

Revised 7/12/2011

**USGS 2002 OAS: Action Recommendations**

**July 15, 2003**  
**Prepared by the OAS Review Team**

## **Introduction**

This report provides some preliminary recommendations for action that may be taken to address the two Bureau-level OAS issues identified in the Preliminary Summary of Bureau-wide OAS Results and elaborated on in the Addendum Report - An Analysis of the Employee Write-in Comments. Actions suggested here are not exhaustive of those actions that should be considered by the Director, Deputy Director and Executive Leadership Team in response to these issues. Rather, they are meant to provide a starting point for the senior leaders who will be given the responsibility for developing a more detailed implementation action plan for each of the two Bureau-level priority issues.

The two Bureau-level priority issues are:

- #1. The USGS is not perceived as preparing effectively for the future.
- #2. The organizational changes and restructuring implemented by the USGS are not perceived as achieving their intended benefits.

A full summary of these issues is provided in the above referenced OAS results reports, which can be found at this location: (web site).

The OAS Team's recommendations are based on both employee ratings of OAS items that addressed each of these issues, and the analysis of the key themes identified in the write-in comments that were provided by employees relative to these two issues. For purposes of action planning, each of the two issues has been segmented into major component elements, based on key themes in the related survey questions and in the employee write-in comments. In general, recommended actions are addressed to the major sub-issues.

To a limited extent, the recommended actions also reflect the OAS Team's understanding of actions and/or commitments that have already been made to address these issues. For example, subsequent to the 2002 OAS, the Director hosted a USGS Field Managers Workshop on June 10 and 11, 2003. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss with field managers their concerns about not being more involved in the science and business decisions of the USGS, and to identify opportunities for increasing their involvement. There may be additional Bureau-level actions, currently planned or being implemented, which should become part of an overall, integrated implementation action plan for addressing these issues.

## Action Recommendations

### ISSUE #1: THE USGS IS NOT PERCEIVED AS PREPARING EFFECTIVELY FOR THE FUTURE.

- **Element 1A:** A significant number of employees do not think the new program planning process provides adequate opportunities for input from scientists.
  
- **Recommendation 1A: Expand Opportunities for Input and Involvement by USGS Scientists**
- Follow-through on the Director's commitment to address the issues and priorities identified both at the Field Managers Workshop and by the OAS is *critical*.
  - Establish specific mechanisms and clear accountabilities to ensure that the necessary Workshop follow-up actions occur, and establish a feedback / measurement process to track actions taken and results achieved.
  - It is also critical that the Program Planning process, as a primary method for developing and funding the science we do, includes the input of scientists. To do this, the Director/Deputy Director should work closely with the Associate Directors, Regional Directors, Program Coordinators and Regional Executives to ensure they are communicating these opportunities consistently and thoroughly to all bureau staff.
  - A targeted mini-survey of USGS scientists is recommended for the first-quarter of 2004 to measure progress and to identify additional ideas for improving communications and involvement in program planning and related activities.
  - Actions to be taken and results achieved need to be fully communicated to employees. (See Recommended Communications Plan on page 8.) The Field Manager's Workshop is a case in point. Communicating to employees that the meeting took place, who was involved, the purpose of the meeting, the issues raised and the outcomes. **[Low Hanging Fruit]**

**ISSUE #1: THE USGS IS NOT PERCEIVED AS PREPARING EFFECTIVELY FOR THE FUTURE.**

- ***Element 1B:** USGS needs to recruit and retain new employees; when appropriate need to hire permanent vs. temporary employees to ensure continuity and the development of essential capabilities into the future; and succession planning is needed to make certain the USGS is prepared for the future and to ensure that key information and experiences are passed on to other employees before we lose it to the large number of anticipated retirements. Appropriate training and mentoring are also essential facets of knowledge management and ensuring organizational continuity.*
  
- **Recommendation 1B: Evaluate workforce recruitment and development strategies and practices.**
  - Create a cross-functional team to evaluate the approach of the USGS to the recruitment, retention and development of employees in mission critical jobs. Develop and integrate strategies within the context of a unified workforce planning and analysis process for the Bureau. It is critical that important strategic issues regarding preparing the workforce of the future be examined, and that staffing and development decisions be made in ways that are consistent with the Bureau's overall human capital management strategy.
  - Specific strategies for resolving the funding and resource issues related to employee recruitment and training should be identified and implemented in a proactive manner across the Bureau.
  - Actions to be taken and results achieved need to be fully communicated to employees. (See Recommended Communications Plan on page 8.)

