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State and Local  
Interest Groups GO

# Getting It Done: A Guide for Government Executives

Edited by  
Mark A. Abramson  
Jonathan D. Breul  
John M. Kamensky  
G. Martin Wagner

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.

*Lanham • Boulder • New York • Oxford*

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.

Published in the United States of America

by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706

[www.rowmanlittlefield.com](http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com)

Estover Road

Plymouth PL6 7PY

United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Available**

ISBN-13: 978-0-7425-6600-2 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-7425-6600-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7425-6601-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-7425-6601-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

*To our friend and colleague  
G. Martin Wagner  
whose insights and years of government  
experience were crucial in the development  
and writing of this book.*

*M. A., J. B. & J. K.*

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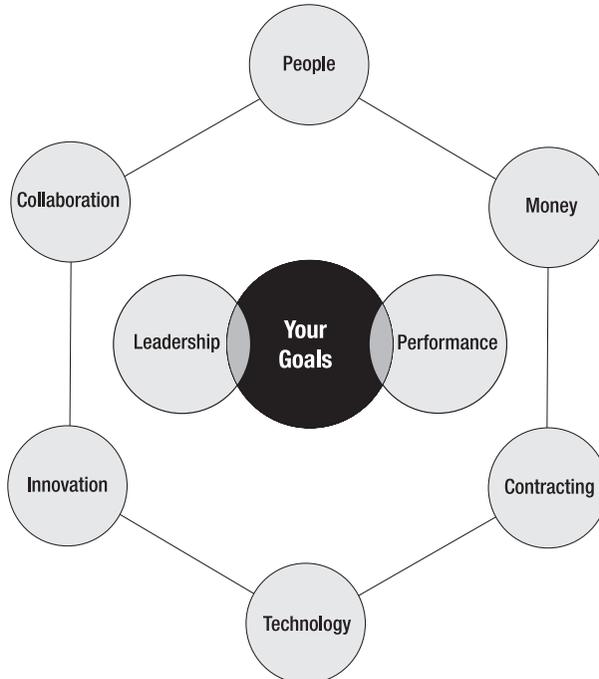
# INTRODUCTION

This book has been written for those who have answered the call to public service. We greatly appreciate their willingness to work on the nation's greatest problems.

The IBM Center for The Business of Government has prepared two books for newly appointed agency heads—those who lead departments, agencies, bureaus, or programs—and their senior management teams, consisting of both political and career executives. Both books are written for agency heads and their teams to help them succeed in Washington. Based on our experience in the federal government, we conclude that new agency heads like you need to understand, and hopefully master, two key elements of successfully working in Washington:

- **The operations of government.** In *The Operator's Manual for the New Administration*, we address the “machinery” of government by focusing on eight essential tools needed to make government work: leadership, performance, people, money, contracting, technology, innovation, and collaboration.

## Eight Essential Tools for Achieving Your Goals



From *The Operator's Manual for the New Administration*, Mark A. Abramson, Jonathan D. Breul, John M. Kamensky, and G. Martin Wagner, editors (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

- **The environment of government.** This book, *Getting It Done: A Guide for Government Executives*, focuses on the environment in which you work. Part I contains six “to dos” necessary to “get it done” in Washington. Part II consists of 14 chapters, each describing an important stakeholder in the political environment of Washington.

## Six ‘To Dos’

This section presents a straightforward to-do list to guide you in your new leadership position:

- **Before confirmation, be careful.** There is likely to be a gap in time (sometimes long) between nomination and confirmation. During this time period, learn as much about your agency as possible. In addition, be careful throughout this time period to avoid making commitments or decisions prior to being officially confirmed.
- **Learn how things work.** While you have done your background research on your agency prior to your confirmation, devote your early days in office to learning more about your customers, your agency programs, and “flash points” that may cause problems down the road for your agency.
- **Act quickly on what can’t wait.** As part of learning how your agency works, find out what needs quick action by you and what issues require further study. You will learn much from talking with your staff and stakeholders about how your agency is performing and what actions you need to take quickly.
- **Develop a vision and a focused agenda.** A vision and a focused agenda will be crucial to your success in Washington. You will need to both communicate the vision and convey a sense of urgency to get it done.
- **Assemble your leadership team.** A key ingredient to your success will be putting together a *joint* political/career team. Don’t view your staff as two distinct camps (political and career). Avoid “political appointees only” meetings as much as possible. Your job is to get these two groups working together as one management team committed to your vision and your agency’s goals.
- **Manage your environment.** All organizations—public and private—have stakeholders and a complex environment, but many observers think that government is harder because there are so many stakeholders. Part II discusses 14 major stakeholders with whom you will be dealing. The key to your success will be succeeding (to a large extent) with all of them. Failure to work effectively with any one group can likely lessen your chances of success in government and possibly shorten your tenure.

## Stakeholder Groups

Part II of this book provides overviews of the 14 stakeholder groups you will most frequently encounter while in government. We grouped these stakeholders into four clusters: your bosses, your colleagues, your constituencies, and your overseers. While some groups might appear in two categories (Congress is your boss *and* oversees your organization), this framework is useful to understanding your relationship with each one.

### Your “bosses”

It is often said that one of the major differences between the public and private sectors is that you have many bosses in government. While the assertion that you have 535 bosses in Congress might be slightly overstated, there is much truth to it. In Washington, any one of the 535 members of Congress (or any of their 29,400 staff) can make your life easier by supporting your agency—or more difficult by providing your agency with a directive or a new piece of legislation placing restrictions or limitations on what your agency can do.

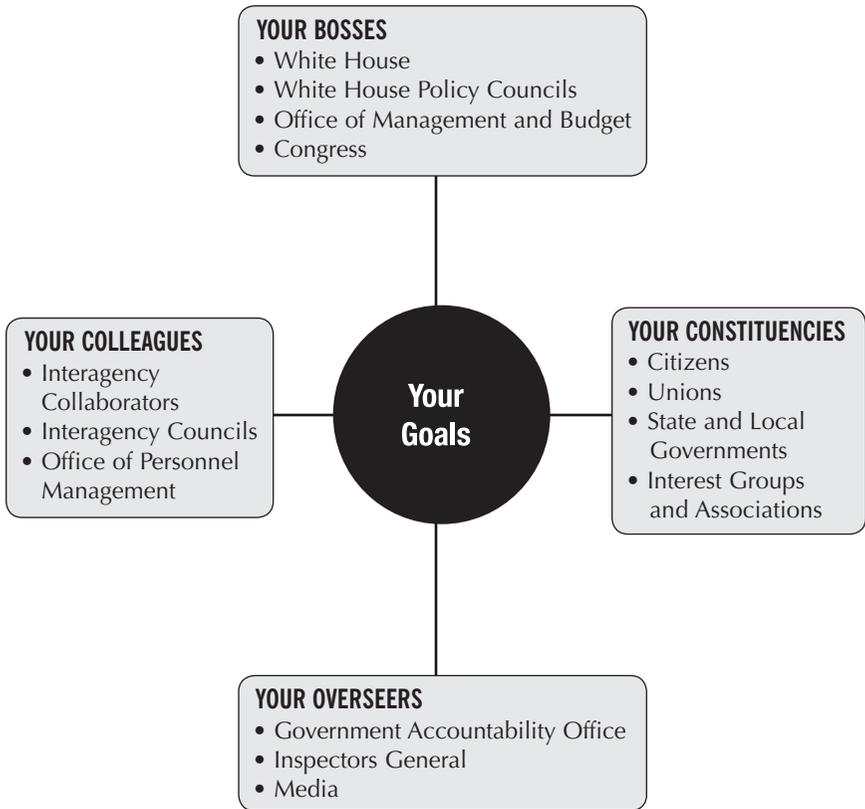
Closer to home, however, are three distinct parts of the White House on which your job literally depends. First, there is the White House itself. While you will see the president infrequently, you will often encounter a variety of special assistants to the president, each of whom works in a different White House office. They can be enormously helpful and supportive to you once you develop a good working relationship with them. Second, we focus on the four White House Policy Councils (the National Security Council, the National Economic Council, the Domestic Policy Council, and the Homeland Security Council). These councils have become increasingly important in recent years as the White House has assumed a greater leadership and coordinative role in new policy initiatives.

Last, but by no means least, is the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which coordinates the development of administration policies and decides on how much funding your agency can request from Congress. In addition, OMB will be involved in many other aspects of your position, such as reviewing proposed legislation or your testimony before Congress, as well as overseeing regulations you might propose. As in all organizations, working with your bosses is essential to your success in government.

### Your colleagues

While you will constantly be working “upward” with your bosses, you might not be as aware of the importance of working “sideways” with your colleagues. In government, the importance of your colleagues cannot be underestimated. There are likely to be few instances in which you and your agency can make a decision solely by yourselves (even after consultation

## Fourteen Stakeholders for Getting It Done



with your bosses). More common is the scenario in which your bosses will actively seek the opinion and concurrence of your colleagues in other agencies across government.

In the chapter on interagency collaborators, we recommend that you set the right tone in creating the expectation that your management team will work closely with other departments and agencies. The chapter on interagency councils recommends that you participate actively on interagency councils that invite you to become a member. You must, however, assume a different role in your participation on interagency councils. Instead of being the “boss” of your organization, you become a peer and colleague working on government-wide issues.

While it has an oversight function, we have placed the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in the colleague grouping. We recommend that you reach out to OPM to help you and your agency seek human capital flexibilities

that can assist you in better accomplishing your agency's mission. While OPM provides specific services to your agency, you can also work with them as colleagues to achieve your mission.

## **Your constituencies**

Each agency will have its own unique set of constituencies. In Part I (Six 'To Dos') we note that different constituency groups cluster around your agency. We have not attempted to "map" the specific groups that will have an interest in your particular agency. Your staff will be able to describe these groups to you, and you will soon be meeting with them to get acquainted and to begin building effective partnership relationships.

Instead, we have focused on a crosscutting set of constituencies. First, there are the citizens. You will interact with citizens in two ways. First, some citizens will be your customers, and we recommend in Part I that you meet with customers to assess their satisfaction with your agency and whether the delivery of services to them can be improved. Second, citizens are in fact the ultimate "bosses" of government and indeed have major stakes in the policies and programs of government. In our Part II chapter on citizens, we recommend that you use the latest approaches (including technology) to engage citizens on new policies or programs you are considering.

Turning to the internal side of your organization, we discuss the importance of unions as a constituency. If your agency is represented by one or more unions, develop a collaborative working relationship with them. In *The Operator's Manual for the New Administration*, we discuss the importance of working closely with all your employees, with specific attention to union representatives.

While government executives are becoming increasingly attuned to the importance of collaborating with other federal agencies, the next major challenge is for the federal government to develop more effective working relationships with state and local governments. Federal spending will become much tighter in the next four years. As a consequence, government leaders will need to find new ways to accomplish national objectives through partnerships with states, localities, and nonprofit organizations.

Finally, there are the traditional interest groups and associations. As noted above, you will quickly get to know the organizations interested in your agency. In the chapter on interest groups and associations, we stress the importance of these groups as a valuable information resource for you. There will clearly be differences of opinions between you and these groups, but the key to a successful relationship will not be agreement on all issues, but instead your ability to create an ongoing dialogue with them and to maintain a constant exchange of information between you and the organizations.

## Your overseers

In addition to looking upward to your bosses and sideways to your colleagues and constituencies, you will also need to “look over your shoulder” at your overseers. Oversight organizations are a fact of life in government. With the spending of public funds, ongoing scrutiny of those expenses will become a daily part of your life. While it is all too easy to fall into an adversarial relationship with your overseers, you should work hard to develop an effective working relationship with them.

The most well-known oversight, or watchdog, organization is the Government Accountability Office (GAO), previously known as the General Accounting Office. In the chapter on GAO, the emphasis is placed on your using GAO as a valuable information resource. While your staff, including your GAO liaison, will be busy working with GAO on specific GAO reviews under way in your agency, you can use information contained in prior and ongoing GAO studies to identify problem areas that Congress is likely to ask you about and areas that your agency will need to work on.

The second watchdog organization you will encounter is the independent Office of the Inspector General in your department or agency. Past relationships between IGs and agency heads have ranged from outright hostility to a cooperative partnership relationship. Like GAO, IGs can identify problem areas that your agency needs to focus on.

Third, you will encounter the media. The Washington media are unique. You will have an able press staff to assist you in both your proactive and reactive relationships with the media. Like all the stakeholders discussed in Part II, the media can assist you greatly in getting your message out and communicating your vision to those both inside and outside of government. As with all the stakeholders discussed, time spent with the media will be a good investment.

## A Final Word

Simply put, Washington is a tough town. Succeeding in Washington requires not only hard work (which is clearly needed), but also a highly sensitive antenna about the environment surrounding your agency. We have not attempted to “rank order” the stakeholders discussed in this book. Instead, we have provided groupings as way for you to organize your approach to each of the stakeholders.

Unlike baseball, where you don't have to get a hit every time at bat to be a success, government actually does require you to bat 1.000. You must succeed with all 14 of the stakeholder groups described in this book. Any one of them can cause problems for you. Conversely, every one of them can serve as a key leverage point for you to succeed in Washington. Assisting you in effectively using these levers is the goal of this volume.

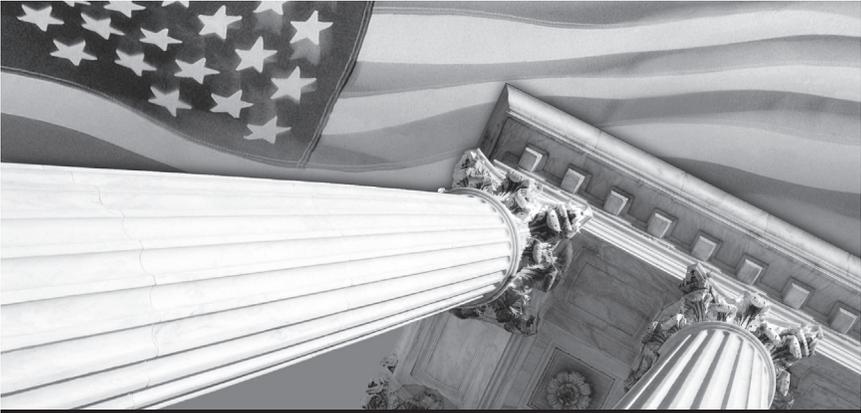
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## **PART I: SIX 'TO DOs'**

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## CHAPTER ONE

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### **Before Confirmation, Be Careful**

Learn How Things Work **Act Quickly on What Can't Wait** Develop a Vision and a Focused Agenda **Assemble Your Leadership Team** **Manage Your Environment**

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## BEFORE CONFIRMATION, BE CAREFUL

Congratulations on your appointment in the new administration. You are taking on more than a job; as you know, it is an opportunity to have an important impact on our society and the world. You are here to deliver on the new administration's programs, but you are answering to a higher calling as well. The oath you swear upon your appointment is not to the president you serve. The oath is to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States." You are part of the administration, but you are part of something greater as well.

