

## **ACTION LEARNING SCENARIO #2**

Maintaining a Rewarding USGS Environment  
In Times of “Less with Less”



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*Leadership 201*  
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## **Maintaining a Rewarding USGS Environment In Times of “Less with Less”**

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### **Issue:**

In his January 28, 2005, email to all employees, Director Groat described the difficult financial pressures the Bureau is facing this year. While Congress initially provided the USGS an \$11 million increase over the bureau’s FY 2004 budget, a subsequent mandatory across-the-board cut, followed by an OMB requirement to absorb the majority of the 2005 Federal pay raise, resulted in a \$20 million dollar net loss compared to FY 2004. The USGS and other agencies are likely to see this pattern continue in future years as funding for many Federal programs decreases in deference to higher Administration priorities.

USGS senior leadership is seeking opportunities to reduce costs but recognizes the reality that the bureau must identify areas in which it can scale back efforts and do “less with less.” The USGS will need to develop a future course of action that keeps staff, programs, and operations sustainable in the face of level or declining appropriated funds. The Director has asked Deputy Director Bob Doyle to take the lead in developing this approach.

A critical aspect of any strategy for doing “less with less” is determining how to maintain a rewarding work environment—one that demonstrates USGS commitment to employees, maintains morale, and sustains the level of performance required to do the high-caliber science that is the foundation of USGS success. Since October 2000, the USGS has focused time and resources on a Rewarding Environment Initiative with the specific goals of increasing employee morale and commitment, improving the ability of the USGS to attract and retain employees with critical skills, and enhancing USGS science and customer satisfaction.

Research conducted by the USGS Human Resources Office has demonstrated that the focus on creating a rewarding work environment is well placed. Analysis of 2002 Organizational Assessment Survey (OAS) results showed that a rewarding USGS work environment does lead to the valued outcomes the USGS is seeking—increased employee morale and commitment, improved recruitment and retention, and enhanced science vitality. The research also showed that there are certain key components of a rewarding work environment that have the greatest impact on employee perceptions of the USGS as a rewarding place to work. In priority order, the things that matter most to employees are:

1. Rewards Practices
2. Fairness and Respect
3. Risk-Taking
4. The Work Itself
5. Overall Supervision
6. Performance Management
7. Communications

Knowing the aspects of a rewarding environment that matter most to employees provides valuable information for leaders and managers to use to enhance the work environment in their organizations. The rewarding environment research demonstrated that maintaining a rewarding environment is critical to sustaining employee morale and science vitality. While this is true under ordinary circumstances, it is even more so in times of tight budgets, organizational change, and mandates such as competitive sourcing.

### **Challenge:**

The challenge is to identify ways in which USGS leaders and managers can maintain a rewarding work environment in times of “less with less.” Members of the Leadership 201 class bring a valuable leadership perspective and diverse organizational experience to this task. The specific questions for the action learning team to address are:

- What can and should USGS managers and supervisors do to maintain a rewarding work environment in a time of “less with less”?
- What can and should the ELT be doing?
- What are the barriers that managers and supervisors face in creating a rewarding work environment? How can these be overcome?

Your findings and recommendations in response to these questions will provide valuable insight and ideas that can help ELT members and managers and supervisors throughout the USGS meet the challenge of sustaining a rewarding work environment in difficult times.

### **Background:**

Additional information concerning the Rewarding Environment Initiative, the 2002 OAS research, and Rewarding Environment best practices is provided in the following attachments:

- 1 - History of the Rewarding Environment Initiative
- 2 - USGS Rewarding Environment Initiative: Executive Summary
- 3 - 2002 OAS Results on Rewards and Recognition (Statistical)
- 4 - 2002 OAS Results on Rewards and Recognition (Narrative Responses)
- 5 - USGS Rewarding Environment Report: Executive Summary
- 6 - Rewarding Environment Best Practices from Across the USGS
- 7 - Summary of Rewarding Environment Best Practices from the USGS, Other Government Agencies, and Private Industry



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