**ISSUE #1: THE USGS IS NOT PERCEIVED AS PREPARING EFFECTIVELY FOR THE FUTURE.**

□ ***Element 1C:***

*a) Although a significant number of employees think their immediate supervisors have the skills they need to do their jobs, they also think their Science Center/Office managers need to make improvements in their ability to resolve disputes or conflicts fairly; in encouraging risk-taking without employees fearing punishment for mistakes; in communicating; and in being and holding others accountable.*

*b) Specific leadership issues requiring attention are: communications about future vision and goals and the rationale for them; resolution of conflicts regarding future direction and the implementation of key strategic decisions; and achieving alignments with organizational goals and vision.*

➤ **Recommendation 1C: Address Leadership & Management Issues**

- The Bureau needs to reassess its approach to the management of science and scientists. Many scientists who are promoted into management positions do not understand or value the role of management, do not have the necessary skills, or continue to function as individual contributors and “manage” people only when time allows. We recommend that a high-level, cross-Bureau team be asked to examine current roles and performance expectations and selection criteria for USGS managers and leaders, and recommend specific strategies for improving the selection, placement, performance and development of managers and leaders at the USGS. This work should be integrated with the leadership development strategy and training plan that has been in place since 2000.
- Another key to this puzzle is increasing the level of accountability for action and results for ALL levels of management, and removing or reassigning individuals who are not able to perform effectively in management or leadership roles. USGS senior leadership must work to establish a culture of management accountability, as this is a “top-down” issue that will not succeed if it doesn’t begin at senior levels of the organization. The entire ELT must play a role in enforcing management expectations and accountabilities, with tools and other support provided by the HR leadership team.
- It is suggested that leadership be made a key critical result for all managers in 2004. **[Low hanging fruit.]**
- Actions to be taken and results achieved need to be fully communicated to employees. (See Recommended Communications Plan on page 8.)

**ISSUE #2: THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES AND RESTRUCTURING IMPLEMENTED BY THE USGS  
ARE NOT PERCEIVED AS ACHIEVING THEIR INTENDED BENEFITS.**

- *Element 2A: Employees feel that BASIS+ is not working, does not meet their needs and that Common Business Practices is actually hindering integrated science. The organization is currently struggling with the implementation of CBP, and the implementation is running into many roadblocks related to an inadequate system, a lack of understanding and/or out-and-out resistance to making the necessary changes. In many cases, this resistance is a direct reflection of lack of resolution of some of the leadership issues identified above.*
  
- **Recommendation 2A: Evaluate Implementation of Common Business Practices (CBP)**
  - Conduct a systematic mapping and evaluation of the current implementation process of CBP to further clarify the challenges and issues involved, and to capture field input on how best to address them.
  
  - Actions to be taken and results achieved need to be fully communicated to employees. (See Recommended Communications Plan on page 8.)

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- ***Element 2B:*** *Employees are confused about roles and responsibilities in this matrix structure – especially related to decision making.*
  
- **Recommendation 2B:** **Realign and Clarify Roles and Responsibilities in the Management Matrix**
  - Given the implementation challenges involved and the apparent negative impact on the organization, the Bureau should consider conducting a comprehensive review of the effectiveness with which matrix management is being communicated and implemented throughout the Bureau. That review, combined with the results of the 2001 study by Ron Gunn, and the employee input provided through the OAS, may identify some specific necessary adjustments and realignments to the current roles and/or implementation on the management matrix. Shifting greater accountability and control toward either the Regions or the Disciplines may remove some of the conflicts that are currently creating organizational tension, resistance and gridlock. Alternatively, clearer expectations for achieving communications, implementation and buy-in throughout the Bureau may be required to work through the issues that have been raised.
  
  - Any required adjustments to the matrix structure and roles should be made with input provided by USGS senior leaders and field managers. In addition, an outside consultant may be required to assist in providing an objective, external perspective on the nature of the barriers being encountered and some effective strategies for overcoming them.
  
  - Actions to be taken and results achieved need to be fully communicated to employees. (See Recommended Communications Plan on page 8.)

**ISSUE #2: THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES AND RESTRUCTURING IMPLEMENTED BY THE USGS  
ARE NOT PERCEIVED AS ACHIEVING THEIR INTENDED BENEFITS.**

□ **Element 2C:** *Change Management – The USGS needs to learn to more effectively plan for, implement and sustain change.*

➤ **Recommendation 2C:** **Continue to Build Change Management Capabilities**

- Change management resource materials (course, modules, guides, etc.) should be provided to all individuals who have been given responsibility for leading key functions or initiatives, who are in key roles in the organization, or who are in the position to influence managers and employees in the direction of change.
- Further, the Bureau should develop or adapt a simple model or approach to leading change that can be incorporated into implementation planning for all large change initiatives. A simple change planning tool, combined with sound change management skills training, would help enable the Bureau to become more effective at bringing about the intended results.
- Actions to be taken and results achieved need to be fully communicated to employees. (See Recommended Communications Plan on page 8.)

