



U.S. FOREST SERVICE

**BUSINESS OPERATIONS
TRANSFORMATION ASSESSMENT**

PHASE 2 REPORT

JUNE 20, 2006



Preamble

There are several conclusions to draw from the second phase of the Business Operations Transformation Assessment (BOTA):

- The Forest Service, made up of hundreds of de-centralized, independent units, does not quickly change its course, especially when any type of centralization is the goal.
- The expectations of all involved stakeholders need to be managed with regards to the duration of this transformation effort. Given the current pace, it should be expected that a period of tremendous change would continue for at least another three years.
- All parties – the service providers at the Albuquerque Service Center, the customers in the field units and executives in the Washington Office – have a clear set of goals to accomplish in order for the transformation of the Forest Service to be successful.

As outlined in the vision for Forest Service Administrative Operations, this agency intends to become recognized as one of the premier government agencies for providing efficient, effective administrative support services, allowing its employees to focus on their core mission of “Caring for the Land and Serving People.”

If this vision is to become a reality, then Business Operations will need to:

- Partner with the field as professional service providers and trusted advisors to help managers and employees make better business decisions.
- Implement and maintain user-friendly websites and systems to better enable field personnel to fulfill their “self-service” duties easily, quickly and accurately. These systems will be of a “Do it once and it’s done!!” quality.
- Use this technology to deliver quality information to customers in the field, to standardize operations, and to attain cost efficiencies.
- Deliver customer service that is professional, knowledgeable, and friendly at a cost efficient level.
- Deliver customer service that continually improves through adherence to performance measures and Service Level Agreements.
- Work with an active Customer Service Board, which will provide quality advice to the service providers and the field and will be a key catalyst in providing continuously improving service.

And, if this vision is to become a reality, then field managers and employees will need to:

- Improve their partnership with business operations, in an interactive, virtual environment, and come to depend upon their advice.
- Learn to become more efficient and comfortable using web-enabled technology and understand the critical role this technology has in day-to-day operations.
- Perform essential “self-help” administrative functions that were previously performed by support personnel.
- Recognize the importance of regulatory and policy compliance and respond promptly to Business Operations requirements in these areas.
- Provide feedback through both formal and informal channels to ensure that Business Operations provides services that best meet the ever-changing needs of the field.



Again, the primary goal of the transformation is to provide for more effective, efficient administrative support and control in order for the dedicated employees of the Forest Service to focus on their core mission responsibilities. However, the consequences to the agency, if this transformation is not successful, are severe. It will take the concerted effort of leaders and employees from across the entire agency to ensure the success of this effort.

The recommendations included within this report provide more tactical direction for the service providers and field units to follow in order to support the goals of this agency-wide transformation effort. It is the hope of all those involved in this assessment that these suggestions are seriously considered and acted upon in a timely, yet well-planned manner.



Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	1
2. Business Operations Transformation Assessment.....	4
2.1 Overview.....	4
2.2 Activities to Date (Phase 2)	4
2.3 Future Phase of the Business Operations Transformation Assessment	8
3. Overall Phase 2 Observations & Recommendations	9
3.1 Field-Based Observations	9
3.2 Overall Recommendations.....	13
3. Information Resource Management	18
4.2 IRM Field-Based Observations.....	18
4.2 IRM Recommendations	22
5. Budget & Finance	25
5.1 Field-Based Observations	25
5.2 B&F Recommendations.....	31
6. Human Capital Management (HCM)	35
6.1 Field-Based Observations	35
6.2 HCM Recommendations.....	38



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the findings from the Business Operations Transformation Assessment (BOTA) Phase 2 activities. These activities included a Web-based survey and site visits conducted at four different sites throughout the Forest Service, and involved teams from across the Regions, Stations, and Areas (RSA). Additionally, a real-time survey was conducted within the Southern Research Station, and provided some interesting results.

The purpose of the BOTA is to determine how the agency-wide transformation of Business Operations has impacted field units. The results of the BOTA Phase 2 activities include several overarching observations and recommendations as well as findings that have been summarized by each administrative function: Information Resource Management (IRM), Budget and Finance (ASC-B&F), and Human Capital Management (HCM). Each area includes additional function-specific Observations and Recommendations.

Overall Observations

- In general, employees admit that “things are a little better” than they were six months ago, when BOTA Phase 1 was conducted, and several improvements have been noticed
- Employees need to understand a clear vision for the future
- Leaders, at many levels of the organization, do not consistently support the transformation effort or they do not seem to understand what role they should play during this effort
- Employees want to have acknowledgement of the temporary negative impact of the transformation on their ability to achieve mission targets
- Employees want clarification of their administrative roles and responsibilities, and the training necessary to equip them to perform those roles
- Effective communications continues to face many obstacles
- There continues to be high stress in the field as a result of the cumulative effects of change, though it is lower than during the Phase 1 assessment
- The field receives inconsistent direction/advice from the service providers
- It is often not clear who has ownership and accountability of an administrative issue from its inception to its resolution
- Forest, Districts and Research Work Units feel that they have not been sufficiently included in the development of new processes/systems

Overall Recommendations

- Provide a clear vision of the future
- Prepare & equip leadership to provide support & modeling
- Develop processes to facilitate ownership of problem resolution
- Include the field in the development of future process improvements/changes
- Increase consistency amongst the field units
- Improve communications



- Simplify user tools & systems – “Meet people in the field where they are”
- Make certain that call centers provide consistent, timely, and accurate information
- Communicate and begin to manage Service Level Agreements
- Clarify field roles and responsibilities and provide appropriate training
- Look holistically at what the Forest Service should stop doing

IRM Observations

- Information Resource Management (IRM) Communications has improved, but still remains too technical for many
- Several other improvements have been noticed across the services that IRM provides
- The End User Support Center (EUSC) service has improved, but many people have still developed workarounds
- Field needs greater understanding of the scope of IRM services
- Clarification needed around the role of Customer Relations Specialists
- The support of phones, radios and printers has proven to be a challenge for IRM
- Providing access to computers and network connectivity for all who require that access is difficult
- The computer replacement process still requires improvements
- Unit leadership wants to be a strategic partner with IRM for future planning

IRM Recommendations

- Provide marketing for “HelpNow”
- Communicate well in advance of initiatives that impact the field
- Expand self-help options to include greater administrative privileges
- Increase field IT knowledge and skills
- Clarify role of Customer Relations Specialist
- Update computers during the evenings and other non-peak hours
- Be more flexible in working with a staff that works primarily in the field
- Reconsider how IRM manages phones, radios, and printers
- Identify and better meet field IT needs
- Involve field in strategic planning

B&F Observations

- Several improvements have been noticed within the B&F functions
- Budget & Finance communications remains an issue
- A need for field role clarification still exists
- Systems and Website are not fully oriented to the typical field user
- Widespread inconsistencies are found in Customer Service knowledge and interaction
- Status updates on critical transactions are needed
- Significant concerns exist about the ability of the ASC to avoid future payment and other backlogs, especially surges that arise during field season



B&F Recommendations

- Clarify field roles, responsibilities and procedures & provide training to the field
- Improve B&F communications
- Continue to make ASC Website and systems more user-oriented
- Improve ticketing system and customer service interaction
- Enhance status update and notification
- Upgrade knowledge management and service provider training
- Provide user-friendly tools to field
- Consider other options for interaction points with field units

HCM Observations

- There is a lot of confusion and concern about how HCM needs are being managed during the time until the HCM transformation is complete
- The field has very high expectations about the services they can expect from HCM, but do not believe their expectations will be met
- There is confusion about the expected HCM roles of field managers & employees
- The field appreciates the decision to delay HCM until the system is ready
- Those planning retirement are concerned about a loss of personal guidance
- There are concerns about the field's ability to manage the field hiring/onboarding appropriately

HCM Recommendations

- Improve ability to provide sufficient interim HR support
- Provide effective communications
- Provide effective training, especially for managers/supervisors
- Provide adequate field authority
- Improve the recruiting/staffing process
- Fully integrate the Transfer of Station process
- Apply lessons learned from the B&F and IRM transformations

Additionally, based on feedback from the participating units as well as the observations of the BOTA Team, it is recommended that the third phase for the BOTA be postponed until after the “go-live” of the new Albuquerque Service Center for Human Capital Management (ASC-HCM), currently scheduled to occur through FY07. In the time between this report and the next assessment, it is anticipated that the Forest Service will be able to fully implement these recommendations.



2. BUSINESS OPERATIONS TRANSFORMATION ASSESSMENT

2.1 Overview

The Business Operations Transformation Program (BOTP) represents one of the largest organizational changes that the Forest Service has undertaken in its 100-year history. The changes are being felt in every office of the Forest Service - every Region, Forest, District, Grassland, Research Station, Research Work Unit, Area and Staff of the agency. It was agreed to early on that an undertaking of this size would inevitably require frequent assessment to ensure that goals in efficiency and effectiveness are attained. An assessment also provides an opportunity to address areas where corrections need to be made.

The BOTA Phase 2 Team, headed by Jane Cottrell, Forest Supervisor on the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho, partnered for a second time with four selected sites from across the Forest Service (Dixie National Forest, San Bernardino National Forest, Superior National Forest, and Southern Research Station) to determine how the transformation of Business Operations has impacted the field units. The team utilized a web-based survey, focus group discussions, interviews, and a quantitative measurement tool.