Unfortunately, the period of time between your nomination and confirmation (when you can actually start your job) will likely be a long one—perhaps several months. It is not uncommon for delays due to factors that have nothing to do with either you or your agency. Frequently, a group of nominations may get "bundled" together and require negotiations between the White House and Congress to resolve specific issues that may or may not be related to your agency.

While waiting for confirmation, you may be tempted to start getting engaged in the work of your agency. This is almost always a bad idea as it tends to incur congressional displeasure and can compromise your being confirmed at all. Better to use this time to get to know your future agency and the issues it faces. Many agency decisions can be deferred until you are confirmed.

While waiting to get started "officially," time learning more about your future agency and its environment will be time well spent. Being effective in Washington begins with understanding how Washington works. Everyone understands the importance of politics, but it is also important to understand how the political and programmatic interact. The roles of stakeholders, the bureaucracy, and process are critical. Washington tends to have large numbers of stakeholders influencing outcomes around your programs in ways that may be difficult to discern. Effective strategies are built on understanding and leveraging the many competing interests you will find, including those that are not supportive. A good beginning is critical.

### **Stay away from your future agency during the confirmation process.**

As noted above, use your time prior to confirmation to get as much information as you can about your agency and department, your key stakeholders, the key issues, and how things work. You can meet with people in your new organization, but it is preferable to do so in a different building than the one in which your agency is located.

Prior to confirmation, don't be offended if your agency briefers sometimes hold back information that will be available to you once you are con-

firmed. They are restricted by law as to what they can share with you until you are confirmed. You cannot make decisions until you have the authority to do so. Prudence is warranted in this time period.

### **Learn who in Congress affects your agency, how they affect it, and their points of view.**

It is likely that multiple committees will oversee your agency. Authorization, appropriations, and perhaps multiple oversight committees in both the Senate and the House will be important to you. Your legislative staff will be able to brief you on which committees have jurisdiction over what issues, the views of the majority and the minority sides of each committee, the views of specific members, the topics that are driven by staff concerns, and the issues that are especially important to specific members. Understanding Congress is a full-time job, so you will probably want to make sure you have a good legislative team.

### **Start to build good relations with the Hill, but don't make commitments too soon.**

A good relationship with Congress will help you get confirmed and will be critical to your success once you are in your agency. You will be making courtesy calls on the Congress after you are nominated. Use these meetings to get to know the principals from both parties and their staffs as well. A senator's or representative's staff can be as important as the elected official on many issues. A good relationship will later be important to resolving the inevitable conflicts that will arise between the executive and legislative branches.

You may find that members of Congress may want you to make commitments for the agency. Be attentive to their requests, but don't make commitments too soon. A "too soon" commitment may often have unforeseen consequences, and it is a good idea to consult with your staff-to-be to understand what those consequences may be. Tell members of Congress you will look into the question and get back to them. Do, however, make sure to get back to them after your confirmation.

### **Limit your endorsement of previous agency positions on issues until you have had time to assess them.**

Your staff-to-be will be helping to prepare you for your confirmation hearings. Some may encourage you to embrace the agency's prior policies. Avoid doing this to the extent you can until you have had a chance to understand the issues.

Confirmation hearings are about your qualifications for the job. They are not about justifying what the agency has done in the past—notwithstanding

the briefing books the agency is giving you that do just that. A good way to frame an answer to a confirmation question on a prior agency position would be: “I have not had an opportunity yet to study the specifics of this issue in depth, but in similar situations I have done the following....”

### **Start to get to know your agency, but avoid the briefing book trap.**

Your staff-to-be will be preparing briefing materials for you. Usually, these are loose-leaf notebooks that explain the agency and its priorities in exhaustive detail. The details in the book make for excellent reference materials, but sometimes are poor guides into the most important or most urgent issues.

Follow a focused approach in this time period. Your first priority is to get confirmed with as few constraining commitments as possible. Your second priority is to get a head start on understanding the important issues facing your agency. Concentrate on understanding those issues of concern to the Hill, but use that as a path to understanding the agency as a whole.

Request your staff to structure the briefing process to fit how you like to learn. Some people like to read papers, others like to have a conversation, yet others learn best from a briefing. Tell your agency staff what style works best for you and they will be glad to adjust to your preference.

You should use the detailed agency briefing books as key reference materials. But remember that briefing books are only one source of information for you. The briefing books will give your agency’s point of view. Though important, it should be augmented with the views of customers and stakeholders. You may also want to learn what your departmental inspector general (IG) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have said about your agency. GAO may be briefing the Hill, and what they say may come up in your confirmation hearings. So time spent reviewing prior GAO reports on your agency will be time well spent.

### **Takeaways**

- Stay away from your future agency during the confirmation process.
- Learn who in Congress affects your agency, how they affect it, and their points of view.
- Start to build good relations with the Hill, but don’t make commitments too soon.
- Limit your endorsement of previous agency positions on issues until you have had time to assess them.
- Start to get to know your agency, but avoid the briefing book trap.

## CHAPTER TWO

---

### **Learn How Things Work**

**Before Confirmation, Be Careful Act Quickly  
on What Can't Wait Develop a Vision and a  
Focused Agenda Assemble Your Leadership  
Team Manage Your Environment**

---

## LEARN HOW THINGS WORK

Your agency is a large bureaucracy with a large number of career employees and relatively few political appointees. Most of the programs are managed by career executives who will typically have been with the agency longer than you will be there. The bureaucracy is both the means by which you will achieve program success and a separate culture that will both support your agenda and give continuity between administrations.

You will learn that process is king, so learn about the process. How you make a decision can be as important as the decision itself. There are processes to buy, to hire, to regulate, and to solicit advice. There are even processes to speed up the process. Successfully implementing your agency programs will depend, in part, on mastering these processes rather than letting the processes master you.

Being successful will require the ability to maneuver among and leverage the various competing interests, while overseeing a complex bureaucracy and using existing processes that can stand scrutiny. You must focus on the important few priorities while keeping the less important ones from occupying all your time or, worse, blowing up into a full-fledged crisis that thwarts your agenda and tarnishes your legacy.

To get things done, you will need to understand your customers. You will also need to understand your stakeholders, what they want and don't want, and how they influence outcomes. You will need to understand the tools your agency has available and their limitations. You will need to understand enough about how your agency operates to be able to use those tools effectively.

### **Learn what your agency's customers want.**

Your agency has customers. You should find out who your agency's customers are and what they want. Talk to representatives of the different customer communities to get a handle on their concerns and understand how they view your agency. In many cases, other federal agencies and state and local governments have programs that overlap with your own and affect the same customers. As a result, agencies are finding it more important to work together. Understanding these overlaps is important. In addition, ask your staff about what they think customers want and compare it with what you are hearing directly.

### **Develop an understanding of your agency's programs and how they achieve the outcomes you want.**

You will need an understanding of how your agency delivers programs to customers. This will also require an understanding of the role of the stakeholders in those programs since program delivery involves both your customers and your stakeholders. You will also need a high-level

understanding of how your agency operates to deliver these programs. Your agency follows complex internal procedures as part of its normal way of operating. In many cases, these are dictated by laws and regulations, but sometimes they are simply the standard procedures that have been followed in the past. You don't want to get lost in that complexity, but you need to know the dimensions of program delivery.

Your career staff understands that complexity and knows how to get things done within the bureaucracy. Get them to help you understand the internal operations of your agency and how you can get it to do what you want. The civil servants you choose to work with closely should have an understanding of the internal processes of your agency, an understanding of what you want to do, and an ability to help focus your leadership on those who most need to be led. The right ones can also help modernize those processes to be more in keeping with the needs of today's government.

### **Learn what stakeholders want and how they affect your programs.**

What your customers want is only part of the story. What stakeholders want can be equally important, and much of this book is devoted to discussing the perspectives of stakeholders with whom you will be working throughout your time in office. By stakeholders, we mean any person or organization that is not a customer of your agency but has an interest in what your agency does.

The top-level stakeholder is the Congress, through its constitutionally established relationship with the executive branch, but it is also a conduit for other stakeholder concerns. Your agency will need to work with the White House, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and other agencies and the various interagency policy councils.

Surrounding your customers will be a set of stakeholders that have an interest in how you support them. These can be the companies that support your customers, public interest groups, or state and local governments.

Your agency will also face reviews from the Government Accountability Office and your agency's Office of Inspector General. Finally, the media are stakeholders, but in a unique way. They make issues more visible, are conduits for other stakeholder concerns, and tend to frame issues in whatever way makes a more compelling story.

Your most important relationships will be agency-specific. For example, there is no single stakeholder called "industry." In reading Part II (Stakeholders), keep in mind that the most important stakeholder relationships will be those specific to your agency. Delivering any important program requires addressing stakeholder interests as well as meeting citizen or customer needs. Understanding who the stakeholders are, what their interests are, and how they affect outcomes will be critical to developing a strategy to get things done.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of stakeholders to your success. Many programs have foundered when an interested party persuaded

Congress to block some action, oftentimes occurring with no clear picture of who did it or how it was done. Your colleagues in the White House can weigh in on your programs, but may not agree with each other. The Office of Management and Budget has an enormous impact on your resources and is also intertwined with the internal operations of your agency.

Finally, keep in mind that many stakeholders have a vested interest in the status quo you are planning to change. Talk to the stakeholders; find out their concerns. Get briefed by your staff on those concerns and on how stakeholders intervene in your programs. Talk to your predecessors and find out from all of them how stakeholders weigh in. Each perspective will be a bit different, but combining those perspectives will give you a more complete picture.

### **Learn how the media affect your programs.**

Part of program delivery is conveying the value of the program and responding to its critics. Perception is important, and often the perception of events is created through coverage of an event or program in the media. Take the press seriously. Try to understand how they have framed your agency's issues in the past, so you can work to frame them the way you want to in the future. This is an area where talking to your predecessors can be particularly useful.

We offer the following four insights:

- The media will give more play to an agency mistake than an agency accomplishment. Efforts to change that are likely to be futile.
- Most stories in the mainstream press involve a hero and a villain, so finding a way to make your agency the hero can be a good strategy.
- A large number of specialized publications will be covering your programs. Those publications matter as well. The *Washington Post* is read by the White House, but the trade press is read by your most engaged stakeholders and you will need to deal with both.
- The media are fragmenting as a result of the Internet and new technology. The role of the authoritative press remains important, but the role of bloggers and other informal media is rising. Pay attention to the informal media as well.

### **Get out of your office.**

You can learn only so much from briefings and meetings. Get out of the office. Meet your frontline employees where they work and talk to them about their jobs. Do the same with your customers. You will not have the time to do this often, but finding opportunities to short-circuit the systems filtering the information that reaches you can be useful.

## Learn the flash points and opportunities.

Every program has hot-button issues that trigger extreme reactions from stakeholder groups. These are often the product of earlier rounds of discussion on an issue and may generate controversy that is disproportionate to the issue at hand. Knowing these flash points beforehand will help you in deciding when or if to take them on. Actions that look easy may be hard. Alternatively, recent changes may have made what used to be difficult easier, so there may be opportunities as well.

## Begin to assess your senior career staff, but defer judgment.

Federal personnel rules impose a 120-day period, beginning with your taking office, during which you may not involuntarily reassign members of the Senior Executive Service in your organization. If you bring in a senior political appointee, then the 120-day period starts again for those senior executives reporting to the new appointee.

### Political Appointees' Impressions of Careerists

#### First Impressions

*"[At first,] they were skeptical of me and our agenda."*

*"Very risk averse."*

*"Seemed tentative and afraid to give their real opinions."*

*"Too much focus on process."*

*"I was at a research organization, and the staff was highly knowledgeable and motivated."*

*"I valued their input."*

*"They seemed very eager to please."*

*"Some of the careerists thought we were crazy!"*

#### Later Impressions

*"They wanted to play in the policy process."*

*"The civil servants really trained me."*

*"They really responded to good management."*

*"Most of them understood that I belonged at the table to fight for certain policies."*

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From "Getting to Know You: Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees and Career Executives" by Joseph A. Ferrara and Lynn C. Ross. In *Learning the Ropes: Insights for Political Appointees*, Mark A. Abramson and Paul R. Lawrence, editors (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

This law is intended to give you and your senior political staff time to get to know your senior executives before making important personnel decisions. As using them effectively will be critical to your success, this is a good time to start understanding their strengths and weaknesses. An argument they may make against something you want to do may be because they see real problems that are new to you. Or, the argument may be primarily because your approach is new to them. Figuring out which will be critical.

The ethic of the career civil service is to serve the political leadership of the executive branch. In addition, the senior career staff sees itself as serving

### Myths (and Realities) About Career Civil Servants

Myth	Reality
Careerists are loyal to the previous administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most careerists check their politics at the door and define their role in terms of the policy process, not the administration’s political agenda.</li> <li>• Most careerists see their role as technical, not partisan.</li> </ul>
Careerists don’t work hard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most careerists work extremely hard under tight deadlines and often stressful conditions.</li> <li>• Careerists are “running a marathon”; political appointees are “running a sprint.”</li> </ul>
Careerists are mostly interested in job security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most careerists are motivated by a strong sense of public service, mission dedication, participation in the policy process, and intellectual challenge.</li> </ul>
Careerists always say no to new ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most careerists are not “against” new policy ideas but are sensitive to the various implementation challenges.</li> <li>• Careerists’ many years of experience have conditioned them to see change in very pragmatic terms.</li> </ul>
Careerists want their political bosses to fail.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most careerists want their political executives to succeed because they believe in the system and because they want their agencies to succeed.</li> </ul>

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From “Getting to Know You: Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees and Career Executives” by Joseph A. Ferrara and Lynn C. Ross. In *Learning the Ropes: Insights for Political Appointees*, Mark A. Abramson and Paul R. Lawrence, editors (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

the public good. Like you, their oath is to the Constitution and they take it seriously. Odds are they have been with the government, and perhaps even your agency, for decades. The recurring myth that they are loyal to the previous political appointees is almost never true. It is true, however, that they tend to see issues from the agency's perspective. This is both good and bad.