## Communication Plan Recommendations

### THE ISSUE: USGS EMPLOYEES MUST BE INFORMED OF ACTIONS TAKEN ON ISSUES RAISED IN THE OAS

Communications with employees regarding actions taken to address the issues raised in the OAS should be regular and ongoing. Significant benefits are to be gained in building employee trust in the survey process, and confidence in their management and leadership teams, by providing timely and responsive communications about the value and importance of their input. Acting on that input will go even further toward these outcomes, which will positively impact employee morale and commitment to the USGS. Whenever possible, information about actions taken or decisions made by the Director and his leadership team related to issues raised in the OAS should be communicated consistently, and the link made back to the OAS. An important lesson learned from the 1999 OAS is that **not** communicating the **linkages** between Bureau actions/initiatives and the issues from the OAS was a significant missed opportunity to build employee morale and trust

#### ➤ **Recommendation 3A: Update employees on actions planned / actions taken to address OAS**

- A multi-faceted approach needs to be taken to communications with employees on actions planned and/or taken on the issues identified by them through the OAS. This communication should include:
  - Regular updates from all senior leaders on OAS issues, actions taken and progress achieved
  - Bureau-wide up-dates on the OAS web-site and in communications developed by the Office of Communications.
  - Face-to-face discussions between senior leaders and employees on OAS-related issues as opportunities arise
- To ensure that all OAS action updates are available to all employees on the intranet, senior leaders who lead specific action planning activities should include the ESPM in their communications on OAS action plans, on the actions taken, and on the results achieved.
- The Deputy Director should request six-month updates from the Regional Directors, Discipline Leads and Function Leads on actions planned or taken to address OAS results relative to their respective areas of accountability.
- The ESPM, with support from the Office of Communications, should develop and maintain a list of key points and current updates to serve as “talking points” for senior manager communications. **[Low Hanging Fruit]**

➤ **Recommendation 3B: Initiate Director’s OAS Recognition “Checkmark Award” for OAS follow-up**

- To recognize, publicize and celebrate those individuals who have shown leadership in using the OAS results to make positive changes in the organization.
- To reinforce 1) the behaviors we’re looking for; 2) the importance of employee feedback; 3) to make the linkage between actions that are taking place and the OAS issues; and 4) to communicate what is going on throughout the organization based on the results of the OAS.

## OAS Action Planning: NEXT STEPS...

The OAS Team has provided a report and analysis of employee responses to the OAS questions, and their write-in comments on the two priority Bureau-level issues that were identified. In addition, the team has identified some preliminary actions that should be considered by senior leadership in moving forward to address the issues raised. The team also offers the following suggested “next steps” to help guide USGS senior leaders in their action planning activities.

### **For the Bureau-level Priority Issues**

1. Identify ELT “Lead” for each of the two Bureau-level priority issues.
2. Leads establish issue “action team” comprised of:
  - a. Leads for current Bureau-level activities or initiatives related to the priority issue
  - b. Other leaders with related areas of responsibility
  - c. Employee representative(s) who are especially interested or affected by the issue
3. Action Teams meet to:
  - a. Define and scope the issue
  - b. Review actions recommended by the OAS team
  - c. Identify additional actions that should be, or have already been, taken
  - d. Develop integrated action plan
  - e. Assign accountabilities for action and follow-up
4. Communicate action plan to Deputy Director, to Employee Survey Program Manager and to employees
5. Implement actions
6. Follow up to assess impact
7. Communicate action updates to Deputy Director, to Employee Survey Program Manager and to employees on a regular basis

### **For other OAS Topics & Issues**

1. RDs, ADs and Function Leads review OAS results / topics relative to their respective areas of responsibility and identify high priority issues that require action at the Region, Discipline or Function Level (Note: focus should be on other issues than the two issues already being addressed at the Bureau level)
2. Establish issue “action team”, if needed to further define the issues or actions required to address them
3. Communicate action plan to Deputy Director, to Employee Survey Program Manager and to employees
4. Implement actions
5. Follow up to assess impact
6. Communicate action updates to Deputy Director, to Employee Survey Program Manager and to employees on a regular basis

## **OAS LEADERSHIP RESULTS**

Overall, employees feel that senior leadership has not provided a compelling vision to guide the bureau, that the USGS is not making the investments necessary to ensure the long-term viability of its science, and that their office is unable to compete for and retain the talent it needs for the future.

Employee perceptions regarding leadership are more negative on all comparable questions, and operational processes continue to be a significant weakness.

Based on the input from a significant number of employees, it appears that senior leadership has not been successful in building adequate understanding, confidence and/or support for the direction and investments being made in preparing the Bureau for the future.

We have not convinced many employees that we are changing in ways that will enhance our science impact, excellence and leadership, or that we are making the investments necessary to ensure the long-term viability of our science.

### **Leadership Culture**

Strengths. None of the issues met the criteria for a strength.

Weaknesses. A significant number of employees do not value the leadership provided by the ELT/Senior Leadership (#16, 41% U) or feel that risk-taking is encouraged without fear of punishment for mistakes (#18, 43% U). Employees do not feel that Science Center/Office management is effective at communicating (#19c, 33%U) or at being and holding others accountable (#19b, 36% U).

A significant number of employees do not feel that senior leadership has provided a compelling vision and direction to guide the Bureau into the future (#54, 38% U), nor do they believe that the Bureau is changing in ways that will enhance the Bureau's science impact, science excellence, and science leadership (#59, 34% U).

All of the indicators in this category (leadership) are down from 1999. Only 4 out of 10 respondents believe that the USGS values leadership, a decrease of 9% from 1999. Risk taking remains a weakness, with fewer employees feeling that risk taking is encouraged. Fewer employees feel that managers and supervisors communicate the organization's mission, vision, and values.

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Employees feel that their supervisors/team leaders understand and support their family/personal life responsibilities (#74, 78% F).