This report outlines the observations and recommendations formed during the second phase of the BOTA.

The results of this assessment will be used to revise existing communications and training efforts, improve processes, make better use of technology, make limited organizational adjustments, and evaluate initial assumptions about field roles and resources. These results will also help the Albuquerque Service Center for Budget and Finance (ASC-B&F), Information Resource Management (IRM) and the Human Capital Management (HCM) organizations improve their transformation efforts to successfully support Forest Service field-level work.

2.2 Activities to Date (Phase 2)

The purpose of Phase 2 of the Business Operations Transformation Assessment was to:

- Compare new data with baseline data obtained during Phase 1
- Gain field perceptions into how business transformation continues to impact their unit
- Develop recommendations, based on feedback from the field on how, collaboratively, to improve service levels within business operations

The core BOTA Team began Phase 2 by delivering separate communications to the participating field units, all members of the BOTA Teams, and to the entire agency, explaining the purpose, activities and intended results of BOTA Phase 2.

In preparing the web-based survey tool for this second phase, the goal of the team was to maintain as much consistency with the Phase 1 survey as possible, but the BOTA team did incorporate suggested updates to survey questions from each of the functional areas—



IRM, B&F, HCM—One additional question regarding burden shift was added to the IRM section, while 18 questions regarding burden shift were modified or added to the ASC-B&F section. The more extensive modifications to the ASC-B&F section were made based on feedback that the changes would help the field better understand the intent of the questions. The wording of some qualitative questions was also updated in order to help respondents reflect on the changes they observed since BOTA Phase 1.

Phase 2 formally began with the distribution of the BOTA web-based survey to every employee of the four participating sites in late March. The survey asked respondents to quantify time spent on key functions prior to the transformation and time spent currently on those functions (please note that, since HCM has not yet fully implemented its transformation, there are no HCM “burden shift” questions in this or the first version of the survey). Additionally, respondents were asked to provide their perception of service levels, training, and communications associated with each of the transformation efforts and what improvements they have seen since Phase 1. Each respondent was also given the opportunity to provide written comments regarding each of the transformation efforts.

During this second phase, field participation in the survey and site visits varied depending upon the site. Some sites increased their survey/focus group/interview participation from Phase 1, while other units saw a dramatic drop in participation. Overall, participation in Phase 2 of BOTA was down from Phase 1. For example, the BOTA team received 254 survey responses (compared with 328 responses during Phase 1), which is approximately 25% of the 1,000 employees within the four participating units. It was determined that this varied participation was due to one or more of several reasons:

- o Conflict with the beginning of field season,
- o Perception by some of improvements in service delivery, leading to a reduced level of urgency to get their points across
- o Sense of acceptance by others that their input would not influence executives to return to the way things were.

(Please see Appendices A – C for survey questions and summary results).

During the last two weeks of April and the first full week of May, the BOTA teams conducted site visits at each of the four participating sites:

- Dixie National Forest, Cedar City, UT
- Southern Research Station, Asheville, NC
- San Bernardino National Forest, San Bernardino, CA
- Superior National Forest, Duluth, MN

At each of these site visits, the teams met with employees from the Supervisor’s Office (SO) or Station Headquarters as well as available personnel from nearby Ranger Districts (RD) or Research Work Units (RWU).

Each of the four BOTA teams had at least one Presidential Management Fellow, who acted in the role of site coordinator and lead facilitator. The team consisted of at least one subject matter expert in each of the functions being assessed - B&F, IRM and HCM - who acted as lead interviewers (except for the Superior National Forest, where the HCM subject matter expert was unable to attend). Several members of the Field Leadership



Focus Group (FLFG) and the Senior Leadership Program also participated as active members of the BOTA Team. Also, one contractor was assigned to each team to provide advice and support.

During the site visit, the BOTA teams conducted focus groups, facilitating open discussions between unit participants, in order to gain the unit's perceptions on aspects of the Business Transformation that have gone well and those areas that can be improved upon.

Also, the BOTA teams conducted one-on-one or two-on-one interviews with selected employees from each site. Many of these employees were chosen because their survey responses showed that they experienced a significant amount of burden shift as a result of the business transformation or had provided survey comments that suggested further discussion was warranted. Local leadership selected others to participate because of their personal familiarity with the administrative processes.

The following chart shows the approximate number of participants at each site:

	San Bernardino National Forest	Dixie National Forest	Superior National Forest	Southern Research Station
Focus Group Participants	36	45	71	25
Interviewees	15	23	15	16

At each site, the team held a de-briefing with local leadership to answer any remaining questions and provide initial observations to leaders requesting input.

Once each site visit was completed, each member of the entire BOTA team provided their overall observations and recommendations to the core BOTA team for consolidation into a short preliminary report briefing paper to the Administrative Management Council (AMC) and this detailed final report.

In addition to the web-based survey and site visits that were conducted across all four units as part of the BOTA Phase 2, time spent performing administrative duties was more rigorously and quantitatively measured using a real-time survey tool at the Southern Research Station. Employees across several Research Work Units were provided with a tally form and requested to manually enter time spent on any of the activities on the survey, as they completed the particular activity. Data was collected bi-weekly and averaged across the participating units as Hours Spent per Week per Unit:



Summary of overall time spent on IRM and B&F duties:

Activity Category	Average Hours Spent per Week per Unit *	
	Pay Periods 1-6	Pay Periods 7-9
IRM	2.33	1.16
B&F	4.93	4.74

*Average of data collected from the participating Units

Summary of overall time spent on IRM and B&F duties, by Job Position:

	IT/GIS		Administrative Support		Scientist		Technician		Project Leader	
	PP** 1-6	PP** 7-9	PP** 1-6	PP** 7-9	PP** 1-6	PP** 7-9	PP** 1-6	PP** 7-9	PP** 1-6	PP** 7-9
IRM*	1.12	0.40	0.81	0.51	0.39	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
B&F*	0.63	0.71	4.05	3.94	0.08	0.00	0.09	0.04	0.08	0.06
Total	1.75	1.10	4.86	4.45	0.48	0.25	0.09	0.04	0.08	0.06

* All time spent is measured in Average Hours Spent per Week per Unit

**Pay Period

It is interesting to note that the results of the “Average Hours Spent per Week per Unit” calculated from the Southern Research Station real-time survey are much lower than the “Average Hours Spent per Week per Person” from the web-based survey used by all BOTA participating units. For example, the real-time survey results indicate 2.33 hours per week across the entire unit for IRM duties, whereas the web-based survey results indicate 9.3 hours per week for an individual for IRM duties. Similarly, the real-time survey results indicate 4.93 hours per week across the entire unit for B&F duties whereas the Web-based survey results indicate 7.5 hours per week for an individual for B&F duties. Several factors may contribute to the discrepancies between the results of the Web-based survey as compared to the real-time survey:

- Survey tool format: On the Web-based survey, employees were asked to recall the time spent on each activity over the course of a week, currently and prior to transformation. On the real-time survey, employees were asked to tally their actual time spent as they were completing a particular activity. With the increased time between the event and the recall on the Web-based survey, this data may not reflect the actual time spent as accurately as the tallies on the real-time survey.
- Survey sample size: The number of units and individuals polled using the real-time survey was much lower than for the Web-based survey (three RWU and XX individuals for the real-time survey vs. one Station, three Forests and 254 respondents for the web-based survey). A direct comparison of results is not likely to be completely accurate.
- Perception of pre-transformation activities and the change accompanying transformation: Most employees feel strongly that these administrative activities took much less time to accomplish prior to the transformation; therefore, this perception may have affected the accurate reporting of both pre-transformation and post-transformation times on the Web-based survey.



The combined effect of these factors may be responsible for the higher numbers seen in the perceived burden shift results of the Web-based survey. If this hypothesis is correct, we would expect to see more dramatic decreases in time spent reported in a third round of the Web-based survey as processes further stabilize, as compared to the slight decreases in time spent reported between the real-time survey results reported for Pay Periods 1-6 and Pay Periods 7-9.

(Please see Appendix D for more detailed results of this survey)

2.3 Future Phase of the Business Operations Transformation Assessment

While the field appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the progress of the Business Operations Transformation, and while Business Operations executives appreciate hearing the field's feedback in order to help guide the decisions they need to make, leadership should defer the third phase of the Business Operations Transformation Assessment for several reasons.

First, based on feedback from the participating units as well as their own observations, it was evident to the BOTA Team that many of the observations and recommendations raised during this phase were similar to those that were provided six months earlier during Phase 1. Evidently, six months is not enough time to properly gauge progress in a transformation of this magnitude. Secondly, with the scheduled delay in the migration to a centralized Human Capital Management function and system, it does not make sense to assess the field again until several months have passed after the migration to the ASC-HCM has occurred.

With this in mind, the BOTA Team recommends that, if a third phase of BOTA is to be conducted, that it not be conducted until at least the fall of 2007. It is expected that, in the time between this report and a third assessment, the Forest Service will be fully able to implement many of the recommendations in this report.



3. OVERALL PHASE 2 OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Field-Based Observations

The teams were presented with both general and specific observations regarding changes brought about by the ongoing business transformation. This first section includes observations that apply across two or more of the Business Operations functions.