Your senior career staff knows the history of how programs got to where they are today. They understand stakeholder interests and are likely to have credibility with those same stakeholders. They know what has succeeded in the past and what was tried and failed. They will have insights on those failures. They are likely to be quite loyal to the agency. They will be ready to support you in where you want to take it.

Your senior career staff is the product of a rough meritocracy. Despite the dysfunctional nature of some of the bureaucracy, careerists at the senior level tend to be highly skilled and very effective within the constraints they face. They can get things done. If running large organizations, they know how to manage within the legal and regulatory constraints of federal service. If managing budgets, they know how to get resources from OMB and the Congress and allocate them to programs in accordance with agency priorities. If working with Congress, they know which argument to use with which committee and staff member.

You may want to look at your senior career staff across two dimensions. The first is what are normally categorized as skills for the job. They are the standard factors like knowledge, expertise, and the ability to work with people. These are critical to the effectiveness of your organization. They are particularly critical because much of getting things done depends on knowledge that only the career people have.

The second critical dimension needed for success is temperament. Do they display neutral competence? Are they objective and do they give a balanced view of the pros and cons of a strategy? Are they too wedded to the status quo? Finally, do they begin with the outcome and then address the constraints or the other way around? People who begin with the outcome often get more done than those who begin with the constraints.

### **Avoid the appearance of unethical behavior.**

Ethics matter in government as they do in all walks of life. How they matter differs. The government ethics rules are about appearances as well as actualities. A government official does not have the latitude to behave in ways that would be well within norms in the private sector. Of perhaps more importance, allegations of ethical improprieties can be used against your policy agenda. You will receive an ethics briefing on government ethics laws and regulations, but here are some useful rules of thumb:

- Don't keep gifts of value. Accept them graciously and pass them to the appropriate agency official.
- Don't mix government and personal travel.

- Don't use someone's private jet for official travel and reimburse the owner for the "full fare equivalent."
- Don't approve your own expense reports. You may have the authority to do so, but give that job to someone else with explicit instructions to question any expense that might be troubling.
- Don't let another organization pay for official travel, even if your staff tells you it is legal.
- Don't get personally involved in contracting. This area has myriad rules that are easy for a newcomer to transgress. Tell your contracting staff what you need and they will work to get it done.
- Don't hire—and don't encourage anybody else in your organization to hire—relatives, no matter how qualified they might be.
- Don't have federal employees do personal services for you or your family, even though they may be eager to do so. Doing so will only spell trouble.

Finally, be careful allowing your staff to do all the legal things they may want to do for you that might look questionable from the outside. This is not an ethical issue per se, but the media love to do stories on how the taxpayer is being fleeced for an office renovation or expenses such as putting an agency seal on towels or soap.

### **Learn the politics.**

There will be a political dimension to your agency's programs that is likely to be new to you. Learning it will be important to your effectiveness. We mention this last, as you will be more effective if you begin with the program and adjust it to the politics rather than the other way around.

### **Takeaways**

- Learn what your agency's customers want.
- Develop an understanding of your agency's programs and how they achieve the outcomes you want.
- Learn what stakeholders want and how they affect your programs.
- Learn how the media affect your programs.
- Get out of your office.
- Learn the flash points and opportunities.
- Begin to assess your senior career staff, but defer judgment.
- Avoid the appearance of unethical behavior.
- Learn the politics.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### **Act Quickly on What Can't Wait**

Before Confirmation, Be Careful **Learn How Things Work** Develop a Vision and a Focused Agenda **Assemble Your Leadership Team**  
**Manage Your Environment**

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## ACT QUICKLY ON WHAT CAN'T WAIT

Developing an understanding of how things work will be one of your early priorities, but you will also need to take some near-term actions. The fastest way to learn is asking questions of your agency's career staff, your agency's customers, your key stakeholders, and your fellow political appointees. Use them all.

### **Start to communicate immediately with a short positive message to the staff of your new agency.**

Depending on the size of your agency, you may never meet most of your employees, but they will be critical to your success. One of your first acts should be to communicate with them so you can start the relationship on the right foot. You may not know everything you want to do at the beginning, but you still have things to say. Give them a broad-brush picture of what you want to accomplish. Tell them you value their mission and you value their contribution to it. Tell them that part of your approach will be to listen to them to get their insights. Convey a sense of urgency. Don't say what they have been doing is wrong and they need to change, but don't promise that there won't be changes, either.

These early messages are the foundation for future communications which will get into specifics that may involve change or overruling staff recommendations. Use memos, e-mails, videos, town meetings, blogs, or some combination of these communication vehicles. Use whatever feels most comfortable for you. The key is conveying a positive message at the beginning.

Your early messages should be aspirational, framed in terms of outcomes that matter, with a sense of urgency and an emphasis on listening as part of your approach. And then follow through.

### **Start to communicate immediately with agency customers and stakeholders as well.**

It is equally important to start communicating with your customers and key stakeholders. They, too, will be wondering what you and the administration plan to do. A short, positive, aspirational message will help you get started on the right foot. You can then build on it as you implement your program. You may find it necessary to send different messages to different groups. They, of course, need to be consistent. They should not be detailed, since specifics will come later. These messages build a foundation for future conversations.

**Start to build relationships with customers and stakeholders.**

Getting anything important done in the federal government requires dealing with multiple parties. These include the Congress, public interest groups, and industry. These also include other parts of the federal government, other oversight bodies, and the media. It's a long list. It is usually a good idea not to overestimate one's own power as a consequence. Learn who matters on what issue and from what viewpoint and start to build a relationship with the key players. This will be easier to do before there is a contentious issue and will make that issue easier to resolve.

**Find people in your agency who can help you master processes to meet your needs.**

As noted earlier, the Washington environment puts a high premium on process, and how you engage can be as important as what you accomplish. One discounts process at one's peril. Congress has delegated regulatory authority to agencies that have the authority to make decisions subject to the requirement that they follow certain procedures. Auditors and inspectors general evaluate agencies on whether they followed proper procedures. Criticisms of new policies are sometimes more about the process followed than the merits of the new policy.

One of the reasons process is so important is that everyone can understand it. Many issues in Washington are complex and different interests put their own "spin" on them. It is hard for an outsider to figure out the merits of the different policy positions and what is really going on. The public finds it easier to understand that a process was or was not followed. Billion-dollar programs have gotten into trouble over who bought lunch for whom, who met with whom, or who gave what advice. Getting a new policy or program in place will require care in doing it through a process that is viewed as fair, open, and objective.

Find people who can look at what you want to do through a "process" lens and still get things done. On a more mundane level, don't get personally involved in contracting; make sure you have acquisition experts working for you who can get you access to good contractor support quickly. If you are overseeing a regulatory agency, be very careful in any discussions involving those regulations. Rule making follows rigorous procedures that specify how you must make regulatory decisions. Your Office of General Counsel can assist you.

**Find and fix the "ticking bombs."**

Out of all the programs your agency is running or planning, some will be "ticking bombs" with a high likelihood of visible failure. Though often not predictable, much can be learned about them from talking to your

staff, agency customers, and other stakeholders. Your predecessors had an incentive to kick problems to you that could be deferred from their watch. Act quickly to find out what those are and address them. Get ahead of the problems. You may not be able to address all of them, but get to the worst. Have a contingency plan for the others. Some leaders have instituted a “pause and reflect” on programs when they arrive at an agency. If you opt to do that, make sure it is of short duration as the longer the pause, the larger the number of new “ticking bombs.”

### **Get control of key budget and key agency actions.**

Some decisions can't wait until you understand them fully. Move quickly to get control of your budget. Where is the money going? What is it being spent on? What is the process for reprogramming it? Who outside your agency needs to agree (typically OMB and the appropriations committees, but sometimes others)? What is the lead time needed between budget availability and the ability to spend the money? Budgeting, like many government processes, can get quite arcane, but understanding the mechanics can be quite important. An investment in understanding some, but not all, of the arcana can pay off handsomely.

By the same token, your agency is involved in multiple actions, many of which may be extremely important. They were started long before you arrived under policies you may wish to revisit. These might be regulatory actions or some other kind of agency action. Get a handle on the key actions in the “pipeline”; understand what they are and the consequences of delay.

### **Make sure agency operations are running effectively.**

The federal government is designed to keep running whether or not there is a political appointee at the helm. The career bureaucracy will continue to manage ongoing programs. They will defer major actions that require a policy-level decision. If the decision cannot be delayed (for example, because of a court order), they will brief you or someone else at the political level. The procedures have been developed over decades and the career staff has had plenty of practice since it is not uncommon for a Senate-confirmed political job to be vacant for a considerable period.

The basic management processes of government will continue to run. Nonetheless, you should have regular meetings on agency operations and satisfy yourself that programs are running smoothly and the people in charge are doing the right things. However, your priority at this stage should be more issue- and program-specific.

**Make sure your early political hires are aligned with you.**

At the very beginning, you may have very few political appointees with you. Other than the people you have brought with you, those that are there tend to move on to other jobs after just a few months. There will be a rush to get jobs filled quickly so your agency can move quickly to implement the president's agenda. Some of those jobs need Senate confirmation, which means they will take time to fill. Others that don't require confirmation can be filled immediately. The White House and others will be making suggestions on individuals for jobs. Some of those suggestions will be stronger than others.

The candidates presented to you will demonstrate a wide range of skills that may or may not fit your needs and will have an equally wide range of political supporters. They will be more diverse in their career plans than your existing agency staff. Evaluate them across two dimensions. As with the career staff, the first dimension is the matching of their skills to the requirements of the job. The second is that they be in alignment with what you want to do. In other words, they will support you rather than a different political constituency.

Many former political appointees have found it more difficult to keep their political staff aligned with their agenda than the career staff. This is particularly important in the early days when there is so much to do with so few people and personnel decisions need to be made very quickly. Keep in mind that once you have taken someone on, you may need White House approval to remove him or her. It is easier to say hello than goodbye.

Finally, your success will depend on forming a joint senior management team that includes both political appointees and senior career staff. When putting together your political staff, think about how the two communities will fit together down the road.

**Get started.**

Triage your efforts into: (1) immediate, (2) short term, and (3) long term. Work to keep a balance of your energies across all three time horizons. Your agency will not be standing still while you are figuring out the internal and external environment, deciding on your staffing, and getting a handle on actions that can't wait. You will also be getting engaged in the operations of your agency. Some decisions can be deferred until you can get a better handle on the pros and cons, but many cannot. You will have to get the best advice you can at the time and combine it with your own expertise to start moving forward. Don't let unmade decisions sit and fester; it is often better to make a pretty good decision right away than to wait until the picture is clearer.

## Takeaways

- Start to communicate immediately with a short positive message to the staff of your new agency.
- Start to communicate immediately with agency customers and stakeholders as well.
- Start to build relationships with customers and stakeholders.
- Find people in your agency who can help you master processes to meet your needs.
- Find and fix the “ticking bombs.”
- Get control of key budget and key agency actions.
- Make sure agency operations are running effectively.
- Make sure your early political hires are aligned with you.
- Get started.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### **Develop a Vision and a Focused Agenda**

Before Confirmation, Be Careful Learn How Things Work Act Quickly on What Can't Wait Assemble Your Leadership Team Manage Your Environment

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## DEVELOP A VISION AND A FOCUSED AGENDA

You may have come to your agency to manage an ongoing operation that is working reasonably well following traditional processes. You may have come to help your agency deliver new programs. You may have the goal of completely transforming your agency and redefining its mission.

Your efforts at your agency may be an integral part of the administration's core agenda with regular senior-level direction from the White House. Or, you may find that it is almost completely up to you to decide what your agency priorities should be. Whatever your situation, you will want to convey your overall vision but concentrate on a few key priorities.

### **Develop your vision for your agency with input from your political and career staff, but make sure it is your own.**

A vision gives a "big picture" view of where you want to take your agency. It should clearly describe the broad outcomes you want to have accomplished when you leave government down the road. Your vision should be stated simply and not weighed down with too many adjectives or dependent clauses. It needs to be aligned with your agency's core values and programs. It needs to be realistic, but it needs to be aspirational and push your agency beyond what it is achieving today. It should make sense to the agency's customers. Ideally, it will give your employees a line of sight between what they do in their jobs and the vision.

Your agency should have a strategic plan for the long run, tactical plans for the short run, a mission statement describing what it does today, as well as a vision statement. In some cases, these will be replicated at the sub-agency level, so you may have multiple mission and vision statements. Refer to these when developing your own vision. They make a good beginning point, but you might want to make some changes.

Test your vision against the administration's agenda and your political and senior career staff, but make sure it is yours. Your career staff can tell you how what you say may be heard, what words are "loaded," and how your vision compares to what has been tried in the past.

Work with your senior political and career staff in crafting the vision, but don't let a committee write it. Committees add adjectives and clauses as they labor to cover all the contingencies. You want something that inspires, not something exhaustive. Good visions tell a story in which people can see themselves.

### **Convey a sense of urgency.**

If your vision is centered on outcomes that matter, it is important to get there sooner rather than later. The tendency in Washington is for complexity,

scale, and diffusion of responsibility to slow things down. If you don't convey a sense of urgency, your agency may never get there.

### **Communicate the vision.**

An effective vision drives behavior. It cannot be simply a slogan on a wall or a new brochure. It needs to be real. You will need to communicate the vision regularly. You will need stories that illustrate what it means. Your agency will need to have short-term objectives that get it closer to that vision.

You will need a strategy to convey the vision to more than your immediate staff. They have a good idea of what you are looking for, but there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of others who lack that advantage. Talking about what you want to achieve and why it matters will be important. You can leverage your personal efforts with staff to help with written material and choosing the right media venues. You may even want to start your own blog.

