPORT DISCONNECT**

Organizations within Indian Affairs – including DAS-M, BIA and BIE – do not coexist and coordinate effectively.

### **LACK OF COMMUNICATION**

Whether due to organization structure or lack of infrastructure, Indian Affairs does not circulate information effectively.

### **POOR INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION**

Regardless of its present effectiveness, the centralization of support services into DAS-M was poorly executed.

These themes were particularly emphasized during interviews with BIA and BIE personnel, many of whom articulated a strong frustration with the perceived “overreaction” that fueled the centralization and creation of DAS-M. The Directors of BIA and BIE each articulated a need for greater control over administrative support services in order to maximize the effectiveness of programs and services administered in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

The DAS-M employees also offered a range of feedback, much of which illustrates an organization frustrated by many of the same federal rules and regulations that confront all agencies equally, including Interior and Indian Affairs. While the baseline analysis uncovered a series of “growing pains” and related challenges within DAS-M, it also revealed progress being made on some issues, including better responsiveness to financial questions and some improved internal controls.

Overall, the first phase report presented the Department with a clear statement concerning the current organization of support services: it is not the ideal solution for Indian Affairs.

# Recommendations and Next Steps

With a completed baseline analysis and initial conclusions that alternative options should be considered for the administrative support structure, Bronner's review included the examination of peer agency best practices. To give senior Department officials a range of established options for support services, the following organizations were reviewed:

**Indian Health Service**

**Fish and Wildlife Service**

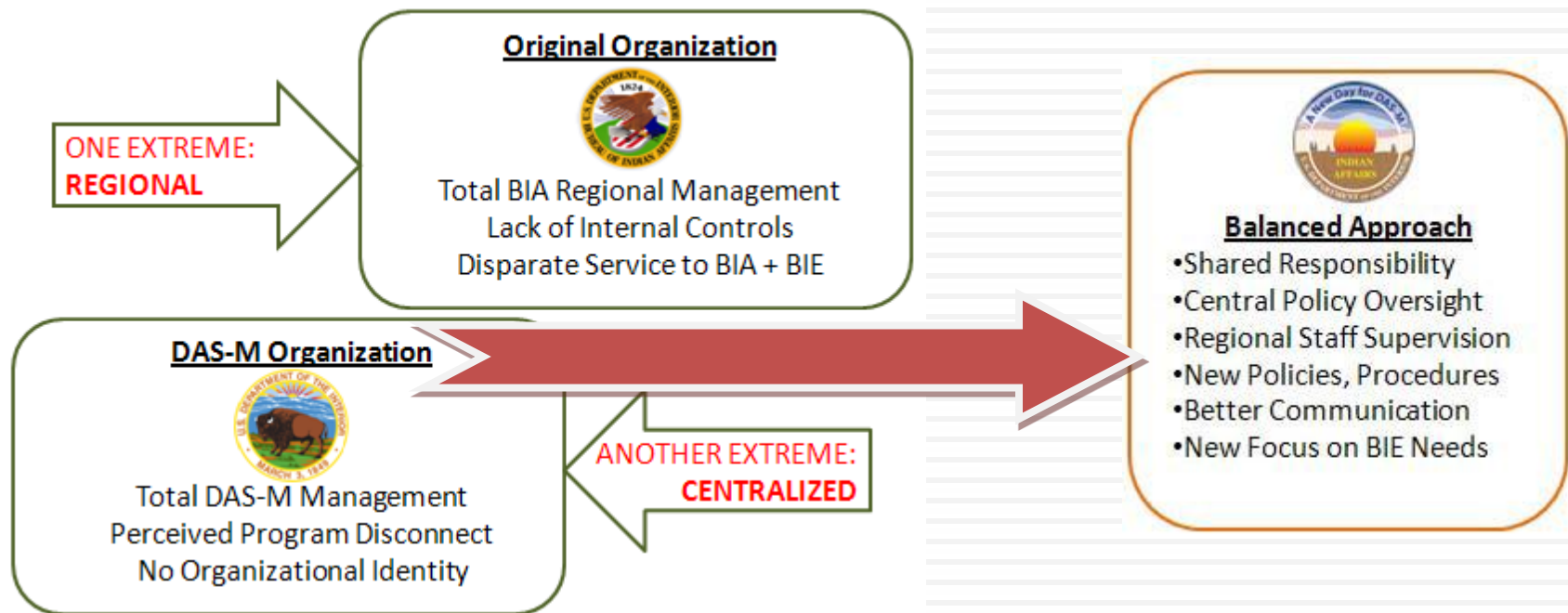
**Executive Office for the United States Attorneys**

**National Park Service**

**Forest Service**

In addition to peer agency best practices, Bronner’s team of federal administrative support experts leveraged feedback from senior Department officials, including the Deputy Secretary, the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, as well as from Indian Affairs executives, managers and employees. A clear point of emphasis emerged that should govern any contemplated changes to the Indian Affairs organization: the “all or nothing” approach that governed the initial establishment of DAS-M must be avoided. To the extent changes contained in this report are contemplated by Department officials, the changes should be implemented carefully to avoid the confusion and frustration that resulted from the DAS-M centralization. In the context of recommended alternatives outlined in this report, Bronner’s team has concluded that the recommend end-state of support service operations for Indian Affairs should capitalize on the strengths and weaknesses of the two most recent models: complete decentralization and complete centralization. Accordingly, a balanced organizational approach is recommended for Indian Affairs moving forward.





This final report establishes, on a functional basis, a series of recommended alternatives and next steps for the support services organization within Indian Affairs. The recommended theme for the potential realignment – “A New Day for Indian Affairs” – is intended to illustrate the Indian Affairs’ interest in moving the entire organization forward, having the benefit of lessons learned from the centralization and, originally, from decentralization. Several key points should be emphasized in reviewing the alternative recommendations contained in this report:

Thoughtful, Effective Implementation is CRITICAL. A defining element of multi-faceted criticism of the DAS-M centralization is the manner in which the centralization took place. Tribal Leaders and the BIA and BIE Regional Directors, who serve in sensitive positions closest to the Tribes, were not properly consulted nor briefed on the transition and its implications. As a new round of reforms and changes are contemplated by Indian Affairs, it is critical for those changes to be carefully documented, communicated with Indian Affairs leadership and Tribal Leaders, and implemented in order to achieve maximum sustainable benefit to the organization.

Address Organizational Issues across Indian Affairs. Similar to other federal agencies, Indian Affairs does not presently maximize the management and administrative tools available. Communication between divisions within Indian Affairs is inconsistent and needs to be improved, as does the clarity of individual roles and responsibilities for senior executives and managers. Any successful changes to the administrative support organization will depend on the organization's overall success in fostering a collaborative environment.

Carefully Coordinate Organizational Changes with Department Initiatives. The Department of the Interior is held to administrative and management performance standards by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Indian Affairs should ensure that all contemplated changes are consistent with the administrative priorities established by the DOI Secretary and the Deputy Secretary in order to ensure limited resistance from OMB or other sources.

Do Not Sacrifice Long-Term Success for Immediate-Term Progress. Interviews with Indian Affairs employees has revealed that many have served in federal civil service positions for decades and most possess a deep commitment to enhancing the quality of life in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Accordingly, Indian Affairs has a unique opportunity to begin a transition process toward a more balanced and effective administrative support organization. It may take the organization several years to fully implement the localization of support services changes in the most effective manner.