In general, frustration still exists as a result of the ongoing Agency Transformation. Service levels do not meet the expectations of the customers across the agency. Customers have mixed opinions on improvements since Phase 1 assessment last fall, but there is a general perception, often reluctantly provided, that “things are a little better”, with IRM demonstrating the greatest improvements. Below are some examples of what the field perceived as improvements since Phase 1 of this effort:

Improvements Since Phase 1

- EUSC Customer Service has improved, with the “warm transfers” to level 2 greatly appreciated
- B&F Payments and Travel Authorization Strike Teams supported the reduction of the backlog of late payments
- The increased availability of transaction status tracking tools (e.g. Miscellaneous Payments) is welcomed
- The quarterly accrual process is improved
- The change in the Transfer of Station (TOS) process to the assignment of one travel counselor from beginning to end has made the process easier than dealing with numerous travel counselors
- The provision of the Integrated Acquisition System Super User concept makes sense to employees and has proved helpful
- INFRA Help Desk is working well
- I-WEB functionality is getting better

The field also shared numerous areas in which Business Operations has yet to improve. Throughout this phase of BOTA, the following improvement themes surfaced, common to all the sites:

Vision for the Future

There is still inconsistent clarity around the vision for the future of Business Operations within the US Forest Service. The Field employees want to know what will be expected of them, what they, in turn, can expect from the service providers and what the future of Business Operations will mean to this organization.

Acknowledgement of Impact on Mission Delivery

The field wants acknowledgement from the highest levels of the organization that the new field administrative roles and responsibilities are impacting mission delivery in resource areas, at least temporarily. If less money and time are available for mission delivery, field personnel believe that natural resource targets should then be reduced.



The persistent message was “you can’t give me more administrative duties without reducing expectations in other areas”.

Clarification of Field Roles & Responsibilities

Field leadership and employees sense a significant lack of understanding around field administrative roles and responsibilities, and are unclear on how to best assign these responsibilities amongst their workforce.

Also, many non-administrative personnel have not accepted the fact that administrative responsibilities are now a part of everyone’s job. Many resource personnel and managers are not handling any administrative issues. They are continuing to rely on their remaining support staff to interact with the ASC-B&F and IRM for items that are actually the responsibility of each and every employee, independent of their position.

The “not in my position description” mentality still exists, especially among higher graded personnel, who express frustration over time spent on new responsibilities. They see it as a “waste of money” to have specialists doing “admin work” they believe should be assigned to lower-graded employees.

Most field employees are basically unaware of the Service Level Agreements that outline and support the relationship between service providers and customers. The field does not know how these “contracts” will be used to drive accountability for both the field units and the centralized organizations.

Leadership Support & Modeling

There is inconsistent “transformation” leadership being demonstrated across field units. Despite efforts on the part of the Chief and other members of the Executive Leadership Team to communicate the Vision for Business Operations in the future, some field leaders do not actively support the transformation effort or have not put adequate emphasis into sharing the message about the transformation to each of the levels of their organization.

Employees look to their local leadership to determine how they should react to these administrative changes. Employees who see their leaders making the effort to stay informed and trying to solve administrative issues constructively, in collaboration with the ASC and IRM, are more likely to do the same within their own jobs. Personnel do not feel that leadership is being held accountable to properly support this effort.

Cumulative Impacts of Change

Local staffs appear to be more willing, emotionally, to accept the changes, but are not content with the level of service to-date. Many still do not agree that the new processes are the most efficient way of performing the work.

The rate of change continues to overwhelm employees and has dramatically changed their working environment. Many view that the forests and districts are working for the ASC instead of the ASC working for them.



As for stress levels, they continue to be high; however, the magnitude compared to Phase 1 appears to be less.

Communications – The Same Five Obstacles Persist

The existing cascading communications flow, continues to be a problem, with the lowest levels of the organization and specific user groups not receiving critical communications in a timely fashion, if at all.

Customers want immediate, concise, targeted communication to come directly from their service providers, and most employees continue to want personal communications and do not want to have to rely exclusively on e-ticketing or e-mail. Given these expectations, the five communication challenges identified during Phase 1 still persist today (listed below). The five obstacles identified during Phase 1 that hinder the effective communications are:

- 1. People don't receive messages.** Whether the distribution list is not updated, or managers are not forwarding messages appropriately, not everyone is aware of messages coming to them from the Washington Office (WO). Some file designations no longer apply, making it difficult for those receiving the messages to know to whom they should be forwarded.
- 2. People who receive messages, do not read them.** People are often too busy to read messages, or they feel that specific messages are not relevant to them, or else they are just not motivated to read e-mails from WO postmasters, etc.
- 3. People who read messages, do not understand them.** Many employees do not understand communications because the technical information is written by specialists for specialists, instead of for field personnel, who do not have the ability, desire or time to gain a specialist's level of knowledge in administrative duties.
- 4. People who do understand messages, do not believe them.** There seems to be an inherent lack of confidence that changes will actually occur, and regardless of what is being shared in a message, many readers don't believe intended plans will ever materialize.
- 5. People who do believe the message, do not take necessary action.** Whether people do not fully grasp their new role, are too busy, are awaiting direction from their immediate supervisor, or just decide to avoid the duty, the net result is the necessary action is not taking place.

Field Knowledge & Skills

Nearly all employees, those with the typical Forest Service "can do" attitude, want to perform administrative duties effectively. However, when picking up new tasks to perform, with limited subject matter expertise, employees often do not know what questions to ask, how to ask them, where to ask them, how to interact with a distant expert (or webpage), or how to properly implement a course of action after receiving relevant information. Field employees feel they lack the sufficient knowledge and skills needed to interact most effectively with their centralized service providers.



Due to the loss of specialists at the field level, generalists are being required to learn several areas of specialization, a situation that frequently leads to personnel overload.

Training in these new responsibilities is either not adequate, not relevant to the issues faced, or non-existent. Numerous employees felt that face-to-face training would be required for them to effectively understand the new processes. Also, specific emphasis was placed on the need to reduce the technical jargon used in future training, keeping the “generalist” audience in mind. Testing the training with field personnel prior to its delivery will help in this effort.

Service Delivery, Advice & Direction

The field continues to receive inconsistent advice and direction from their service providers at the ASC-B&F and IRM. There is a strong perception that an employee can continue to call the ASC until “they get the answer they want” or “they get the answer that sounds right”. Customer service agents also often transfer callers to the wrong department, adding to the confusion and frustration.

Service delivery is also inconsistent and prone to error. There is insufficient quality control when scanning or attaching documentation during transaction processing, contributing to delayed processing, interest penalties and unhappy partners and vendors.

Ownership of Problem Resolution

Under the current call center operating models, customers sense a lack of problem ownership on the part of their service providers. The field is weary of not being able to speak to the same person from one call to the next, requiring instead that they re-state the problem(s) during each callback. The field strongly requests that an accountable party own an issue to ensure that it is resolved and closed in a timely and complete manner.

Although some turnaround times have improved, customers continually feel they must regularly check in with the service provider for a status on their issue/transaction. Some functions (e.g. ASC-B&F Miscellaneous Payments) are now providing status updates, which are greatly appreciated by the field. However, field units continue to rely on workarounds to track many transactions. These workarounds undermine the efficiencies that the centralized processes were intended to provide.

Field Involvement in Process Improvements/Changes

Forests and Districts argue that the centralized processes are geared for the higher levels of the organization (R/S/A/WO), and are not adequately designed for lower levels (one size does not fit all), in terms of the 1) the types of problems faced, 2) how field processes hand-off to centralized processes, and 3) dependability/speed of technology.



3.2 Overall Recommendations

Provide a Clear Vision of the Future

All involved parties should be provided a clear vision for what the future holds for Business Operations within the Forest Service. The vision should include a description of the expectations of both the service providers and the customers as those expectations pertain to:

- o The partnership between the field and the service providers,
- o The types of systems and technology that will be used
- o How customer service will be provided and received
- o How feedback and continuous improvement will be managed

Prepare & Equip Leadership to Provide Support & Modeling

- Establish and confirm buy-in across all managerial levels of the Forest Service, especially at the highest executive levels.
- Field leadership must lead the transformation effort by first making the effort to understand their roles, by demonstrating how they handle their personal administrative responsibilities and then by ensuring that their employees are held accountable to meet their own administrative responsibilities (e.g. booking their own travel).
- Supervisor responsibilities need to be clearly defined and enforced by agency leadership.
- Consider making important business operations trainings mandatory for supervisors. If supervisors don't prioritize business improvements or trainings, why should their employees?
- Incorporate employee compliance with business operations systems into manager and employee performance reviews.
- Reward and replicate successful leadership driven efforts to help employees use new systems (e.g. Region 4 Field Training Workshop and Quick Reference Pocket Guide).

Increase Organizational and Procedural Consistency Amongst the Field Units

- The more consistency in the administrative policies/procedures, skill level, technical infrastructure, and organizational structure that exists in the field units, the more effectively and more efficiently the centralized service providers will be in performing their duties.
- Current field end-user responsibilities within each centralized process should be assessed to determine if greater efficiencies can be achieved, thus reducing the "burden shift" felt by the field (e.g. the ASC-B&F Miscellaneous Payments team just reduced the number of multiple field transmittal checklists down to only one checklist).
- Improving this administrative consistency should not initially require additional consistency and standardization with the mission-focused, resource management arena of the Forest Service. Local resource/research needs can still be addressed within primarily decentralized organizations.