Communicating your vision will be critical to keeping your agency on track and should be a priority for your communications organization. It will take a continuous effort to communicate to the rank and file what you want to do and why it matters in a way that enables them to see themselves in the picture. The more you can convey what you want in terms that make sense to them, the more effective your organization will be. It is almost impossible to over-communicate. So many voices are talking to them that even your voice will have trouble getting through. The same is true of your key stakeholders. Keep the message simple and in terms that matter to the customers of your agency and repeat it over and over again. Make sure the message makes sense in the larger context of what the administration wants to deliver.

### **Harness agency plans to your new vision.**

The agency strategic and tactical plans will need to be adjusted to reflect your new vision. There may be budget implications as well. Task your staff to make those changes and brief you quarterly on their progress. Do not get too engaged in the details, but use the meetings to assess whether the agency is moving in the right direction overall. Use the agency's existing planning mechanisms rather than develop new ones.

### **Focus on no more than three priorities where you can personally make a difference.**

You have more to get done than you can get done. Your agency faces a large number of pressing issues calling for your attention. Many of them you know about and care about because that is what made you want to take this

job in the first place. You can't do them all, and the more you spread your energies, the less you will get done. When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. You will need to decide on no more than three big things that you want to accomplish during your tenure. Pick ones that matter and are possible. Tie them to your vision.

You may want to get up every morning and go through a mental checklist of how what you do that day will advance the top three. This does not mean that you ignore everything else your agency does, but it does mean that you keep personally focused on the three.

Keep your goals in outcome terms and revisit them regularly. Keep asking yourself:

- What does success look like?
- What do I want to look back on as having achieved?
- What outputs or milestones do I need to achieve this month to move forward to getting one of the three outcomes?
- Am I being pulled off course by the crisis of the moment?

You should regularly look “up” and make sure you are still going in the right direction.

### **Develop a strategy for your top three priorities in consultation with both political and career staff.**

An effective strategy will combine what you and your fellow political appointees know and want to do with the expertise and resources of your agency. Developing that strategy will take a joint effort of the two communities. Your career staff has a huge amount of knowledge and experience that you will need. Many of them have dedicated their careers to the programs you now lead, but they cannot get things done without your political leadership. Each community needs the other to get it done.

Listen to the career staff, but weigh their advice carefully. They may feel more limited in their options than you or your political staff. Combining the

### **Now What?**

“The challenge in Washington, I began to realize, was not getting the job, but figuring out what to do with it.”

– David Kessler, former Commissioner,  
Food and Drug Administration

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From *A Question of Intent: A Great American Battle with a Deadly Industry* by David Kessler (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001).

two viewpoints will lead to a better result. Much can be learned from discussions around some basic questions:

- What has been tried before that was similar to what I am proposing? Why did it work or not work and how do I know?
- What are the legal and regulatory constraints? If your staff tells you something is illegal or contrary to regulation, get them to show you exactly where it is written in law or regulation. There is a lot of lore within the government about what is legal or illegal that is more tradition than fact. Probe to make sure this is not tradition or legal interpretation that could be interpreted in some other way. But assess whether an incorrect legal argument is fronting for a valid policy or stakeholder issue.
- Who cares about what we are doing? What do they want? Will they weigh in and try to affect the outcome? In what way? How do we know? How should we respond?

### **Make sure there is a person accountable for implementing each of your priorities.**

At the broadest level, a strategy requires a goal and a plan to get there. That plan includes the basics like putting someone in charge, making sure resources are available and managed, and following up periodically to make sure progress is being made. That strategy should place a particular emphasis on stakeholder management and be designed to adjust to contingencies.

The strategy should provide you and your agency with a road map to successfully negotiate a path through all the diverse interests that make Washington so difficult. An effective strategy leverages supporters and neutralizes adversaries. Resist the temptation to concentrate only on supporters. Concentrate on groups who disagree with you or are neutral. It is often more important to pay more attention to those who disagree with you than those who agree. The nature of Washington is such that it is easier to stop something new than it is to do something new, and neutrals don't always stay neutral.

As noted earlier, your strategy to achieve your top priorities will be a product of the insights of your political staff as well as the knowledge and experience from your career staff. The combination of political knowledge and agency experience will give you a far stronger approach than either community could do on its own. Although you will want to keep some distance from the mechanics of executing a strategy, you will want to make sure that there are good answers to the following questions:

- Who will be in charge and accountable for delivery? Why does that person have the qualifications to do this job? Does that person have control of program resources or is he or she dependent on others in my organization?

- Too many projects in Washington look great on paper, but are rolled out without doing the up-front work to give them a chance of success. They are lumped in as additional duties for people already overbooked, with no clear picture of where the resources will come from after the initial phase. Ensure that there is a management framework to deliver.
- What resources will be needed in dollars and staffing? You will need to make sure resources are set aside and fenced off to support the program. Will the fence hold or will the next priority bleed off the resources? You don't want to fall into the trap of your agency always pursuing the next better idea before it finishes the last one.
- How much of my personal time will be needed and in what ways?

Finally, your strategy should plan for the inevitable surprises. No important project unfolds as planned in this environment. Stakeholders weigh in and force adjustments to objectives. Congress does not always appropriate all the necessary funds. Contract award dates slip. Being flexible and always having a “plan B” are key ingredients of success. That said, there may come a time when plan B is so far from the original goal that it is better to cancel and move on. Thinking through that contingency at the beginning is a useful, albeit depressing, exercise. Some deals are worse than no deal, but that can be harder to discern months later, after the expenditure of major resources in the heat of the moment.

### **Make sure there is an effective governance framework for your top three priorities.**

Big initiatives cross organizational lines or depend on other initiatives to be successful. Successful big initiatives depend on sound program management, but they also depend on clarity about who makes decisions on what. Your “top three” priorities will be no exception. You not only need to have a sound strategy and someone strong in charge of execution, but also need to ensure that the program management operates in a governance framework that will allow it to succeed. Some of this can be handled by your staying actively engaged, but you will find it easier if there is a clear process for raising and resolving problems that does not require your personal attention.

### **Relentlessly follow up.**

The daily pressures on your time and attention will make it hard to concentrate on those few items that will be your most important legacy. Your agency will be buffeted by many issues that risk displacing your key priorities, pushing them to the back burner. Find a way to keep the top three always in front of you. Regularly follow up with those tasked with implementing the strategy for your highest priorities. Probe. People tend to put the best face

on what the boss wants. Get second opinions and compare to the internal reports. You want a realistic, not an optimistic, picture. You may want to make your top three a topic at every staff meeting.

Track measurable milestones, monitor key stakeholder relationships, and watch for the unpleasant surprise. Don't let the urgent drive out the important, and don't succumb to the tyranny of the many. Concentrating on what matters most will help you deliver on what matters most.

Your staff, particularly your senior staff, may need regular reminders of what is important. Follow up with them so they stay focused on your priorities. Just as you will wake up every morning thinking about how to make progress on the things that matter most to you, you want them to wake up every morning thinking the same.

## Takeaways

- Develop your vision for your agency with input from your political and career staff, but make sure it is your own.
- Convey a sense of urgency.
- Communicate the vision.
- Harness agency plans to your new vision.
- Focus on no more than three priorities where you can personally make a difference.
- Develop a strategy for your top three priorities in consultation with both political and career staff.
- Make sure there is a person accountable for implementing each of your priorities.
- Make sure there is an effective governance framework for your top three priorities.
- Relentlessly follow up.



## CHAPTER FIVE

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### **Assemble Your Leadership Team**

Before Confirmation, Be Careful **Learn How Things Work** Act Quickly on What Can't Wait  
Develop a Vision and a Focused Agenda  
**Manage Your Environment**

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## ASSEMBLE YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Your team needs to be able to effectively develop and implement all your agency's programs, not just your "top three." Your programs will cross many interests. The team will need to work effectively with multiple stakeholders on both the programmatic and political dimensions. The team will need to address a complex external environment, a complex internal environment, tight resource constraints, and cumbersome processes.

Agencies are too complicated to be managed at a distance by a small cadre of political appointees developing a strategy and then directing a larger body of career staff to execute against that strategy. Such an approach will run into obstacles that could have been avoided with a wider initial conversation between your political staff and career staff. It needs to be a joint effort.

### **Leverage the senior career staff: Find whom to listen to and on what.**

Your agency is large and complex, with all the vices of a large bureaucracy. It has a cadre of senior career managers who are ready and able to get that large bureaucracy to do what you want it to do. Those senior career managers support your agency's mission and recognize that they need political leadership to achieve it. Those senior managers will be critical to your success, but are also part of that same bureaucracy.

The senior career managers overseeing this bureaucracy are skilled at getting the bureaucracy to move forward, although their approaches may sometimes stick too close to the traditional. The vehicle may be obsolete, but they know how to drive it. You will find many people in your agency at both senior and lower levels that have an entrepreneurial bent. Unlike the private sector entrepreneur who pursues profit, these government entrepreneurs pursue program results or transformation. They care about the mission and know how to get the larger organization to move in a desired direction. Many have good ideas on how to improve service delivery that will assist you in your own agenda. Your senior leadership team can help you leverage this entrepreneurial energy as well as get the bureaucratic behemoth you now manage to move in the right direction.

However, you may need different skills from those your agency needed in the past. You may find some of your staff too wedded to the status quo and too quick to explain why the way things work is the way things should be. Your most important skill will be figuring out whom to listen to and on what. When some people tell you not to take a course of action, they may be warning you against very real dangers. When others warn you against a course of action, they may simply be embracing traditional ways of operating.

You will need to figure out who are the former and who are the latter. Further, you will find that one person has good insights in one area and poor ones in another. One may be good on the politics, but weak on program realities. One may be strong on program issues, but oblivious to the political

ramifications. Leveraging the right strengths from the right people leads to success. Not listening at all or listening to the wrong people on the wrong issues risks failure.

### **Hire senior political staff with the right political talents.**

Your career staff is largely in place, but will be less effective without political leadership. Selection of your political appointees will be among your most important decisions. The selection of political appointees often requires approval from the White House. Your selections will need to meet the needs of both you and the White House. Most of the selection criteria will be specific to your agency and the job, but some are more general in nature.

- Choose appointees who have the talents and existing relationships to work effectively with political interests outside your agency and with your stakeholders. They will be particularly important in working with your agency's key constituencies.
- Choose appointees who have the technical and people skills needed for the specific job. You will be under pressure to employ political staff that the administration would like to place for various reasons. Not all candidates have the right skills for your needs. Match skills to needs.
- Choose appointees who have energy and are committed to your agenda. They should see the larger picture and commit to stick around for a while. Many appointees have a short time horizon for a job. It needs to be long enough to meet your needs.
- Finally, at the risk of being indelicate, choose appointees who will support you over other political interests. Most political appointments involve some balancing of different political interests. Different wings of the party, different geographic regions, and different congressional support all come into play. You will need political staff that is loyal to you and your agenda first.

The right mix of political staff will be crucial to achieving your goals.

### **Blend political and career: Leverage their different strengths.**

Your success will depend on your ability to build an effective senior management team to carry out your and the administration's agenda. It will need to be a blend of senior political and career staff working together. It should not be an inner circle of political appointees who then communicate with the career staff. That road leads to failure as programs with major flaws not visible to the political staff get started and later need to be adjusted or, worse, fail. Better to fix the problems internally as part of the design than fix them publicly as part of a redesign.

Political appointees often begin their tenure with reservations about the career staff. Invariably, they leave government service with a high opinion of

## Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees

Rule	Illustration
Engage the career staff and listen to their advice—even if you don't heed it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the career staff in agency deliberations.</li> <li>• Actively solicit their analysis and recommendations.</li> </ul>
Show the career staff that you respect them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read your careerists' résumés.</li> <li>• Understand their skills and what they bring to the table.</li> <li>• Make it clear that you are the decision maker, but treat them as a partner.</li> </ul>
Spend some time learning the details.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask lots of questions—particularly as you enter office.</li> <li>• Find out why some initiatives have worked and others haven't.</li> <li>• Knowing the details gives you stronger credibility within the agency and improves your chances of achieving your agenda.</li> </ul>
Have a clear and limited set of objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivate the career staff with ambitious but achievable objectives.</li> <li>• Make sure the careerists know where you're going.</li> <li>• Make sure you know where you're going.</li> </ul>
Be willing to compromise and admit mistakes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realize that sometimes you have to give a little to gain a little.</li> <li>• Be strong but pragmatic.</li> <li>• Take responsibility for your mistakes.</li> </ul>
Don't forget about the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay attention to organizational stewardship.</li> <li>• Take on bureaucratic and administrative problems within the agency.</li> <li>• Make an effort to attend job fairs and new employee orientation events.</li> <li>• Don't shy away from tough human resource management issues.</li> </ul>
Communicate, communicate, communicate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constantly communicate your goals.</li> <li>• Constantly give the career staff feedback about ongoing agency deliberations.</li> <li>• Make sure that the staff understands why decisions have been made the way they were.</li> <li>• Give the staff feedback on their performance.</li> </ul>

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From "Getting to Know You: Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees and Career Executives" by Joseph A. Ferrara and Lynn C. Ross. In *Learning the Ropes: Insights for Political Appointees*, Mark A. Abramson and Paul R. Lawrence, editors (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

the majority of the career staff they have worked with, lauding their ability, knowledge, work ethic, and integrity. Interestingly, surveys of career staff after the fact have them saying the same kinds of things about the political appointees they have served under.

That said, what is true of the average is not true for all. You need to build a team that delivers on your agenda. That means you need people committed to the mission and with the right skills for their job, not some other job. They also need to be able to work together and resolve the inevitable conflicts.

Three geniuses that cannot work together may be worse than three solid people who can. You will need to assess your senior career staff as individuals and decide whether they are the right fit for where you want to go or whether they might best support the government somewhere else. Consult with your human resources staff if you want to move people, as process is particularly difficult in the personnel arena.

### **Recognize that political appointees and careerists have different roles and responsibilities.**

Despite having stressed the importance of a joint political/career team, it is worth emphasizing that they are each part of distinct communities. The two communities have different roles that need to fit together well for success. Careerists tend to manage down and concentrate more on service delivery.

