

New moves will streamline gov't

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President George W. Bush is serious about making the federal government more streamlined and efficient.

To do this, he established an agenda for the federal government. Two of the agenda items deal with strategic management of employees and competitive sourcing. Working in concert with the Federal Activities Inventory Reform (FAIR) Act of 1998, he plans to increase government efficiency and effectiveness while reducing the cost and the distance between citizens and decision-makers. A key part of this initiative is a five-year program to conduct competitions of commercial activities performed by the government. The objective is to produce efficiencies and savings whether the functions are ultimately performed in-house or by the private sector.



To meet the President's agenda, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directed that by the end of fiscal year 2003 all agencies of the federal government must...

- Complete public-private competitions,
- and/or
- Direct conversion of some tasks to contract performance,
- and/or
- Implement other privatization initiatives,

...for at least 15 percent of the renewable positions in their FAIR Act inventory.

"All federal agencies are required to take on these initiatives, in accordance with the directives from OMB," said Ray Navidi, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' program

manager for the initiative. "In previous years, some agencies haven't been doing as much as required, so OMB and this administration tied compliance into the budget of the agencies. And that got people's attention.

"The USACE Strategic Workforce Initiative is the Corps' response to the President's management initiative and the requirements of the FAIR Act," Navidi said. "The FAIR Act requires an inventory of all the commercial-in-nature positions in federal agencies. A function is considered commercial-in-nature if it is or can be performed by the private sector and if the agency head (in our case the Army) determines it is not inherently governmental. A list of these activities is compiled and submitted, in our case, through the Department of the Army to DoD and then to OMB."

The administration's goal during the next five years is to review 50 percent of all positions identified in the inventory that are not inherently governmental for competitive sourcing.

"It is important to remember that this initiative doesn't mean we have to shed these positions," Navidi said. "All it means is that we must review and compete (public/private competition) these positions. At the end of the process we will determine whether the government or private industry can perform the functions most effectively."

Navidi added that the USACE Strategic Workforce Initiative is looking at the whole organization. In the past, "commercial activities" basically meant "blue collar." Not this time. Once you get out of the planning and policy arena, which are determined to be inherently governmental activities, you are looking at pretty much every job in the Corps - technical, labor, administrative, etc.

In developing the initiative, Lt. Gen. Robert Flowers, the Chief of Engineers, has set several principles "in concrete" that will not change:

- We will follow the Corps' Vision - "The world's premier public engineering organization, responding to our nation's needs in peace and war."
- The Corps will not become a hollow contracting agency, or a grant agency.
- Except for what it takes to accomplish our mission, we are willing to outsource everything.
- The existing organization structure of USACE will remain as-is. No restructuring of the division or district structure.

"Where is the Corps in respect to these directives?", Navidi said. "We're preparing a USACE Strategic Workforce Planning Document that is due to OMB at the end of August. It will discuss our workforce for the next five years. It will discuss the make-up of our workforce, examine the workload, and see whether we're positioned to accomplish

our mission. At the same time, it will take a look at competitive sourcing and work that into the plan.

"Regardless of what happens, the resulting organization will not look like it does today," he said. "When you go through the competitive sourcing process, you have to develop a plan for your most efficient organization. This organization forms the basis for comparison against private sector offers/bids. Government-wide experience has shown that your most efficient organization will probably be smaller than what you started with."

To develop the Strategic Workforce Planning Document, the Corps built a multi-disciplined team with people from throughout the organization. Led by Maj. Gen. Robert Griffin, Director of Civil Works, it includes representatives from divisions, centers, laboratories, and Headquarters. According to Navidi, the team is considering a large number of factors.

"There are certain core competencies in the Corps that we will not give up," said Navidi. "If you strip us of these, we're not the Corps of Engineers any more. There are many other functions that are not core competencies, but it would be difficult to live without them. Legal? The Public Affairs Office? Are those reasons that we're called the Corps of Engineers? No. Are we willing to give them up? No."

"Another distinction we need to make is that the competitive sourcing we're talking about applies only to the civil works functions at this point," Navidi said. "The military-funded functions are not exempt; they're just under the Department of the Army. Army's plan is due to OMB at the same time as ours, so we haven't received any guidance from Army yet."

"The Corps is not starting this process from zero," he added. "Currently the Corps contracts out 100 percent of civil works and military programs construction. About 75 percent of the design on the military side is done by contractors, and about 50 percent of the planning and engineering on the civil side is done by contractor. So we're already leveraging the private sector to the fullest extent possible. And we've just been through a decade of restructuring and downsizing. So those are more factors that our Strategic Workforce team is considering."

He added that the Corps is working closely with Army, DoD, and OMB to determine the exact number of positions to look at.

"We have to stress that this is not a drill. This is something we have to do," Navidi said. "This is something that could have more impact on the Corps of Engineers than anything we've done in the past. The process is very demanding and complicated. We have to do this, and we have to do it right."