Improve Communications

- Communications should be targeted to appropriate user groups and should be short and simple – modeled after such communication vehicles as FS Today, IRM News and IRM Updates. Simplicity of format and message is key, focusing on required actions and changes that directly impact field units.
- Training and communications need to use field-friendly language vs. technical, arcane, internal process language. A field-level representative should be involved in reviewing important agency-wide communications for “readability”.
- Provide easy reference/contact sheets that can be printed out and carried with employees.
- Create an easy “Search” option similar to Microsoft Word’s Help function – for example, if an employee types in “Travel Authorization” then the help function would provide actionable items such as the instructions and the Authorization Form. Search results should be limited to the internal FS Intranet.
- Communications “should be action/impact-oriented and not propaganda”.
- Do not use acronyms in communications without elaboration, especially not in titles and subject lines.
- Utilize several, varied communication methods/modes. Ensure that important communications, especially those requiring customer response, are reinforced by line officers.
- Discontinue general use of 6500 and 6520 file designations for all centralized B&F communications. This is true of file designations under IRM, as well. Instead, communicate directly with specific user groups and responsible parties, with copies to corresponding line management.
- Continue improvements to Websites by enhancing navigability and adding more “I want to...” options. Websites should lead people through logical “smart” questions that adjust the level of answer to the user’s specific request, knowledge and ability (e.g. “Is this your first time with this process?” – the TurboTax model).
- Require that links to centralized service providers be present on each units’ home page – currently not listed on some units’ home pages.
- Provide organizational charts online with pictures and backgrounds of individuals – management and employees – so customers can sense a more personal relationship with their service providers.

Develop Ownership of Problem Resolution

- Ownership of problem resolution belongs mainly in the hands of the service providers. An effective structure should be put in place within each of these organizations that makes certain each ticket is completely resolved and in a timely manner. A solution suggested by the field is to assign groups of ticket numbers (100-200) to one employee to make sure they are 100% resolved in a timely manner prior to closing.
- As much as possible, provide consistency across Business Operations in terms of the customer interaction points. There are “Customer Relationship Managers” within IRM and there will be “Human Resource Liaisons” within HCM, but Acquisition



recommends a “super-user” structure and B&F relies exclusively on the Call Center approach. The inconsistency between these models confuses many in the field. Every organization clearly needs a “go-to person when normal procedures fail to resolve the problem.

- The field continues to clamor for dedicated resources/teams to help their unit or local geographic area. They would prefer this model to having to speak with a new person every time they call. They want to speak to someone who understands their unique situations and will be personally accountable for resolving their problem. ASC-B&F, in particular, needs to outline a success path for their customers through its current structural approach or consider pilot testing a geographically dedicated resources/teams model.

Include Field in Process Improvements/Changes

- Consult and test new or changed processes with a small focus group of “field” (SO/District/RWU) employees who will work with the improved/changed processes. Future strategies and changes should include much more input from the Forest and District level.

Simplify User Tools & Systems – “Meet people in the field where they are.”

- If using computers is critical to the success of the new business model, then, instead of expecting the field to automatically become comfortable on computers, Business Operations should help people become more comfortable on computers through basic training, etc.
- “Bake” policies, procedures and know-how into the systems and electronic forms; forms should be simple and intuitive enough for even the most inexperienced computer user. As an example, instead of sending out memos to explain a change in mileage expense rates, just build that rate into the system. Make sure that the system knows the necessary information, so that people don’t have to. This should become the standard for all systems.
- Use field vocabulary for processes, whenever possible, and train the field in the use of a new vocabulary.
- Increase network capabilities at remote locations. This is especially an issue for Ranger Districts (RD). For example, many RDs are still using dial-up or party lines.
- Provide concise “quick reference guides” and other tools so that field employees can troubleshoot problems more quickly without having to fully depend on ASC, EUSC.

Make Certain that Call Centers Provide Consistent, Accurate Information

- Customer service professionals must provide consistent answers or know where to accurately direct customers for answers. Customer service professionals must be trained in and provided standardized scripts/answers, which they can utilize to make certain that customers receive consistent answers to their questions, regardless of which professional they reach. Individual customer service professionals cannot be expected to have knowledge of all areas within their repertoire. A process and tool to quickly and reliably access accurate information is critical, especially given the high turnover rates of the call center positions.



Communicate & Begin to Manage Service Level Agreements

- More general awareness is needed regarding the use of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) as contracts between service providers and field unit customers. Continue to communicate with the field the specific role of the Customer Service Board (CSB) in making sure that both service providers and customers meet SLAs.
- As performance results are tracked, make sure that the field is aware of the performance levels that are being attained, as well as improvement plans where levels are not adequate.

Clarify Field Roles and Responsibilities and Provide Appropriate Training

- An audit of field roles and responsibilities needs to take place, and field training around these roles and responsibilities needs to be developed and implemented. Make field training mandatory for those user groups with field responsibilities.
- Provide “basic training” for field employees – for example Finance 101, or Technology 101 so that a basic level of administrative and technical knowledge, skill and ability can be achieved.
- Cooperate among Regions/Stations/Area/WO to share how roles and responsibilities are being allocated with the purpose of identifying “best practices” for allocating such work.
- Emphasize face-to-face training where practical, and use such training as a part of a gradual process of helping field become comfortable with computer-based training (CBT). This could start by bringing participants to a classroom setting and, from the classroom, introducing them to self-initiated CBT.
- Test all field training with a field-level focus group (SO/District/RWU) in order to verify that it is applicable, understandable and designed for the appropriate field audience.
- Develop comprehensive training for supervisors and managers that provides instruction on their new duties related to centralized business operations (e.g. approval of travel authorizations, technical approvals, etc).
- Provide a standardized new employee packet to all new employees their first day on the job. This guide should also be provided to all existing employees once it is developed. The packet should include contacts and quick guides for business operations that apply to all employees (e.g. Overall Business Operations Quick Reference Pocket Guide, Travel Quick Guide and ISO Quick Guide, etc). For employees with additional responsibilities in the area of Business Operations, additional quick guides would be provided (e.g. IAS or I-Web Quick Guides, Managers’ Quick Guides, etc).

Look Holistically at Work the Forest Service Should Discontinue

- There seems to be a gap between the flat or decreasing budget that is allocated to the Forest Service and the increasing demand for services from the agency. Though the BOTP effort will lead to certain efficiencies that will allow the Forest Service to do more with less, until this organization can determine what services it no longer needs to provide, there will be continued frustration felt by field personnel who are now shouldering additional administrative duties.



- Managing all elements of the transformation will be key for the Forest Service to be able to maintain good morale and retain its highly skilled, a highly committed workforce.



4. INFORMATION RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

4.1 IRM Field-Based Observations

Based on the pre-site visit surveys, the number of hours spent per week on IRM activities decreased by three hours over the last 6 months. This change can be attributed to a variety of causes, including:

- Level 1 support is generally keeping tickets open until the problems are resolved;
- Level 2 support is more easily accessible and efficient;
- Users are self-learning basic computer troubleshooting; and,
- Users are more efficient at workarounds, using EUSC less than before.

Many users stated that IRM has made improvements, specifically in the following areas:

IRM Improvements Since Phase 1

- The IRM News and IRM Updates are effective communication vehicles
- Improved customer service focus and helpfulness on the part of EUSC employees
- The “warm transfer” to Level 2 works well
- Level 1 support for routine items has improved
- Level 1 has more frequently been able to solve problems in a timely manner.
- Phone calls are being returned more quickly
- The ability of IRM to provide 24/7 service was greatly appreciated
- Being able to plug your computer into any network without change properties was well received
- Many employees who had computers replaced had a positive experience
- Being able to open computer boxes on their own has allowed the field to be more productive
- I-Web has shown greater improvements in speed, number of applications, and efficiency
- The Infra Helpdesk provides improved service

Despite these improvements over the last six months, the amount of time supporting IRM is still twice what users spent prior to centralization. Survey results indicated improvements in the level of service and communications provided by IRM, but respondents’ perspective of training remained the same. (*Please see Appendix C*)

Regarding field resources, many IRM tasks still remain at the local level without adequate resources to handle those residual activities. In addition, the responsibility of handling residual duties has been transferred from supervisors to their increasingly overburdened subordinates. Many argue that real costs have not been calculated for the IRM centralization process, given that they believe the cost of one GS-9 IRM specialist must be less than the cumulative cost of lost time for an entire field unit.

Constructive feedback for IRM from across the various sites including the following themes:



IRM Communications

IRM's Lotus Notes based newsletter, IRM News, has been well received and read by users, although the overuse of acronyms in all forms of communications continues to cause frustration for the field. Users also find the IRM website language often difficult to understand and the website, itself, difficult to navigate. Many users have yet to fully utilize HELPNOW, since they are unaware of its existence.

However, communications include more than just official messages. It also includes the verbal exchange of technical information for the purpose of assisting users in carrying out their jobs.

Unfortunately, many users are avoiding the use of the End User Support Center (EUSC) and the IRM webpage. Primary problems include the difficulty of many users to understand the technical IT language used in writing and in oral communications, and difficulties in navigating the IRM website.

Employees would also like to be made more aware of the status of certain IRM actions. Users mentioned that they had not discovered until after the fact that they had not received the appropriate "patches" for their computers. Users would like to be informed of the status of these critical actions that are not readily visible to them.