Politicals tend to manage up and out and work on managing the stakeholders and the message. The political community is part of an administration that will last four to eight years and then move on. They bring innovation, a new agenda, and the political connections to bring it about. They usually make or advocate policy. They are subject to different personnel rules and will be involved in political activities that are forbidden to career employees.

The career workforce tends to have a longer time horizon with the federal government, although the old lifetime employment model appears to be declining. It brings continuity and the operational skills to ensure programs are carried on from prior administrations or beyond the current one. It tends to be more the implementer of policy than the maker of policy. It is subject to different personnel rules and cannot be involved in political activity.

### **Be careful how you blend the political and career jobs.**

To a large degree, political and career jobs will be defined before you arrive. Political jobs tend to be reserved for senior policy makers and their immediate support staff or for positions in which the administration conveys its views to the public. Career jobs tend to be more operational or reserved to ensure the impartiality or the public's confidence in the impartiality of the government.

Placing political appointees in operational jobs carries some risks. If you place a political appointee between career employees in an operational

## The Role of the Careerist

Careerists want to feel like they are contributing to the mission of their organizations. If political managers cut them out of processes or if their advice is rarely sought, they suffer from a sort of professional identity crisis. Such an identity crisis negatively affects their job satisfaction and motivation. Ultimately, the productivity and the effectiveness of the organization will be negatively affected, too.

Careerists are the institutional memory of American public administration... They draw the policy maps that connect the past, present, and future. They are the keepers of the institutional "lore" and can tell political appointees the stories that explain what has and hasn't worked before. As Richard Neustadt once wrote, "What makes lore invaluable is the sad fact that no institutional sources of memory exist as substitutes, save patchily, by happenstance, at higher executive levels of American government. Lore is almost all there is. Without it, available documentation tends to be ambiguous, misleading, or perverse."

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management chain, you risk reducing the operational efficiency of your organization. The careerists will be inclined to look for a political "sign-off" or feel the need to clear actions at a higher level. The appointee is like a "circuit breaker" in your management accountability chain that will regularly have to be reset.

This has nothing to do with the skills of the political and everything to do with organizational culture. It can be overcome, but needs to be addressed at the beginning. A simple example is when a career executive manages a national program with regional operations under a political appointee. Expect simple operational decisions to come back to your senior political staff for resolution, taking time away from your real agenda and slowing your agency's reaction time. Unless you address this up front, you or your senior staff will be refereeing operational disputes.

In the long run, this can also have an impact on your legacy. One of the virtues of the career bureaucracy is continuity. What begins under you is more likely to continue when it is run by careerists. If the program is controversial, its likelihood of continuing is reduced to the degree it is under the direct management of a political appointee. You may want to have political appointees in operational jobs as you get started, but at some point you will want to move careerists into those jobs for your legacy's sake.

## Differences Between Political Appointees and Career Civil Servants

Factor	Political appointees	Careerists
Role perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Determine the nation’s business”</li> <li>• Focused on achieving policy outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Do the nation’s business”</li> <li>• Focused on ensuring a fair, open, and sound decision process</li> </ul>
Partisanship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affiliated with a political party</li> <li>• Serve a particular president</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonpartisan on the job</li> <li>• Serve various presidents</li> </ul>
Professional experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often a mix of government, academic, and private sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government has been their main career</li> </ul>
Tenure of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come in and go out</li> <li>• Average about two years in their positions, about four years in their agency, and about nine years of government service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In for the long term</li> <li>• Senior executives average four years in their positions, 19 years in their agency, and more than 25 years of government service</li> </ul>
Time perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tend to have a shorter-term outlook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tend to have a longer-term outlook</li> </ul>

From “Getting to Know You: Rules of Engagement for Political Appointees and Career Executives” by Joseph A. Ferrara and Lynn C. Ross. In *Learning the Ropes: Insights for Political Appointees*, Mark A. Abramson and Paul R. Lawrence, editors (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

### **Keep political-appointees-only meetings rare and reserve them for political matters.**

Your effectiveness in getting your agency to do what you want it to do will depend on your ability to build an effective joint political/career team. Your staff meetings should be joint, as should most of the meetings involving the management of your agency. Nonetheless, you will find that you occasionally need to meet separately with your political staff on political issues. Such meetings might cover political strategy or campaigns. These are necessary and the careerists should not be there. However, you will have more success running your agency if the two communities regularly work together in policy development and implementation.

### **Put it all together, decide whom to depend on and for what.**

Step one in harnessing the power of the career bureaucracy is figuring out whom to listen to and on what. But that is only step one. The more critical

step is figuring out whom to depend on and for what. This applies to both the career and political side of your organization. You will find most of your career staff to have the right combination of knowledge and inclination to support your agenda. Some may not be in the best positions to exploit the full force of their talents and need to move to new positions. Others may not be a good fit for what you want to accomplish and need to move as well.

Your success will depend on how well you put together this joint political/career team to deliver on your agenda. Some of this will be the matching of skills to the job, but some of this will be finding the right “chemistry” between your politicals and careerists. If you have a good team that works well together, you can get it done.

### **Don’t reorganize your agency.**

One last thought: Reorganize only as a last resort. Government reorganizations consume enormous resources, always take much longer than planned, and focus energies internally at the expense of the mission. If you do reorganize, make sure you do it quickly, have the right career staff in charge, and don’t try to fix too many problems at once. Otherwise, the process takes over, and it is easy to lose a year or more to a reorganization initiative.

### **Takeaways**

- Leverage the senior career staff: Find whom to listen to and on what.
- Hire senior political staff with the right political talents.
- Blend political and career: Leverage their different strengths.
- Recognize that political appointees and careerists have different roles and responsibilities.
- Be careful how you blend the political and career jobs.
- Keep political-appointees-only meetings rare and reserve them for political matters.
- Put it all together, decide whom to depend on and for what.
- Don’t reorganize your agency.

## CHAPTER SIX

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### **Manage Your Environment**

Before Confirmation, Be Careful **Learn How Things Work** Act Quickly on What Can't Wait  
Develop a Vision and a Focused Agenda  
Assemble Your Leadership Team

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## MANAGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

First, pace yourself. You can't do it all in the first 100 days. Your agency needs leadership more than it needs you to work long hours. You will find that your biggest impact will come about through your ability to maintain a focus on your vision for your agency and on your stakeholders, to keep your agency focused on your top three priorities, and to manage crises that are sure to come up during your tenure.

Second, your vision needs constant repetition. The relationship with key stakeholders needs to be maintained so there is a good foundation for resolving the inevitable issues. You cannot allow the many urgent crises to push your program priorities to the back burner. You need to keep crises from taking all of your time and the agency's.

Third, you must constantly be aware of all your stakeholders and proactively manage your environment.

### **Manage the politics.**

One of your most important roles will be to manage the political dimension of managing your agency. We will not be so presumptuous as to tell you how to do this. To be put simply, you must stay on top of the political issues. You must be careful in delegating political issues and make sure they are delegated to your political staff. Keep a wide gap between political activities and your career staff. Also, keep a wide gap between political and agency activities.

### **Manage the stakeholder relationships, but save your personal time for the most important ones.**

Your agency has long-standing relationships with the White House, the Office of Management and Budget, the Congress, customers, industry, oversight bodies, and the media. These relationships transcend any individual program or decision. Managing these relationships will be one of your most important roles. In some cases you will want to get personally involved. In other cases it will work better if your staff is doing it. The managing of stakeholder relationships is a bit like negotiations in the business world in which great care is taken to ensure that senior executives are brought in only at the appropriate time. Your personal involvement should be reserved for the most important issues or the most senior stakeholders. Make sure your subordinates are appropriately involved and step in as needed.

### **Meet regularly with your senior political/career management team on agency programs.**

You are head of a large agency that needs to be well managed. Most of this will be done by your senior management team. Meet regularly with

them, make sure they are on top of what matters to the agency, not just what matters to you. This will help ensure against a secondary problem turning into a full-fledged crisis and requiring your personal time. Make sure people who have the right training, experience, and aptitude are in charge of day-to-day management. The best policies in the world are worthless if the agency implementing them is adrift.

### **Don't take too long to fill important jobs or let key decisions slip.**

Decisions need to be made in a timely manner since the consequences of no decision are often worse than choosing the less-than-perfect option. Management slots need to be filled rather than left empty for months or even years, as is too often the case. Budgets have time limits on their availability and need to be allocated to programs early enough in the year so the money can be spent wisely—not “dumped” into an available program weeks before the money expires. Leaders with only policy expertise need deputies that are good at management and must work well with them and support them in making the regular hard decisions to keep policy implementation on track.

### **Don't manage your agency's operations on a day-to-day basis, but make sure someone with the right skills is doing it for you.**

You are not here to manage your agency on a day-to-day basis, but you cannot ignore the need for the agency to be managed. You will have a more than full-time job managing political and stakeholder relationships, your own priorities, and the various crises that will occur during your tenure. Management is a difficult discipline that requires a set of skills that are rare. The federal government also offers unique challenges to a manager because it puts such a high premium on adherence to process and has multiple points where external organizations (e.g., Congress or OMB) can intervene.

You will need someone, or perhaps several people, you can trust that have the right management skills, including an ability to manage in the federal government “ecosystem.” We cannot emphasize enough that effective management depends on a high degree of skill and it will be critical to get people who have those skills. Don't go for people who just have the right idea on the policy. This is a different skill from getting that policy implemented.

One effective model is to pair a political appointee with a career deputy to manage day-to-day operations, but the effectiveness of that model depends on how well that deputy works with your political appointee and how often you would need to get engaged. Whatever approach you take, make sure you have skilled managers overseeing agency operations.

### **Empower your team, stay current with what they are doing, and focus on the big picture.**

You are here to run an agency, not do projects. You have built a joint political/career team. You have ensured that the right people are in the right jobs. Empower them to deliver on the program. Follow up regularly on what progress is being made.

Conserve your energy for what really matters. You may have to work directly with the Congress. You may have to resolve disputes between different parts of your agency. You may need to engage with the White House. You may even have to engage on specifics with OMB, which over the past few presidencies has become increasingly involved in internal agency operations. Think of yourself as the conductor of an orchestra, not one of the musicians.

### **Maintain a results-oriented climate and a sense of urgency.**

Maintaining a results-oriented climate in your agency will be important to mission success and may require you to overcome two tendencies within the bureaucracy. First, the federal government puts a high value on process, but has multiple organizations establishing them and poor methods for resolving the inevitable contradictions. Worse, whatever processes are established are buffeted by external pressures from Congress, OMB, and other stakeholders that will impose reporting, reduce or change budgets, and add additional requirements.

Second, individuals tend to be rewarded more for adherence to process than for program results. There are few individual financial rewards for mission success, and penalties for mission failure tend to be modest as well. You have many people motivated to achieve the mission and work in spite of the incentives, but you have many who go with the flow.

You can overcome this by maintaining a climate that frames issues around how they help or hinder achievement of the agency mission. You can require that the right issues be handled at the right level. You can make sure that there is a governance framework around your programs that at least gets the basics right: authority and accountability in the same place, people in charge of their programs having control over the budgets to deliver those programs, clarity on who can make what decisions, and a clear and quick process for raising and resolving issues.

### **Reward innovation, collaboration, and success.**

The incentive system in the federal government puts too much weight on process and not enough weight on results, and tends to be more top down than collaborative. Process is a necessary element of program management, but not sufficient. Innovation is an important means to deal with shrinking budgets.

Organizations throughout the world increase their effectiveness through collaboration. By collaboration we are not invoking altruism and

the value of working together for the common good. Appeals to altruism are of limited value. Appeals to the self-interest of different links in a chain have enormous value. Effective collaboration depends on the pursuit of pragmatic policies in which the various participants individually gain from the collaboration. Find ways to reward innovation, collaboration, and results. There are already enough incentives to follow existing procedures.

**Make sure your mission-support executives (chief financial, acquisition, information, and human capital officers, as well as the general counsel) are focused on program results, not their fiefdoms.**

You will depend on your program managers for program results, but they will be dependent on other support organizations to deliver. Someone needs to manage the people, technology, contracts, and the financials in support of them. You should not be personally involved in these questions, but you will want to make sure that you have strong people in charge of these areas and that they can work together to support the programs. This is a special case of the discussion just above, but worth emphasizing in its own right.

Unfortunately, these different professional communities are often better at dictating what they want the rest of the agency to do for them rather than finding a joint strategy to support the larger mission. The financial community will tell you they need a clean audit. The acquisition community will stress the need for good contract oversight. The information technology community will stress the importance of a standard infrastructure. The human capital community will stress the need for a human capital plan, and the attorneys will stress the need for legal sufficiency.

All of these are important, but they only matter in the context of your mission. You cannot afford to spend time refereeing disputes on whether a financial computer system is financial or information technology. It is both. You can tell the leadership of the various areas that you expect them to work together and the test of success is whether the agency mission succeeds. Your programs need the legally sufficient joint product of technology, contracting, finance, and human resources, not the clash of each community's independent view.

**Keep the discussion on measurable results.**

The trend in recent decades has been to move more of the government conversation to the results achieved rather than the resources expended. Not all constituencies embrace this approach and any discussion of results is open to "spin." Nonetheless, an ongoing concentration on results has value beyond the ideas of good government, particularly as the American people have become less trusting of the government. It helps your agency concentrate on the things that matter. Finally, it gives you the moral high ground in debates with critics and can help you in the court of public opinion. Keep yourself and your agency focused on measurable results.

**Manage the crises. Plan for unpleasant surprises, act quickly when they happen.**

No matter how effective you are, no matter how strong your team is, no matter how popular your programs are, something will go badly on your watch. All you can do is take steps to find out about those ticking bombs, take steps to avoid them before they go off, and be ready to address the issues when they do. Make your people think the unthinkable and prepare contingency plans. When the surprise happens, it will probably be for something that wasn't planned for, but the effort to anticipate will make your agency better prepared.

When—not if—something does go wrong, the rules are straightforward. Act quickly to fix or mitigate the problem. Tell the public what happened and what you are doing about it. Do not try to cover it up. Cover-ups always fail and often cause more damage to your credibility than the original problem. Get information out quickly as you learn it. Only give out information that you know to be accurate. If you don't know, say you don't know. Yes, you may be criticized for not being on top of the situation, but it is worse to be attacked later for sending out misinformation.

**Take steps to minimize leaks, but expect them to happen anyway.**

It is close to impossible to keep a secret in Washington. People tell “only” one person. E-mails cross the world in fractions of a second. Leaks are regularly used by stakeholders to affect a policy debate. A large number of organizations specialize in knowing what is happening as part of supporting their interest groups and are very good at it. Do what you can to minimize leaks, but don't depend on being successful all the time. Remember that transparency is a good antidote.

**Manage yourself. Don't let your calendar manage you.**

Your priorities will come from the president and the White House, but you have some latitude. To frame it perhaps too baldly, you have the opportunity to make a big difference on a few things or no difference on a great many things. Your predecessors have found that they could get things done by focusing on a few priorities and not letting themselves be distracted—and there are many distractions. Your agency faces a great many problems. Addressing those problems crosses many diverse interests. Solutions tend to cross the boundaries between agencies, interest groups, and the private sector. Getting anything important done is difficult and will require your undivided attention.

Your calendar and in-box will be your worst enemies. Every day someone will want you to give a speech. Every day there will be too many meetings. Every day there will be too many documents to read and sign. Find ways to make those demands part of someone else's day so you can concentrate on what really matters. Delegate so you can concentrate.

**Find people who will tell you the truth. Listen to them.**

It is human nature to tend to tell the boss what he or she wants to hear. You will have a communications organization working hard to put everything you do in the best possible light. You will have people coming to meet with you who want your agency to take some action. They, too, will tend to tell you what they think you want to hear. Much of the political establishment will be doing the same. Congressional oversight hearings might seem to be an antidote to this, but these are more often exercises in political theater than an attempt to convey a realistic picture of what is really going on.

Find people who will speak straight to you and tell you what you should be worrying about. Family and friends can be invaluable for this, but they often are not as close to the issues that matter for your agency as you might need. Find ways to talk to employees on the front line as well as customers and citizens that deal directly with your agency. You may be able to learn more in five minutes from a real customer than in any status briefing.

**Embed your legacy in the career bureaucracy, not your political subordinates.**

Programs and policies that last longer than a single administration depend on at least some degree of consensus between the two political parties and the executive and legislative branches. You are best positioned to determine if your legacy meets this political test and can outlast your tenure. You should also embed your programs in the hands of your career staff.

You may want to use political appointees to get the programs started, but transition over those programs to the careerists as soon as practicable. The later you do this in an administration, the more risk that your successor will take your programs in a different direction.

**Maintain a sense of proportion.**

The work you do will be extremely important. Unfortunately, everyone will be telling you that and how important you are as well. After a while, it may be difficult to maintain a realistic perspective. Not everything you do will be important and not every action you take will be the right one. You may even receive more criticism for doing the right thing than if you had done the wrong thing. Friends and family can be an important counterbalance to overstated compliments or unfair criticisms. Stay connected to them.

To this we also suggest adding "the Mother Test" in deciding how important things are. Imagine explaining to your mother why something is important. If you think it unlikely she would agree, perhaps it isn't.

**Do the job, don't be the position.**

Your job carries a title, a lot of prestige, a nice office, and an attentive staff. You should concentrate on what you can accomplish from the leverage of that position. Archimedes, the ancient Greek philosopher, is purported to have said, "Give me a lever long enough and a place to stand on and I will move the world." This job gives you the lever and the place to stand.

**Don't burn your bridges.**

Washington is a "Society of Immortals." The organization you work with today will work with you tomorrow. The people you see today you will see tomorrow, though their business cards or even their party affiliation may change. The issue you work on today will come back tomorrow in a new incarnation. How one disagreed or how truthful one was will be remembered. Don't burn your bridges; your ally today may be your adversary tomorrow and your ally the day after.

## Takeaways

- Manage the politics.
- Manage the stakeholder relationships, but save your personal time for the most important ones.
- Meet regularly with your senior political/career management team on agency programs.
- Don't take too long to fill important jobs or let key decisions slip.
- Don't manage your agency's operations on a day-to-day basis, but make sure someone with the right skills is doing it for you.
- Empower your team, stay current with what they are doing, and focus on the big picture.
- Maintain a results-oriented climate and a sense of urgency.
- Reward innovation, collaboration, and success.
- Make sure your mission-support executives are focused on program results, not their fiefdoms.
- Keep the discussion on measurable results.
- Manage the crises. Plan for unpleasant surprises, act quickly when they happen.
- Take steps to minimize leaks, but expect them to happen anyway.
- Manage yourself. Don't let your calendar manage you.
- Find people who will tell you the truth. Listen to them.
- Embed your legacy in the career bureaucracy, not your political subordinates.
- Maintain a sense of proportion.
- Do the job, don't be the position.
- Don't burn your bridges.





## **PART II: STAKEHOLDERS**



## CHAPTER SEVEN

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**White House** Government Accountability Office  
Interagency Collaborators **Citizens** Congress  
Office of Management and Budget Interest Groups  
and Associations **Interagency Councils** State  
and Local Governments **Unions** White House  
Policy Councils **Media** Inspectors General

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Thurgood Marshall, Jr.  
Bingham McCutchen

# THE WHITE HOUSE

*By Thurgood Marshall, Jr.*

One of your greatest challenges will be to balance the daily demands of your challenging job with the important task of making progress on your agency's long-term priorities and goals. One key stakeholder that can be of great assistance to you in accomplishing your agency's mission is the White House. The greater your ability to work closely and effectively with the White House, the more success your agency will enjoy. Your goal will be to have your talented team interact seamlessly with their White House counterparts, their colleagues in other executive branch agencies, and representatives in and out of government.

## **Working with the White House**

It is important to have realistic expectations. It is highly unlikely that you will be "called" to the White House on a weekly basis. But you will have opportunities to interact with the White House throughout your tenure. Most of your dealings with the White House will be program or policy specific or because of some crisis. When a crisis arises you will be working with them intensely for a short period of time, then you will be off their radar screen until the next emergency situation.

Your job will be to make sure that your agency gets the most out of those interactions. You should get to know those in the White House who are assigned or interested in your agency. You and your staff must work to make sure that your agency is in sync with the White House.

Some direct familiarity with the White House will help to pave the way to a smoother working relationship when, as invariably occurs, you find yourself or members of your team presented with a project that calls for collaboration under pressure. Be prepared to lend some resources and staff to the White House. You must remember that the White House staff is lean and they are always seeking to augment their limited resources. Loaning a talented staffer to the White House will both improve the information flow between the White House and your agency and create goodwill for your agency.

## **Coordinating Your Agency Calendar with the White House**

It will be incumbent upon you to build your agency calendar and process in parallel with the administration and the White House. With any administration, a series of action-forcing events fills the internal and external

calendars. These events establish a rhythm that can help you to schedule actions and plan the announcement of good news and bad news. Internally, a blizzard of regular meetings can be expected to dictate the flow of events through the course of the day. Unexpected events will trigger other meetings, and your team may need to inject itself on occasion. Externally, a relentless and recurring series of events trigger activity at daily, weekly, monthly, and annual intervals. Those events can include regularly anticipated monthly reports such as economic updates, as well as breaking news.

## **Working with the White House Communications Office**

Your team will need to be able to interact with many of the White House offices, some more routinely than others. You can expect daily contact with the White House Communications Office. With regard to the communications operation, for example, you will and should be expected to amplify the administration's message and its accomplishments in your meetings and speeches. By the same token, you will need to work with the White House to inject your policy initiatives and accomplishments into the message for the president, as appropriate. Internally, your staff should be in the habit of tracking the on-record and off-record exchanges that the president's press secretary has with the press corps. In addition, you owe that office, for your sake and for theirs, a heads-up on noteworthy news involving your portfolio, whether it is good or bad, along with background material and suggested responses.

Be on the lookout for constituent anecdotes that highlight the positive impact that the president's programs administered by your agency is having so that those stories can be incorporated into the presidential message process. Get a sense of the rapid-response apparatus at the White House and have a plan in mind for your office to plug into that process if a crisis arises. You should establish a pipeline of good-news deliverables that you can share with the president, vice president, and their spouses. They will significantly enhance exposure for your projects and bring more breadth to the press coverage of your agency.

## **Working with the White House Office of Legislative Affairs**

Your congressional lobbying team ought to be performing their tasks in close tandem with your counterparts throughout the executive branch and the White House. They should be attuned to the relationships that the president has with members of the House and Senate who exercise authorization or appropriation authority over your agency. That can serve as an early warning system to opportunities or potential problems on the horizon. Make sure that you cultivate your own strong relationships with the House and Senate leadership on both sides of the aisle.

## At a Glance: Key White House Offices

**The Office of Presidential Advance** coordinates all logistical arrangements for presidential visits.

**The Office of Cabinet Liaison** is the primary point of contact between the White House, cabinet members, and executive agency heads.

**The White House Counsel's** office advises the president on all legal issues concerning the president and the White House.

**The Communications Office** is responsible for the planning and production of the president's media events.

**Intergovernmental Affairs** serves as the president's liaison to state, local, and tribal governments.

**The Office of Legislative Affairs** serves as the president's liaison to the United States Congress.

**The Office of Political Affairs** ensures that the executive branch and the president are aware of the concerns of the American citizen.

**The Office of Public Liaison** promotes presidential priorities through outreach to concerned constituencies and public interest groups. This includes planning White House briefings, meetings, and large events with the president, vice president, and other White House staff.

**The Presidential Personnel Office** recruits, screens, and recommends qualified candidates for presidential appointments to federal departments and agencies.

**The Presidential Scheduling Office** is responsible for the planning, organization, and implementation of the president's daily and long-range schedules. All requests for appointments, meetings, or events with the president are directed through this office.

**The Office of Speechwriting** is charged with crafting the president's message in formal speeches and other remarks.

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Adapted from [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

## Working with the White House Policy Councils

Your ability to engage with the various policy councils and strategic planning offices will be an essential component of your job, and it will require your personal time, supported by the expertise possessed by your department-wide team. As you advance your agency's agenda along and tackle a long list of presidential promises framed during the election campaign, keep in mind that significant action can be undertaken with the power of the president's

pen. This power will be an especially welcome option during the first 100 days of the administration and during periods of harsh partisanship.

## **Interacting with Other White House Offices**

There are a number of process-oriented offices at the White House. They include the offices of Cabinet Liaison, Scheduling, and Advance. They will provide valuable information and opportunities. It will be important to keep those offices well informed on events within your department. Handled well, those individuals can act as surrogates for you within the White House operation to ferret out information and to advance your interests. When you and your team are asked to deploy in support of the president, be sure that the White House chief of staff is aware so that you don't find yourself working for a junior staffer rather than the president.

Important outreach offices will support your priorities and establish valuable bridges for your initiatives. Public Liaison and Intergovernmental Affairs are the foremost examples. Working in tandem with those outreach efforts will yield benefits in the short term and the long term by explaining the rationale underlying your agency programs and promoting them to important and influential stakeholders who can then build valuable support with key communities and interest groups. Similarly, your legal team should be well connected to the White House Counsel's office. In addition, you should make sure that you are regularly apprised of the priorities set forth by the Office of Political Affairs.

## **Don't Forget the Office of Management and Budget**

Be sensitive to cues from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The viability of your programs will be at stake. In addition, a number of management cues will come from OMB through the President's Management Council, where you can expect that you or the deputy secretary of your department will have an important seat at the table to share your best practices and learn from others.

Every day will bring new challenges and fresh opportunities to harness the skills and expertise of your agency team in ways that will enable the president to serve with great distinction. Few jobs offer risks and rewards that can rival that.

***Thurgood Marshall, Jr.,** is Partner, Bingham McCutchen, Washington, D.C. He served as Assistant to the President and Cabinet Secretary in the Clinton administration. He also served as Director of Legislative Affairs and Deputy Counsel to Vice President Al Gore.*



## CHAPTER EIGHT

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# **White House Policy Councils** Media Government Accountability Office Interagency Collaborators **Citizens White House Office** of Management and Budget Interest Groups and Associations **Interagency Councils State** and Local Governments **Unions Congress**

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Paul Weinstein, Jr.  
Progressive Policy Institute  
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# WHITE HOUSE POLICY COUNCILS

*By Paul Weinstein, Jr.*

As the head of your agency, a key to achieving progress on your major policy initiatives (either those that originate at your department or come from the White House) is a strong and communicative relationship with the White House Policy Councils:

- National Security Council (NSC)
- National Economic Council (NEC)
- Domestic Policy Council (DPC)
- Homeland Security Council (HSC)

The White House Policy Councils are important organizations that often get little notice in Washington (with the exception of the National Security Council). During your tenure, you will be interacting with these councils in various ways:

- If you want to include a proposal in the president's State of the Union, you will need the sign-off of one of the policy councils.
- If you want to appeal a budget decision by OMB, you will need a policy council on your side.
- If you are caught in a policy dispute with another agency, you will need the assistance of a policy council to arbitrate the disagreement.

The policy councils can make the difference between your success and failure, and you need to develop a good and effective working relationship with them. While you both report to the president, as a practical matter the policy councils have a more direct relationship with the president on a day-to-day basis.

## **Increasing Centralization of Policy Development in the White House**

Since the end of the Second World War, control over policy development has become increasingly centralized in the White House. This trend has been driven in large part by three factors:

- The United States' growing role in the global community
- The rapidly increasing size and responsibilities of the federal government
- The evolution of the president as "policy-maker-in-chief"

From Harry Truman to George W. Bush, almost every president has accelerated the centralization of power in the Executive Office of the President (EOP). The most influential policy makers in the EOP are the Office of Management

## Executive Office of the President Councils vs. White House Policy Councils

Councils within the Executive Office of the President (such as the Council of Economic Advisers and the Council on Environmental Quality) are distinct in three key ways from the White House Policy Councils:

- Top political appointees must be Senate confirmed.
- They can have programmatic, regulatory, or reporting responsibilities.
- Political appointees can be asked to testify before Congress on matters of policy.

and Budget and the four White House Policy Councils. Although OMB plays a critical role in executive branch policy making (along with its responsibilities with regard to the federal budget), the focus of this chapter is the White House Policy Councils, which are designed to serve as the principal units responsible for the coordination of presidential-level policy development.