Scope of IRM Services

Employees expressed frustration that particular applications and/or hardware were not supported by IRM. The field needs clarification regarding what software/hardware is supported by the EUSC and when, alternatively, end users should contact vendors directly.

Users continue to seek a password management system that does not require them to memorize several different passwords, without being allowed to store them.

Users also expressed numerous concerns regarding servers, including servers being down, servicing, replacement, etc.

EUSC, Level 1 and 2 Support

Despite the positive feedback that EUSC was credited with efficiently escalating problems from Level 1 service to Level 2 by using warm transfers, many users are not utilizing EUSC as often as before, opting to pursue workarounds, such as relying on technically savvy employees within their own office. The majority of users felt that while Level 2 knowledge has improved, Level 1 workers lack a common base of knowledge and ability to ask "the right kind of" questions, which has led to inconsistent performance. This inconsistency has often led users to seek help from unit coworkers in order to facilitate quicker and better responses, which then creates lower program productivity for these technically savvy workers.



Additional issues facing the EUSC include the following:

- Level 1 service has often inadequately documented inquiries, so that when an inquiry was escalated to Level 2, Level 2 would have to ask the user to restate their problem, increasing the time needed to reach issue resolution.
- Some respondents commented that EUSC workers are using computer hardware that is inadequate to properly aid in the resolution of the user's issue (e.g. slow system or lacking application for which they are to be providing support).
- Employees who spend a significant time in the field and away from the desk are still experiencing prematurely closed tickets, due to the EUSC's policy of closing a ticket after three unsuccessful attempts to contact the user. This conflicts with the newly implemented IRM performance standards that require ticket resolution.

Phones, Radios, and Printers

Users still have tremendous difficulties receiving technical assistance and quick response times for phones, radios, and printers. A real safety issue will continue to exist until radios and phones can be repaired in a more timely fashion. Repairs can take days, even weeks, to occur due to the lengthy travel times it takes for the repair contractors to make a site visit, and spares are not always available. Also, Asset Management doesn't contact the user to tell them what the status is for their request.

Prior to centralization, field units worked with local providers to meet their phone, radio and printer needs in a timelier manner, which frustrates many whose expectations were raised by the service they had received in the past. Some examples of phone, radio and printer problems include:

- Frequently new vehicles sit in limbo until radios arrive. This is due to radios now being the responsibility of each driver, rather than the radio shop, that used to order them for all vehicles in advance.
- Radios are not being turned in when they are broken because the reordering and repairing process is difficult. Field personnel try to "get by" with the radio even when something is wrong rather than lose a radio completely and wait months for a replacement.
- Finding an IP address for a shipped printer causes frustration, since they are not prominently placed, if placed at all, on the printer received.
- Receiving phone bills for phone repair and set-up that the field believes they are not supposed to receive.

Another issue exists regarding the payment for certain services. For example there has been confusion about some cell phone charges and whether IRM or the local forest is liable for payment.

Computer & Network Access

Many users complained that not everyone who needs access to computers, such as seasonals and volunteers, have it. By sending information exclusively via the Internet, computer and phone line access is mandatory, but not always available to some employees. For many, gaining access can often take a full day since employees may have to travel to distant sites to use available equipment.



Also, a concern exists over the slowness or availability of the network at the District and Work Station levels. All field level personnel need to be able to effectively utilize all required applications with appropriate processing speeds (e.g. GIS and TIMFACTS).

San Bernardino, perhaps like other National Forests, has network access problems to several Forest Service systems, such as TSA, which EUSC cannot fix.

Computer Replacements

Conflicting feedback was received in the area of computer replacements. While many stated that for the most part the experience was positive, others stated that contractors were not familiar with the Forest Service systems, with each other, and often took parts back with them that belonged to units or employees. Units are concerned about who can best be assigned as the Unit contact for future rounds of replacements, as IT experience continues to dwindle in the field.

Technical Approvals

The field does not understand why all supervisors are given authority to approve the acquisition of new equipment, when many supervisors do not have budget authority. They believe that approval authority should exist with the person with budget authority (e.g. program managers).

Strategic Planning

The field is unaware of IRM's strategy for determining and planning future field needs for services and infrastructure, such as telecommunications, network access and user support. The field would like to be a strategic partner in these efforts.

Roles & Responsibilities

The field expressed frustration with not understanding the role of the Customer Relations Specialists who are located on site and how they help in resolving outstanding issues. Customer Relations Specialists also expressed the frustration they feel in having to say "no" to on site employees asking for assistance that should go through the EUSC. Overall, the field lacks an understanding as to the difference in roles and responsibilities between the ISO, IRM, EUSC and Customer Relations Specialists and "systems administrator" (employees don't even know who the systems administrator is, yet receive messages to contact).

Field Training

Field employees are extremely frustrated with their inability to easily perform many residual IT tasks due to their lack of basic IT knowledge and skill. Bringing all field employees up to the minimum level of technological knowledge and skill is critical for the success of the new operation environment.



4.2 IRM Recommendations

Provide Marketing for “HelpNow”

Users still have yet to fully utilize “HelpNow”. The Information Solution Organization (ISO) should communicate to field staff that ticket status can be checked through “HelpNow.” Possible actions include reminders in the IRM newsletters and memo direction to the field on how to most effectively use “HelpNow.” Callers should be reminded about “HelpNow” on each call. The ISO should also make sure that language and acronyms on each ticket are clear and easy to understand by field personnel

Communicate In Advance of Field Impacting Initiatives

IRM can help reduce the field’s stress level around changes that impact their daily work by effectively communicating such initiatives well in advance. For example, field personnel are already concerned about how the upcoming computer replacement process for 2006 will be coordinated and if changes will be made to the process.

Others have suggested that IRM technical experts visit the field periodically to provide training on common problems and to provide site-specific recommendations to improve IT efficiencies.

Expand Self-Help Options to Include Greater Administrative Privileges

Providing easy-to-use guidebooks, directions and other tools for users will allow them to avoid an over-dependence on EUSC. Many employees are not aware of the ISO Guide to Services or the ISO Quick Guide, which are examples of such directions. Employees also suggested that newsletters should provide direct links to resources that can help them resolve their own problems.

As stated in the BOTTA Phase 2 overall recommendations, many users recommended a self-help system similar to Microsoft Word’s, which has a “How Do I...?” search menu.

Post large contracts (computers, radios, etc.) on the web, so employees can see what is available and the timelines associated with procuring such items.

Increase Field IT Knowledge and Skills

Provide basic technology and computer training to ALL employees in order to bring the all employees to a minimum level of knowledge and skill, thus reducing frustration and stress.

Update Computers During the Evenings and Other Non-peak Hours

IRM should update computers during the evenings only, not during weekend days, since Saturday and Sunday are regular working days for employees at many field locations. Additionally, new applications and hardware should be rolled out during off peak season times.



Be More Flexible in Working with a Staff that Works Primarily in the Field

EUSC, when leaving messages, should ask the user to respond to their message by explaining whether or not they are in the office and whether the customer wants the ticket closed. Moreover, EUSC should take note of voice mail greetings that indicate that the customer will be out of the office for a period of time. In this case, EUSC should use the backup contact listed in the ticket.

Field personnel also want flexibility around repairs. Employees recommended that a direct-exchange program should be in place to provide interim hardware while broken hardware is being replaced, to minimize impact on productive work time.

Reconsider How Phones, Radios, Printers and Facility Moves are Managed

Given the difficulty and risks involved in centrally managing this hardware, consider other options (e.g. field unit responsibility, local contracts, etc.) to provide for cost effective, low risk support. Alternatively, National level contracts are needed to reduce variance in services. The FS needs more and better-trained technicians to support these areas. A quick win suggested by field employees would be to tape the IP address directly on the printer.

As for facility moves, the field suggests that a project leader assist the Forest during the move on site, and that a detailed checklist be developed and provided to the Forest many months (a year in some cases) in advance of any move.

Continue EUSC Improvements

Expand, where possible, the use of the ‘warm transfer’ program to other levels of service. Also, establish a comprehensive knowledge management system that logs unique problems and solutions, for future reference by EUSC employees when dealing with similar issues.

As for EUSC customer satisfaction surveys, users feel they could respond more accurately to IRM customer surveys if, in addition to the ticket number, the survey provides a qualitative description of the ticketed issue in question.

Also, the ability for EUSC to remotely control computers to make required changes saves users’ time and should be used more widely, as appropriate.

Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

Communicate the roles and responsibilities of the Customer Relations Specialist (CRM) to all FS employees and explain how the CRM can help provide field feedback to the IRM organization.

Involve the Field in Strategic Planning

Develop a repeatable method for involving field leadership in the strategic planning of future field needs. This should involve a cross-section of leadership from the various levels of the organization, with more emphasis put on levels closest to the ground, such



as Districts and Research Work Units. Communicate strategic plans in advance of rollout.

Identify and Better Meet IT Needs

Review Service Level Agreements and evaluate the ability of ISO to meet specialized Forest Service needs as a whole (includes server space and server support, phone support, Lotus Notes/email capabilities, Forest Inventory Assessment, etc.)

Develop criteria to determine where technological support should be more standardized and where it can remain relatively customized to local needs.

Provide for faster networks, especially at the District level, where dial-up connections are still the norm for many.