### Understanding the Role of the Policy Councils

The policy councils play three primary roles in the policy-making process:

- Arbiters between other actors in the policy-making process
- In-house think tanks for policy development
- Guardians of the president's agenda

The policy councils are very different from other agencies in the EOP or cabinet-level departments. First, they have no programmatic and regulatory responsibilities or specific constituencies beyond the president. This lack of programmatic or regulatory bias can help increase their perceived legitimacy of their role in the policy-making process, but can be easily lost if they do not act as "honest brokers" in handling agency disputes.

Second, the staffs of the policy councils are primarily made up of political appointments not subject to the delays and tribulations of Senate confirmation. As such, policy council staffs are highly accountable to the president, and they have the ability to impact the decision-making process on the first day of a new administration. However, while the councils are more flexible, they can also lack the expertise of the agencies, and turnover is relatively high, creating a lack of continuity on policy matters. The lack of expertise provides an opportunity for agencies to influence the councils by providing policy experts in a number of fields to work with the councils.

Third, the policy councils are (with the exception of the NSC), not congressionally mandated and thus not as politically beholden to Congress as

federal agencies. Indeed, presidents have often bolstered this independence by protecting internal communications with the policy councils under the claim of executive privilege.

## **The National Security Council**

The oldest and largest of the policy councils is the NSC. The NSC was first established by the National Security Act of 1947. The first president to embrace and recognize the potential of the NSC was Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower dramatically expanded the size of the office and created a structured system of integrated policy review, which is still in effect today. Eisenhower held regular NSC meetings and established areas of specialization. A national security advisor (assistant to the president for national security) was created to run the office and chair the meetings in the president's absence. Members of the NSC include the vice president, secretary of defense, and secretary of state.

Over the years, the power and size of the NSC has fluctuated. Originally designed to focus on policy development and coordination, the NSC over time became increasingly involved in policy implementation. The office's role in policy implementation reached its zenith during the Nixon administration when Henry Kissinger took the lead on negotiating important international agreements such as reopening relations with the People's Republic of China.

However, the NSC's growing role in policy implementation caused a number of problems. First, it diminished the office's ability to coordinate policy, as the Department of State felt threatened by the NSC's growing involvement in diplomacy. Second, the NSC lacked the resources needed to both coordinate and implement policy. And by bringing policy implementation into the White House, the NSC made the president more vulnerable to blame for policy failures. Finally, the office receives little congressional oversight. These factors all came to a head during the Iran-Contra affair and the subsequent indictments of former National Security Advisors John Poindexter and Robert McFarlane along with staffer Oliver North. The Iran-Contra affair eventually led to a series of reforms put into place by George H. W. Bush's National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft that pushed the office's focus back on policy development.

## **The National Economic Council**

The creation of the NEC finds its origins in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1991 recession. Looking to ensure that America did not lose its economic predominance, President William Clinton wanted to create a more coordinated and centralized policy development and planning

apparatus over economic policy. In 1993, the NEC was created by presidential Executive Order.

The NEC operation is very closely modeled on the NSC. The office is led by an assistant to the president with two deputies (one who focuses on domestic economic policy and the other who focuses on international economic matters) and is staffed with political appointees who are experts in a range of areas from health care to tax policy. Like the NSC, the NEC has regular meetings with their agency members. Although it has a much smaller staff (about 20 to 30), the number of agencies that are members of the council is much greater than the NSC.

Under President Clinton, the NEC was very active. The NEC helped drive the development and successful enactment of the president's 1993 federal budget, which many credit with helping to get the budget into surplus by the end of the decade. It was also a force behind the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, new tax incentives to help families pay for college (e.g., Hope Scholarship), and passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Under President George W. Bush, the NEC initially played a significant policy-making role. Lawrence Lindsey, Bush's NEC director, created and led the effort to enact the president's tax cut legislation in 2001. Yet, the role of the NEC under Lindsey versus Robert Rubin (Clinton's first NEC director) was substantially different. While Rubin tried to use the NEC to build consensus among the agencies, Lindsey saw the NEC as more of an enforcer of the president's wishes, which often led to conflicts with agencies, particularly the Treasury Department. Over time these conflicts damaged the ability of the NEC to coordinate economic policy later in the administration.

## **The Domestic Policy Council**

Although the name has changed throughout the years, a domestic policy staff has existed in the White House since the 1960s. A foundation for the current DPC was first created in the Johnson White House, when a senior-level aide spent a majority of his time developing domestic policy and attempting to organize a staff to facilitate that activity. In 1970, President Nixon issued an Executive Order creating the Office of Policy Development, a larger White House office whose budget and functions were split by President Clinton through two Executive Orders in 1993. One of the Executive Orders established the NEC discussed above; the second created the modern-day Domestic Policy Council, which was set up along the same lines of the NEC, except its membership of agencies was more focused on social issues.

During the Clinton administration, the DPC led the effort to develop and pass welfare reform and the crime bill, two of the president's biggest domestic legislative successes. President Bush continued the DPC, and appointed one of his closest policy advisers from Texas, Margaret Spellings, to lead

the council. In the first few years of the Bush administration, the DPC was the leading force behind the enactment of “No Child Left Behind,” President Bush’s education reform effort.

## The Homeland Security Council

The fourth and final policy council is the Homeland Security Council. Founded in the aftermath of 9/11, this council was originally considered a bridge until the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. Yet the council lives on and operates along the same lines as its sister policy councils (headed by an assistant to the president, membership of cabinet-level rank and from other federal agencies, and responsibility for coordinating policy development in an issue area). While the council’s responsibilities could be subsumed within the NSC in the future, history has shown that it is very difficult politically to eliminate or merge an office once it has been created.

## Leveraging the White House Policy Councils

Based on my experience working in a White House Policy Council, I’d like to share the following insights on how you can leverage these organizations to accomplish your agency’s mission:

**Insight One: Make sure you frame your policy ideas as being consistent with and supportive of the president’s agenda.** Policy council personnel often come from presidential campaigns and are sometimes more politically oriented than policy staff from agencies. This will increase the likelihood that your proposed initiatives go forward.

**Insight Two: Offer your agency’s policy expertise to the White House Policy Councils.** Consider detailing a key member of your staff to a policy council to assist on an important project. This would increase understanding of the work of a policy council by your agency and also be an excellent learning experience for a key staff member.

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CHAPTER NINE

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**Office of Management and Budget**

Government Accountability Office Interagency

Collaborators **Citizens** White House Congress

Interest Groups and Associations **State and Local**

Governments **Unions** White House Policy

Councils **Media** Inspectors General

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Bernard H. Martin

# OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

*By Bernard H. Martin*

There is one certainty in Washington: You will be dealing with the Office of Management and Budget throughout your tenure as an agency head. Nearly every major issue you will face will pass through OMB.

If you are sending budget requests or legislative documents to the Congress, they must first go through an OMB review and approval process. If you are seeking to submit regulations to the public, they must undergo OMB scrutiny. Guidance on financial systems and procurement actions comes from OMB. Government-wide management agendas are also typically organized and supervised by OMB. Within the Executive Office of the President, OMB works closely on policy, serves as a central clearance mechanism, and is in constant communication with the National Economic Council, National Security Council, the Domestic Policy Council, and the Homeland Security Council.

You will have to work with OMB in a variety of areas, but the budget process is the main arena of engagement. What are OMB's central budgetary concerns and operating principles? What should incoming agency heads and other appointees know in order to develop a productive relationship with OMB?

## **Recommendation One: Understand the presidential perspective.**

The expansion of the power of the presidency and the influence of the Executive Office of the President has been an integral part of the history of the federal government in the 20th and 21st centuries. OMB, as a central EOP staff agency, has been an instrument of that expansion. It has been intimately involved in policy direction, priority setting, program and management review, and budget development for an unbroken succession of presidents.

In the current fiscal climate with the new president inheriting substantial budget deficits, interest in eventually returning the budget to long-term balance makes it highly likely that the president will put agencies under tight budget constraints for all but his most essential priorities. The translation of such presidential guidance into agency-specific spending limits may result in lower targets than agencies believe appropriate. Agencies almost certainly will find themselves caught between OMB's insistence on adhering to presidential priorities, counter pressure from a variety of constituencies and interest groups, and the ever-present pressure of scarce resources.

**Insight:** *You must understand that OMB examines agency budget requests within a balanced framework of presidential policies and priorities. Even a proposal of great merit may not survive this balancing process.*

**Recommendation Two: Get to know OMB staff.**

Your lead OMB policy official for most budget and program policy matters will be the program associate director (PAD) with jurisdiction over your agency. OMB usually has four or five PADs. Each is responsible for several departments and agencies with related missions—for example, human resource programs. They may negotiate with congressional members and staff on appropriations and authorization bills affecting the budget, along with or independent of agency appointees.

The PADs review analyses of program issues by OMB career staff and work with the staff to develop solutions to policy and program disputes. They frequently represent OMB at the policy level on interagency groups established to formulate new administration programs or address crosscutting issues.

Each PAD usually has two Resource Management Offices (RMOs) reporting to him or her. A deputy associate director (DAD), a career member of the Senior Executive Service (SES), heads the RMO. Two or more branches report to the DAD; another career SES member, the branch chief, heads each branch. The branches are normally responsible for the analysis and examination of the budget and programs of an entire department or agency—for example, the Department of Education and several related agencies—and for review of legislative, regulatory, management, and other issues in conjunction with other OMB units. Branch staff can provide insights about agency strengths and weaknesses. They will often be asked by OMB program officials to develop alternative approaches to solving difficult problems, fresh ways of considering long-standing issues, and so on.

**Insight:** *It is essential that you establish good working relationships with OMB policy officials and career staff. This will not guarantee easy resolution of contentious policy, program, and budget issues, but it will normally make agreements more likely and negotiations more amicable. Ask your staff to schedule a get acquainted session with your PAD and DAD during your first month in office.*

A former OMB senior staffer recalls his introduction to an agency he was examining early in his career. An agency official said that he should ask about anything he wanted and they would get him an answer, because they were so confident about their proposals that “the more you know and understand, the harder it will be for you to say no.” And he was right. Although that attitude didn’t guarantee approval for every agency proposal, such proposals always receive serious consideration.

### **Recommendation Three: Understand the numbers—recognize that budget and policy are inseparable.**

To those who have not been previously involved in its preparation, the federal budget can appear a bewildering mass of numbers. You must realize that the numbers are the reflection of policy decisions, program initiatives, performance goals, and management systems. Paul O’Neill, a former deputy director of OMB, chief executive officer of Alcoa, and secretary of the treasury, described the fundamental importance of the numbers and the budget process as follows:

One of the secrets only the initiated know is that those who labor here [at OMB] for long do so because the numbers are the keys to the doors of everything. Spending for the arts, the sciences, foreign policy and defense, health and welfare, education, agriculture, the environment, everything—and revenues from every source—all are reflected, recorded, and battled over—in numbers. And the sums of the numbers produce fiscal and monetary policy. If it matters—there are numbers that define it. And if you are responsible for advising the president about numbers, you are—de facto—in the stream of every policy decision made by the federal government.

OMB’s budget review is fundamentally policy and program based within a broad framework of fiscal and budget policy goals. OMB will ask questions such as:

- Is the proposal consistent with White House policy objectives?
- Does the program show convincing evidence that it is meeting its goals?
- How does it compare with other similar programs?
- How well is it being managed?
- What would be the impact of increasing, decreasing, or even terminating the resources provided to the program?
- Is there a reasonable basis for the design and goals of new initiatives? How effectively can the agency implement them?

Of central concern is a focus on program performance. This focus was described by a former senior career staff member at OMB:

In every administration, ... OMB is the institution that is most consistently focused on the results that programs and program managers achieve; consideration of these results is a required ingredient in the budget and policy decision-making process.

**Insight:** *You should not get mired in budget details but you must appreciate the policy implications of the numbers. Program performance should be at the core of your agency’s justifications for initiatives and spending levels.*

**Recommendation Four: Master the budget process—start early.**

By law, the new president has to send up his or her first budget request to the Congress within a month or two of the inauguration. This puts enormous pressure on the agencies. In most cases, only a small number of policy officials have been named and confirmed. They have normally not had much opportunity to get to know all the programs or the career civil service staff they have inherited, but the budget process proceeds. New White House and OMB policy officials may suggest drastic changes on agency activities, sometimes with limited knowledge of agency or program history or capability.

This period can present opportunities for you. The long hours and intense deadlines can offer you a “crash course” in the programs you have inherited and the current policies you may wish to change. You can propose your own policy and program ideas for inclusion in the president’s budget. You can observe the White House and OMB officials and staff that you will have to work with in coming years, see how they operate under significant time constraints, and make some preliminary judgments about their strengths and weaknesses (and vice versa).

Even with the time pressures, agencies can appeal budget decisions to the director of OMB and, in limited cases, to the president. The appeals are serious matters and often involve millions or billions of dollars and major policy choices. A former senior career staff member in OMB recalls one appeal session:

The Secretary opened with a statement of his total desired increase. The OMB director countered with a much lower number. The Secretary promptly agreed to the lower number, throwing the OMB contingent, which was anticipating a tense negotiation, off balance. The director suggested that they move on to discussing the distribution of both the base and incremental resources across programs. The Secretary waved at [the] chief appointed and career budget aides and said, “No, let’s let these fellows figure all that out.” The meeting adjourned. And we did figure all that out.

**Insight:** *In the midst of the budget complexity and tension, you are a valued source of new thinking. New proposals won’t always succeed. But their reception and the resolution of budget appeals can depend on personal relationships and the confidence established between OMB and agency policy officials and staff. An agency head’s strategic and/or tactical sense can be crucial.*

**Bernard H. Martin** served as a senior career executive in the Office of Management and Budget for over 20 years. He spent a decade as the head of a unit which developed the President’s Budget for, and reviewed the policies and programs of, several Cabinet departments. At OMB, he also headed the unit responsible for one of OMB’s core functions—the review and clearance of legislative documents sent to the Congress by executive branch agencies.