Create an ISO knowledge database of problems and solutions to promote shared knowledge among service providers and enable them to provide timely and accurate service to customers.



5. BUDGET & FINANCE

5.1 Field-Based Observations

For the most part, field employees accept that centralized financial management is here to stay. Discussions from the latest phase of the BOTA study revealed a field workforce dedicated to seeing through their responsibilities to support their units' programs of work.

Improvements Since Phase 1

- Travel Authorization and Payments Strike Team's reduction of the backlogs
- Increased politeness and effort demonstrated by customer service personnel
- Addition of "I want to..." options on the ASC Website
- User friendliness of the FTRS system
- Workplan Transaction Register appreciated
- Availability of some transaction status tracking tools (e.g. Miscellaneous Payments)
- Improved quarterly accrual process
- The change in the Transfer of Station (TOS) process to the assignment of one travel counselor from beginning to end has made the process easier than dealing with numerous travel counselors

Despite these improvements, numerous barriers still prevent field personnel from fully carrying out the budget and finance related functions necessary to support local unit operations, and respond in a timely manner to the ASC-Budget and Finance's (ASC-B&F) many requests. Procedural, operational, and communications gaps in the new operating environment contribute to a significant confusion within the field workforce and contribute to late and overdue payments, for which field units and individual employees pay a high price.

This assessment – conducted during the ramp up to the field season – revealed a host of function-specific Budget and Finance (B&F) issues rooted in weaknesses in communication, policy, system usability, and customer service. Discussed below are thematic issues raised across all four units, with some specific examples provided to illustrate how these over-arching problems affect work at the field level.

B&F Communications

As noted in the overview, the field feels that existing communications in the budget and finance arena do not meet their needs. B&F communications, field staffs say, often fail in one or more of the following ways. The communications:

- May come in only one format and therefore are not well absorbed (in an e-mail or on the website, but not both);
- May not be clear and may use unfamiliar technical language;
- May conflict with other communications;
- May not be distributed to the appropriate staff;
- May be difficult for the lay user to understand;
- May often arrive too late; and
- May not arrive at all.



Examples include:

- Currently, correspondence is not simultaneously posted to the ASC-B&F website for reference.
- Instructions for the use of the Web Auth form were too complicated and cumbersome.
- 6500 File designations sit in a manager's inbox too long before being forwarded. The creation of cover letters to accompany the forwarding of these communications only further delays the process.

Need for Role and Procedure Clarification

Roles and responsibilities for both the ASC and the field must be clearly defined and communicated. Program managers and residual B&F employees want to do their jobs right the first time. In order to perform their responsibilities, they require clear guidelines and appropriate tools. The ASC, field leadership, and technical specialists should be involved in the design and validation of these roles and responsibilities. The role of budget officer, in particular, needs renewed clarification. The B&F transition assigned many field-level fiscal duties to the field budget officers who feel they are now an "ASC Liaison" upon whom the ASC constantly relies for more work, on top of their demanding local budget-related work.

Both employees in the field and at the ASC will also benefit tremendously from a catalogue of clearly written policies and procedures, or user-guides, for common budget and finance related processes. Below are a few process-specific examples of how the lack of clearly developed roles & responsibilities and consistent policies & procedures hinder field operations.

➤ *Travel Authorizations:*

Field staff is unclear how to use blank travel authorizations. It is not clear to them:

- Whether an employee needs to request a new travel authorization every time s/he travels.
- Which situations can a blanket travel authorization be used.
- Why the number of people allowed on a blanket travel authorization was reduced to fifteen without informing the field of this procedural change.
- Why they have to fill out the entire new authorization form instead of just adding someone to a blanket.

Also, the requirement for supervisors to authorize travel is not widely understood in the field, causing confusion and delays for some units. (This is part of a widespread uncertainty regarding supervisors' and program managers' responsibilities.)



➤ *Transfer of Station (TOS)*

Field supervisors and managers are unclear regarding their responsibility to provide transferring employees with a comprehensive Transfer of Station (TOS) checklist that includes not only the ASC-B&F related aspects of a TOS, but also the detailed actions required by IRM and Human Resources (e.g. changing Lotus Notes profile, obtaining Govt. ID card). Supervisors do not clearly understand their responsibilities in regard to providing transfer-related advice, versus the responsibilities of the ASC-B&F Travel Counselor.

Also, the field senses that tighter coordination is needed between B&F and HR on the TOS process, as delays are occurring due to offer letters arriving late, reporting dates listed for too early a date, etc. Delays in processing TOS documents result in a range of negative impacts for the field units and transferring employees. Many cases recount employees reporting late or skipping parts of the process (e.g. they may not have enough time prior to reporting date to house hunt) or forced to arrive at the new location before their household belongings arrive. Also, Relocation Income Tax vouchers do not reach all employees who need them.

➤ *Credit Cards:*

Forests report unclear closeout procedures for departing employees. One example is the collection of travel cards. Though the unit recovers the card, there is no understanding of what to do with the cards, or whether or not ASC will pursue cancellation. Also, units would like to know in advance when credit card payments are late so they can help avoid unnecessary Employee Relations actions.

➤ *Job Codes:*

Due to job code restrictions, field employees say they are being forced to utilize cuff records to track their budgets with any confidence. Is it the WO's intention to acknowledge this additional tracking work as a role and responsibility of each unit?

➤ *Real Property and Other Record Keeping:*

Responsibility for record keeping is vague in more than one area. One Forest is currently negotiating with the ASC over responsibility for supporting documentation for real property files. The ASC has requested that forest's support transactions from previous years, but most if not all of these items have migrated to either a records center or the ASC. ASC personnel continue to request the forest staffs' assistance in sending and preparing the documentation. Meanwhile, the Forest lacks both the paper documentation and the staff resources necessary to handle the tasks at hand.

Field Interaction with the ASC-B&F

Field personnel assert that B&F systems – including the ASC call center, the IAS help desk and the ASC-B&F website – are incomprehensible to normal, infrequent users and



not oriented to their needs. Customers do report that most customer service representatives at the ASC are polite and try to help, an improvement since Fall 2005. But as noted above, some representatives are more knowledgeable and therefore more helpful than others. Below are some specific interaction points identified as needing improvement:

➤ *Level 1 of ASC Call Center:*

Field employees claim that Level 1 of the ASC Call Center is more of a switchboard than a help desk. From their perspective, it is misleading to call it a “help desk” when they just receive a ticket with a message that someone will call them back. When field employees call, they want to be able to speak with someone who can handle their problem.

➤ *Call Center/Ticketing System:*

The ticket system reportedly does not work well for many FS employees who spend significant time away from their desks. Many that call the ASC still report long wait times. Of those that do receive a ticket (electronically or via phone), many say that they do not receive a call back for service. It has not been determined whether this is due to the absence of a service call or the inability to reach employees who spend little time at their desks.

➤ *Integrated Acquisition System (IAS):*

Field employees describe numerous problems with IAS. Though IAS is a Department-managed system that supports the Acquisition function, there are several impacts felt by those responsible for field fiscal work. The most serious flaw is the inflexibility of the system to change dollar amounts. This causes problems if invoices and estimates do not match exactly. Unspent funds are tied up for weeks, unavailable for use. Also noted, the system is difficult to use, lacks ability to track actions throughout all phases of the procurement process, and the lengthiness of the process eventually outdates the inputs (e.g. the cost of something has changed) requiring the user to start the process again, which is both time-consuming and frustrating. An example of a Forest work around is splitting purchases to keep payments under \$2500 so purchasers can use PCMS cards and avoid IAS altogether.

As noted in *Appendix A*, the use of IAS increased in the survey, and the field attributed this to having more orders now in the system, more people learning the system and researching problems (e.g. hardship/duplicate payments).

➤ *I-Web:*

Users find that the system is improving; yet the general feeling is that suggested system improvements are taking too long to implement. Many still find it cumbersome and lacking in user-friendliness (e.g. approvals have to be done more than once). Employees mentioned that a simple flow-chart explaining use would be helpful.



➤ *ASC Website:*

The website redesign has improved some with the addition of the “I want to...” function, but customers say they are still spending too much time navigating through numerous web pages to find particular instructions. Customers are encouraged to use the ASC website as a primary resource, but many consider the website difficult to navigate and not friendly to field users. It does not contain the breadth or depth of information that customers want and need. Having both ASC internal procedures and field procedures in one location often makes the search for the necessary information even more daunting. Also, in many cases, terminology used on the website differs from that used in the field (e.g. Federal agency payments vs. IPAC) or the location of a particular procedure is not intuitive to the field (e.g. tuition reimbursement embedded within the Miscellaneous Payments process).

Widespread Inconsistencies in Customer Service

B&F information provided to the field varies significantly at times from one correspondence to another, and from one service representative to another. As a result, field employees receive different direction each time they call. As previously mentioned, some field staff are so accustomed to receiving different answers to their questions that they “keep calling” until they “get the answer that they want”. Others, confused by conflicting instructions, fear doing something wrong and make additional calls to the ASC, receiving new information still (e.g. even with something as simple as instructions to fax vs. mail in hard copies).

Employees are also experiencing inter-departmental runaround, as they are frequently passed from one branch of the ASC to another, or between the ASC and the National Finance Center (NFC) when processing or checking the status of B&F work. This pattern suggests that some B&F procedures are neither clear to the customers nor to the service providers. (**See Appendix E for an example of a “run-around” experience – past due payments*)

One explanation of this confusion is that ASC employees, especially new employees and support contractors, do not fully understand the terminology and processes used in the field. Knowledge levels also vary from one ASC representative to another, contributing to inconsistent information. Field staff are sympathetic towards the high learning curve for ASC personnel, but sympathetic or not, the field staff need timely, accurate and reliable information. The lack of confidence in the B&F organization to provide such information has in part fueled a system of workarounds in the field.

Status Updates Needed

The ability for field as well as ASC personnel to follow and track payments and requests is critical to the B&F organization functioning efficiently. Knowledge of the ability to check the status of payments through the ASC website varies across the field, with a number of units still unaware that this tool is available. Of those in the study that had used the status check tool, many said that the information provided could still be enhanced. Customers wish to see this option improved and expanded across B&F



functions. Field staff noted the following functions in particular for which status checking, or read-only access, would be helpful:

- Accounting Adjustments
- IAS
- Additions to Vend Table
- Additions to Blanket travel authorization
- Individual Travel Authorizations
- TOS obligations and de-obligations
- Claims resolutions and closure
- All Payments

Impending Payment Backlogs and Field Season Concerns

While earlier efforts to reduce payment backlogs are appreciated, field employees see another backlog on the horizon and lack faith in the B&F organization to handle the load of work that comes with the field season. Strike teams are viewed as a short-term fix to systematic problems of understaffing and dysfunctional communications. The agency's ability to perform efficiently through the close of the field season will be a significant test of its ability to earn the trust of field employees.



5.2 B&F Recommendations

Clarify Field Roles, Responsibilities and Procedures and Provide Accompanying Training

- Develop a curriculum of training courses that field employees can take to become proficient in their ASC-B&F related administrative duties.
- Re-assess the current residual roles and responsibilities of the field, along with the knowledge, skills and abilities now available in the field for accomplishing this work. Over time, less fiscal expertise will be found in the field and the end-user portions of centralized processes need to be redesigned for even further efficiencies and ease of work by non-fiscal experts. Additionally, field employees need to be provided with appropriate financial skills training.
- Include field personnel in the design of new processes. The field does not understand why the ASC will redesign the field portion of a procedure into a more complex process that generates more fieldwork. A common statement from the field is, “If they would just ask us for input,” implying they have plenty of suggestions that might be more efficient than those generated solely by the ASC-B&F. For example, due to changes within the volunteer payments process, the field has created workarounds in order to pay volunteers in a timelier manner than the ASC. Another example includes the change to the field Unliquidated Obligations (ULO) process.
- Develop practical solutions to help each unit (including Ranger Districts) adapt to a Unified Budget system. The alternative is extensive employee effort at personally tracking expenditures in individual, separately created, databases by collecting employee timesheets and receipts.

Improve B&F Communications

- Establish a communications coordinator role at the ASC-B&F – someone who can not only translate technical finance language into communications understandable to the field but also coordinate the message delivery.
- Distribute communications in more than one form – including e-mails, memos, website and newsletters – and make certain all forms carry a consistent message.
- Create targeted user group pdls and distribute targeted instructions directly to the “need to know” audience and their managers.
- For changes in processes that affect all Forest Service employees, the ASC-B&F should communicate directly using the ALL FS PDL (e.g. travel process changes)
- ASC should communicate directly with Forests and Districts – the current cascading communications process of forwarding centralized instructions down the organization is much too slow and often does not reach all the right people. As mentioned in the overall recommendations of this report, the use of the 6500 file designations for all B&F messages should be discontinued.
- Note “Action Required” in subject line for any item that directly affects and requires action of a particular employee or user group.



- ASC should send the field a package (via e-mail) with samples and explanations of how they want things done when changing a process (not just posted to the website) and vice versa.
- ASC should develop, when appropriate, brief update statements via email with links for more information. Employees generally like recent IRM update mailings.
- Strengthen internal ASC –B&F communications as well. It is obvious to the field that separate branches within the ASC are not fully coordinated, do not understand each other’s roles and do not effectively inter-communicate.
- Send communications well in advance of actions being required, not just in time, or worse, when the due date has past.

Continue to Make ASC Website More Field User-Oriented

- Separate internal ASC procedures, instructions and news from those directed to the field. It may be necessary to consider an entirely separate Web portal for the field that doesn’t mix ASC internal procedures with external procedures. In the least, ASC Internal Hot News should be separated from Field Hot News. Field Hot News should include any process changes that affect the field and all correspondence sent to the field – to our knowledge, such correspondence is currently not found anywhere on the ASC-B&F Website.
- Replace technical jargon with easy-to-understand field terminology.
- Expand the use of the “I want to…” function to all ASC-B&F process web pages.
- Solicit further input from the field regarding the ASC-B&F website.

Improve Ticketing System & Customer Service

- Initiate the use of “warm transfer” between Level 1 and Level 2 Customer Service for ASC customers, so that customers can get an answer to their question when they call the ASC, not forcing them to go directly to Level 2 voice mail and thus wait for a callback.
- When follow-up is required, service representatives should work with customers to set up a time that works for both parties. Use both phone and email to reach customers.
- Provide approximate wait time to the caller on the ASC help line.
- Provide approximate wait times and other critical information on a service ticket status check. See below for more details.

Enhance Status Update and Notification

- Enable customers to check their own transaction status where possible. See list under “Status Updates Needed” in above B&F Observations section. Field customers want to be able to track documents and transactions as easily as tracking a package with UPS or a book order with Amazon.com.
- Payment status reports should tell customers: 1) status of request; 2) expected wait or processing time; 3) required field actions, if any and 3) confirmation of receipt, obligation, etc. Information provided must be comprehensible and useful to customers.



- Give field users “read only” access to TUMS, enabling them to inquire about utilities payments before they are overdue.
- Give field units EAGLS access (Bank of America Travel Card). Units should know about payment delinquencies before Forest Supervisor is notified by RO.
- The ASC should implement notification for accounting adjustments and make these corrections in a timely manner. The current practice of waiting months to conduct lump sum adjustments inhibits field operations.
- Require timely response by branches to emails sent by customers to specific branch email inboxes and incorporate this responsiveness into performance management structure.
- Implement a system for internal control of field documentation received. Many field personnel are copying everything they send to the ASC due to past experiences of being asked for “lost documentation”.

Upgrade Knowledge Management and Service Provider Training

- Customer service representatives (CSR) should be able to view information on a customer’s unit, past issues, attempted solutions and unique processes (e.g. National Symbols). This will limit the need for customers to reiterate their problems and unique unit concerns, which seem to still occur fairly often.
- Develop a comprehensive knowledge management database for CSRs in order to raise the knowledge level of the service provider and to provide timely answers to the customer. The agency can improve customer service by facilitating information sharing between ASC employees, thus reducing the amount of time spent resolving redundant issues.
- Develop intra-branch information sharing sessions and tools for ASC employees.
- Develop inter-branch information sharing sessions and tools for ASC employees and field employees to cross-educate on some of the following topics: the field’s program of work, the ASC, US Department of Agriculture (USDA) (e.g. IAS, Aglearn) and National Finance Center (NFC).

Provide User-Friendly Tools to Field

- Develop clearly written, easy to follow user guides for B&F functions. Field staff, leadership, and ASC personnel should all be involved in the development of these guides.
- Create a user-friendly desk guide for employees to use when vendors notify them of non-payment. It will help the ASC and improve customer service to agency vendors if employees can track payment progress, troubleshoot problems, and provide accurate information.
- Electronic forms should help customers fill them out correctly. Adapt forms so that unnecessary inputs are grayed out. Create “smart forms” with pop-ups when customers enter incorrect information.
- TOS needs to be carefully coordinated between B&F and HCM. The agency should consider assigning employees a contact or counselor to see them through the entire



process (not just B&F portion) or provide supervisors and managers in the field with a comprehensive TOS checklist they can manage with employees.

Consider Other Options for Interaction Points With Field Units

- Consider establishing regionally dedicated teams/personnel within the ASC for the field instead of having all calls being received by the call center. Consistency in support and understanding of units' unique set-up and needs are critical to their operations.
- Consider either enabling customers to contact branches directly, or bolstering Level 1 support with knowledgeable representatives. If neither is possible, the agency must at least standardize the warm transfer practice to provide more timely service.



6. HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT (HCM)

6.1 Field-Based Observations

The BOTA team focused again, as during the first phase, on assessing the current *perceptions* that field personnel had about the *anticipated* changes within HCM and the impacts of delays. While it is true that the centralized HCM function and the new EmpowHR System are now delayed until winter of 2007, it is evident, in all field sites, that changes and delays have heavily impacted the way the Human Capital Management function is managed.

Forest Service leadership announced another delay in the migration of Human Capital Management to the new Albuquerque Service Center for Human Capital Management (ASC-HCM) during the course of this second assessment. Employees expressed mixed feelings of fear and hope around the delay; some fear that the HCM transformation will be as difficult as B&F's and IRM's, and others feel hopeful that it will be more successful due to the extended time that the HCM function has spent planning and testing.

The following themes around the HCM transformation were shared during phase 2:

Managing HR in the Interim

Pushing back the ASC-HCM implementation was perceived as “good news/bad news”. Field personnel are hopeful that the delay will translate into systems and processes that work from day one. Yet, many units are experiencing significant impact due to the delay in the migration, as more of their knowledgeable HCM employees are leaving the agency, or finding other positions within the Forest Service. Some suggest that “total breakdown” will occur if other resources are not made available in the interim. Examples of the current impact include:

- Some units creating a new position (the ‘loose ends’ position) to help handle work in the interim (e.g. keeping track of the positions that are vacant, etc).
- Units complaining that HCM staff is currently spending a large amount of unpaid time in order to get work done on time with limited resources.

This growing number of vacancies in Human Resource positions is causing significant stress, frustration and delays in service for the field. Supervisors feel they have nowhere to turn for HR support, especially during the field season and they feel that the process for requesting Core Team support has not been well communicated to the field. Further delays to centralized HR support may have consequences for both employees and the field units' program work. There is a significant lack of understanding in the Field as to what interim procedures are in place to handle unmanageable HR workloads. And, frankly, there is a level of distrust in the field that may inhibit the units from requesting ASC assistance during the interim.



Service Expectations:

Customers have high expectations of future HR service delivery. They are unsure of what services and service levels will be provided in the new operating model. What services will the ASC-HCM provide? What features will EmpowHR provide? What services will Human Resource Liaisons (HRL) provide? These expectations need to be communicated sooner rather than later.

Also, units shared their expectations regarding the following services from the new organization:

- Ability to fill positions within 90 days and require only an hour of supervisor's time to make it happen.
- Make standard classified position descriptions available service-wide to all managers and supervisors. (Multi-grades with separate position descriptions in AVUE are an issue.)
- Provide managers and supervisors with real-time reminders for critical dates regarding employees and whom to contact (i.e. term is running out, timesheet not complete, WGI, etc.).
- Provide managers and supervisors with more authority over hiring; if managers are going to be given responsibility, they should be given the necessary authority, such as classification authority, as well.
- Employees should not have to wait through a lengthy ticket resolution process for critical HCM services (e.g. employee not receiving a paycheck).
- Give assistance/instruction on how to do HR work for large numbers of seasonal fire people that need to be hired quickly – possibly a “super-user” option.
- Allow official proxies or designees for HR work, so that when supervisors are unavailable, the work can continue.
- Provide managerial access to easy-to-read reports regarding open positions and other managerial duties.
- Provide checklist for managers' activities during the hiring/onboarding process
- Hardwire the system to be user-friendly and capable of completing the entire hiring process for both standard and nonstandard positions.

Understanding HR Field Roles and Responsibilities

Employees express little understanding of future HR roles and responsibilities. The field needs more communication around this important topic. Managers and supervisors want to know what time, knowledge and skills the EmpowHR system will require of them; and if authority will be given to provide access to administrative employees who help them with the hiring process.

Not coincidentally, these administrative employees are concerned about the additional workload they may receive from managers and supervisors. They expressed concern that they were left with B&F and IRM residual duties and will now be left with HR duties for which they have no more capacity. Also, the field was concerned that the employee relations staff were already overworked and would also not have additional capacity.



The field wants to warn Business Operations that if personnel actions occur during field and/or fire season, it is more likely that the work required for these actions will not be accomplished until that field/fire season is over.

EmpowHR System and User Readiness

“Give us automation that helps us do all we need to do or give us people” are the words from the field around EmpowHR implementation. Although the field is struggling to cope with the diminishing HR resources at their units, they see hope in the Agency’s delaying the migration if the systems and processes are not yet functioning properly.

Users are fearful that EmpowHR will not work as advertised due to the historical precedence of other system implementations. They are adamant that the systems not only work, but also be “smart” – intuitive and simple enough for the least knowledgeable user, and incorporate field-friendly language.

Improved User – Service Provider Interfaces

Field personnel expressed concerns that the helpdesks and websites would be as difficult to navigate as was initially experienced with B&F and IRM. They suggested that HCM should apply lessons learned from these previous transformations.

Retirement Planning

Employees are concerned with not receiving face-to-face retirement advice and counsel. They are afraid they may be missing or losing information that could lead them to make decisions that could negatively impact their retirement benefits. They would prefer a human being’s advice on something this important. A number of employees mentioned that they were thinking of retiring prior to the migration so as to get a human being’s retirement advice.

Continued Criticism of AVUE

A lot of criticism was aimed at AVUE, although it is not directly part of the transformation effort. Users complain that the system is too difficult to use and is not effective in the hiring process as it often disqualifies a qualified candidate. Significant misunderstanding exists as to when new positions descriptions need to be created and the role of managers in this process. Several offices indicated that they have circumvented the use of the AVUE system to fill their vacant slots. They use alternative methods, such as hiring through the STEPS program, avoiding AVUE altogether.

Seasonal Hiring Process

Real concern exists around the seasonal hiring process. Currently, the lead-time requirements and the reduced number of applicants on certificates is a problem. If this worsens with the transfer to ASC, it will adversely affect units’ missions. With the number of seasonals needed, field leadership are concerned that managers will have to practically become a personnel technician, which will be a tremendous commitment of time. Field leaders are also concerned that there may be some limitations around centralized hiring, such as the need for specialized announcements.



6.2 HCM Recommendations

Improve Ability to Provide Sufficient Interim HR Support

- The agency needs to provide immediate interim Human Resource support during the delayed transition to the new ASC-HCM.
- Communicate to every level of the organization the options and methods for accessing such interim Human Resource support.

Provide Effective Communications Around the HCM Change

There are particular aspects of HCM communications that the field would like to see improved upon as soon as possible. These include the following in order of urgency to the field:

- How to get assistance with unmanageable HR workloads in the interim
- What roles and responsibilities field managers & employees will have in the future
- What HR services will be like in the future
- How the EmpowHR system will work and what skills, knowledge and time it will require of employees

Send carefully crafted, yet simple, communications directly to ALL employees explaining the following:

- Future roles and responsibilities in the new centralized environment.
- Services that will be provided and by whom (ASC-HCM, EmpowHR, Human Resource Liaisons (HRLs), line officers, field managers and resource program supervisors)
- The future level of service provided (e.g. benefits of online retirement counseling vs. previous face-to-face method)
- The EmpowHR system and link to its demo
- The skills and knowledge required to use the EmpowHR system
- How the FS will help employees obtain required skills and knowledge for the new operating environment

Provide Effective Training

The field was very particular in stating that they need adequate training on the new HR processes and systems, sooner rather than later. They expressed that online training would not be sufficient and that any training in new HR processes should not only be for supervisors, but also for their administrative assistants who assist them in the hiring process.

To help provide for consistency and to help participants become familiar with Computer Based Training (CBT), some of the training could be accomplished by “classroom CBT”. Ongoing training could move more and more towards CBT as a primary tool for education. If possible, the ASC-HCM training staff could also provide support to the AO training at each RSA, to further ensure consistency and to provide clarification if issues arose.



As suggested in phase 1 of this assessment, one possible plan for field-level training is a Train-the-Trainer approach. In advance of the HCM migration, at least one Administrative Officer (AO), or other similar position, from each RSA could receive training with other AOs in Albuquerque. This AO would have to meet the criteria of being known/respected by their peers and being a capable trainer. After returning from their training, they would provide the training to their peer AO's back home. Each AO would then be expected to ensure that the appropriate staff in their office was trained on their individual roles.

Though this field training process would take time and money to accomplish, the field feels that this effort would be well worth the investment, in order to gain their support and full understanding of their roles.

Provide Adequate Field Authority

Several in the field stated that if managers are going to be given more responsibility, they should be given the authority that they need – with any “oversight” being baked into the system so errors or conflicts with policy are immediately identified, with no override needed. The system needs to cover for any lack of knowledge that managers may have at any given time.

Improve Recruiting/Staffing

The following suggestions were offered:

- Have the review occur before receiving a certificate, so that the process doesn't need to be started again from scratch
- Allow recruitment for temps to happen through state employment offices
- Set-up the process so the manager can just signoff instead of reclassifying
- Provide easier instructions and user requirements for applicants

Fully Integrate the Transfer of Station Process

As mentioned in the Budget & Finance section, a comprehensive process needs to be developed that includes all aspects of the Transfer of Stations process - the B&F, IRM and HR aspects. A liaison/counselor that assists in all aspects of TOS (not just B&F) is needed, or the agency needs to furnish field supervisors and managers with a comprehensive TOS checklist the can provide to their employees. Field leadership strongly recommended that a service level agreement be put in place that ensures that offer letters are sent early enough to account for the more lengthy ASC-B&F TOS process and accounts for the tight coordination needed between B&F and HR on the TOS process.

Ensure Application of B&F and IRM Lessons Learned

The field expects a higher standard of service delivery based upon lessons learned from previous transformations. Examples include:

- A user friendly Web design with navigation tools and quick links organized to address the user's needs
- Readily available and accurate answers to process questions via Website help functions and via knowledgeable customer service representatives



- Easy method for moving or creating profiles
- A specific team and telephone number to contact by geographic area that will understand unique hiring agreements, union contracts, etc.
- Direct personal contact with LMR and ER positions, to make hiring more efficient
- Proper performance measurement tracking tools that are put in place to alert management, as early as possible, of backlogs or spikes in service
- Ability for the field to access an online status of their transaction, with a written history understandable to non-HCM personnel.