## CHAPTER TEN

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**Congress** Government Accountability Office  
Interagency Collaborators **Citizens** White House  
**Office of Management and Budget** Interest Groups  
and Associations **Interagency Councils** State  
and Local Governments **Unions** White House  
Policy Councils **Media** **Inspectors General**

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John J. Callahan  
JJC Consulting

# CONGRESS

*By John J. Callahan*

There are many sets of stakeholders described in this volume. While all are important, only Congress has authority to enact laws and provide money to your agency. While OMB has to approve your agency's budget request and legislative proposals to Congress, it is Congress who ultimately decides how much funding your agency should receive and the legislation that it operates under. Thus, it is crucial for you to work well with Congress and to understand the dynamics of the congressional process both for appropriations and oversight.

In order to succeed in your position and to accomplish your agency's mission, you must understand certain realities about Congress. The tenure of some of your predecessors may have been shorter than they wished because they did not recognize these five lessons about working in Washington in a highly political environment.

## **Lesson One: Political and pragmatic power in Washington is shared between the Congress and the executive branch.**

While it might sound like Civics 101, it is important that you understand that our political system is constitutionally one of separation of powers. The Congress under Article I of the Constitution is given preeminence in the legislative realm. That means only the Congress can enact laws and only Congress has the power of the purse. The Congress guards these powers very jealously. If you wish to formulate a new program, revise an existing program, or request money for your programs, you must get congressional approval. The ultimate power for such actions rests with the Congress and not the executive branch. The president does not have the power to unilaterally start or fund new programs. So Congress is clearly going to play a major role in the success, or lack thereof, of your agency during your tenure.

## **Lesson Two: You must understand the oversight powers of the Congress.**

If you are a presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed executive, you are bound by terms of your appointment to appear before congressional committees when duly summoned to testify. You cannot decline such an appearance. Political appointees that are not Senate confirmed may not be bound by such strictures, though it is in the best interest of the administration to let them testify before the Congress on their programmatic areas of jurisdiction. While all your written testimony is cleared by your department, coordinated with the rest of the executive branch, and cleared by the Office

of Management and Budget, you will undoubtedly be asked further questions in a hearing and you must answer these questions as truthfully as possible, especially if you are testifying under oath.

Oversight hearings are conducted by both appropriations and authorizing committees. Appropriations hearings are concerned with your budget request and you will have to vigorously defend your agency's request. Additionally, there will be a large number of follow-up questions submitted to you and your budget staff that generally have to be answered within 48 to 72 hours. Failure to answer these follow-up questions can adversely affect your final budget approval.

Authorization oversight hearings are wide-ranging. Here Congress will also receive extensive testimony from congressional support agencies, such as the Congressional Budget Office and the Government Accountability Office, as well as various interest groups that may endorse or oppose your programs. Here again, you must be attuned to the programmatic concerns raised in the oversight hearing and mount an effective presentation that deals in a straightforward manner with the subjects raised.

**Lesson Three: In addition to their concern about the national well-being, you must understand that Congress is also concerned about the impact of national policies on their political constituencies.**

Congress may share the executive branch view that a new or revised public policy has a broad base of public need. However, members of Congress have an obligation to understand the impacts of these national policies on their respective state and local constituencies. As an example, a Senate chairman of the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee may well support a well-intentioned national energy research policy, but if such a senator happens to be from Tennessee, the senator will also wish to ensure that it benefits agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which are located in the senator's home state. Thus, you must work closely with your management team to fully understand the state and local impact of the new or revised policies or programs that you propose to the Congress.

**Lesson Four: In addition to the Congress itself, you also will be working closely with other oversight organizations.**

The Congress is served by a number of organizations that provide continuing oversight of the executive branch. Upon congressional request, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) can begin an oversight investigation of the activities of your agency. GAO has subpoena power that can compel the submission of evidence for their report to Congress.

Your own departmental inspector general (IG) has similar powers that can be activated by congressional request as well. The Congressional Budget

Office, the Joint Committee on Taxation, and various other congressional appropriations and authorizing committee staffs often provide deep subject-matter expertise to the Congress that can often prove a match for some of your own executive branch staff expertise. All these instrumentalities and staff will, at some point, interact with you in matters of congressional oversight. You should pay significant attention to them and work to develop effective working relationships with these organizations and staff.

**Lesson Five: You should not regard Congress as an adversary. Congress and the executive branch share a joint responsibility to make sure that government programs serve the public interest.**

Congress need not be your adversary and certainly should not be your enemy. You and the members of Congress have a responsibility to make government work for the public interest. Appropriations bills have to be enacted annually. Budget resolutions occur every year. New programs have to be authorized or old ones reauthorized. These actions ultimately require positive interactions between Congress and the executive branch.

An example of the two branches working closely together is the Budget Reconciliation Bill of 1990. The comprehensive budget bill was hammered out in an executive-legislative summit, sometimes held at Andrews Air Force Base. High-ranking executive branch and legislative personnel and their respective staffs engaged in an arduous exercise to find a bill that the Congress could pass and the president could sign. Ultimately, a five-year, \$500 billion budget deficit reduction bill was enacted into law. Compromise and a sense of shared executive-legislative responsibility for reducing the deficit was the order of the day.

Finally, you must always remember that both the executive branch and the Congress have to work together, day in and day out, to ensure that legislation and funding will be available for the executive branch to implement the constitutional duty of the executive branch.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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**Interagency Collaborators** Government  
Accountability Office **Citizens** White House  
Office of Management and Budget Interest Groups  
and Associations **Interagency Councils** State  
and Local Governments **Unions** White House  
Policy Councils **Media** **Inspectors General**

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Brookings Institution

# INTERAGENCY COLLABORATORS

*By David F. Garrison*

You are the new head of your agency. You have been sworn in, greeted by the staff in the agency's executive office, and are now facing a mountain of briefing materials designed to help you get acclimated quickly to all aspects of your new portfolio. Your calendar for the next several weeks is already chockablock with briefing sessions on key components of your agency's domain, interspersed with personnel discussions with the few staff you brought into the agency with you as you search for qualified people to fill the many leadership positions. Meanwhile, your chief scheduler is keeping track of the ever-lengthening list of requests from interest group representatives to come meet you and tell you of their goals for your agency. And then there is the Hill to figure out.

But wait. What about the rest of the federal government? Don't your agency's mission, goals, and objectives, not to mention your own ability to be a success, depend to a considerable extent upon how other agencies deal with key elements of your new portfolio?

The answer to these questions is almost certainly yes. If you focus all of your time and energy within the four corners of your agency, you will not be able to accomplish your goals. If you neglect these interagency and intergovernmental imperatives, you are likely to regret it. What should you do?

During 2000, while on the Secretary's staff at the Department of Health and Human Services, I conducted a review of federal interagency collaborations for the President's Management Council. I looked at information on about 50 such projects, selected 19 for more consideration, and ended up studying five in detail, including interviewing key participants. The five projects reviewed all involved multiple agencies that had to work together to accomplish an agreed-upon common mission:

- *The President's Task Force on Environmental Health and Safety Risks of Children* involved at least six federal agencies with a complex, three-tier governing structure.
- *The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force* involved at least six federal agencies, various Florida state agencies, and a number of general and special purpose local government entities including two Native American tribes.
- *The Interagency Alternative Dispute Resolution Work Group*, headed by the attorney general, involved numerous federal agencies.
- *The Brownfields Initiative*, which was driven by four federal agencies, involved 15 other federal entities, plus extensive outreach into 16 target localities.

- *Welfare to Federal Work* involved nearly every federal agency in matching up welfare recipients with federal jobs.

Analysis of these initiatives, along with information about a number of other similar efforts, resulted in the identification of 10 attributes of successful collaborations and a number of lessons learned. Based on this analysis, as well as lessons learned in my own federal service, here is what I recommend you do.

- **Set the tone that interagency collaboration is important.** For starters, you need to understand that interagency work can and often is the toughest kind of assignment for government employees to carry off well. Thus, you need to set the tone for your staff, both those you bring in to help you run the agency as well as—and perhaps more importantly—the career staff who provide the all-important continuity and institutional memory for your establishment. You need to send a clear message throughout your organization that working with other agencies is important and to be taken seriously.

All too often, agency heads send the wrong signals, such as that other agencies are the “enemy” and turf is to be defended at all costs. Everyone needs to know that you want a conscious, aggressive, constructive effort to reach out both horizontally and vertically in the federal system to build active partnerships with other agencies and officials.

- **Get personally involved with your staff working on interagency initiatives.** To drive home the point, you need to make time on your calendar to meet with staff involved in interagency and intergovernmental efforts. You need to search for efforts already in place in your agency. There will undoubtedly be some, but they will almost certainly be in the shadows to greater or lesser degrees. You should seek out the staff involved in these existing undertakings, reinforce the importance of their work, and find public ways within the agency to reward their activity.
- **Recognize good works.** Recognition for good works in interagency endeavors is rare. Frequently, the staff members that get the assignment to reach out beyond the confines of the agency find they are lonely in their labors. Too often, the task is extra, over and above whatever the normal duties are for the staffer’s job. When the person finds little encouragement for the work, whether monetary or otherwise, no wonder its priority slips.
- **Involve human resources to include interagency work in annual performance evaluation plans.** To make this policy of yours real, tell your human resource office head that you want the annual performance evaluation system for all senior officials, whether appointees or career, to require that annual work plans include interagency and/or intergovernmental tasks where appropriate and that rating credit be given for successes in these areas.

- **Spot leaders with interagency skills.** As you get to know these staff, be on the lookout for leadership, communication, and facilitation skills—all essential for successful interagency projects. Moreover, continuity of effort is important. Be clear to the staff working on these projects that you expect them to stick with their assignments right to the end so that the collegial relationships developed across agencies are not disrupted by frequent changes in personnel.
- **Take to the road to get to know key government officials essential to accomplishing your mission.** You need to tell your staff that you want to reach out personally to the agency heads, governors, and local officials who are important to the success of these ventures to emphasize your commitment to working cooperatively. As you and your policy leaders in the agency formulate new initiatives, you need to be on the lookout for opportunities to involve other agencies and governments and to be willing to request their assistance directly rather than going through normal staff channels.
- **Use field staff in interagency initiatives.** Look for ways to involve your agency's field staff in collaborations that target states and local governments. Regional office staff often have considerably more enthusiasm for such tasks, especially when staff know the agency head is engaged. These staffers often know the players better than headquarters officials do. Good collegial relationships are a key building block in establishing the necessary working environment for collaboration.
- **Take advantage of the web in interagency initiatives.** Tell your information technology people that you want each collaborative initiative to be supported with web resources. And let your public affairs people know that it is their job to help out with organizing the outreach work of the collaboration.
- **Consider detailing your employees to work directly with state and local government organizations.** Look for opportunities to detail employees to work on a collaborative initiative at the level of government where it is centered, such as working directly for a state or local government. Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) assignments are a particularly effective way to support interagency partnerships. The act allows the federal government to detail federal employees to state and local governments, and also allows state and local government officials to be detailed to the federal government.
- **Blaze the budget trail on interagency projects.** Be sure to let the rest of your agency know about the interagency projects you launch and that you expect support from all quarters. It is especially important to tell your budget office of your desire to have resources made available to these ventures. Otherwise, you may find your own budget shop turns down key initiatives before you have a chance to rescue them. Moreover, be prepared to run interference at the White House, particularly at

the Office of Management and Budget, often the graveyard of efforts to conduct interagency work at the federal level.

- **Be cautious about Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs).** Finally, unless it is clear that it will markedly move the ball down the field or is needed to establish a long-term relationship, avoid formal MOUs among the parties. Such drafting exercises consume prodigious amounts of staff time, including by the lawyers, and in the end the documents are rarely worth the paper on which they are printed. Instead, concentrate your time and that of your staff on building trust among the parties and finding effective and timely ways to achieve consensus.

Interagency and intergovernmental work is difficult, but success can make a huge difference in the ability of your agency to achieve its goals. Stay out of the stovepipe; reach out and collaborate.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

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**Interagency Councils** Government  
Accountability Office Interagency Collaborators  
Citizens **White House** Office of Personnel  
Management **Congress** Interest Groups and Associations  
State and Local Governments **Media**  
White House Policy Councils **Inspectors General**

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D. Cameron Findlay  
Aon Corporation

# INTERAGENCY COUNCILS

*By D. Cameron Findlay*

John Donne famously observed that “no man is an island.” Well, no department is an island, either. Many political appointees might like to think of themselves as all-powerful in their domain, but the truth is that you can accomplish more, and more quickly, by coordinating with other parts of government. Often, this coordination takes place in interagency councils or task forces composed of officials from several different agencies. So you need to know what these entities are, what they might do, and how to use them effectively to move forward the policy priorities of the administration.

## **Understanding Interagency Councils**

Interagency bodies come in many forms. Some are created from the top down by the White House or legislation as permanent or semi-permanent entities, such as the National Economic Council or the Interagency Council on the Homeless. Others are convened on an ad hoc basis to deal with specific sets of issues, such as the interagency group convened by President George W. Bush to consider the issues raised by stem cell research. And some are pulled together by agencies themselves to handle programs or issues that cut across agency boundaries, such as the partnership between the Department of Energy, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Labor to coordinate work on a program to provide compensation to former federal employees who had suffered health effects from working in the plants that manufactured nuclear weapons in the years after World War II.

Although it is difficult to generalize about all of these types of interagency bodies, one constant is that because several agencies share expertise or responsibilities for an area, issue, or program, agencies can accomplish more working together than they could working individually. The federal government is simply too big and too complex for a single department to accomplish its mission by itself.

## **Interagency Councils in Action: The President’s Management Council**

One excellent example of an interagency council in action—and one on which I was privileged to serve while I was deputy secretary of labor—is the President’s Management Council, or PMC. The PMC had its origins in 1993, when President Bill Clinton brought together the chief operating officers (typically the deputy secretaries) of all of the cabinet departments, and

some heads of non-cabinet agencies, to share best practices in government management. It was the PMC, for instance, that was charged with implementing President Clinton's "Reinventing Government" initiative. The PMC was also a key player in the federal government's Y2K preparations leading up to the changeover of information technology systems at the turn of the millennium.

When George W. Bush came into office in 2001, he immediately understood the potential of the PMC and issued a new executive order rechartering the organization. Consistent with his view that there was much to be learned from the private sector, President Bush asked the PMC not only to share best practices in management from one agency to another, but also to introduce innovative management practices from the private sector.

The PMC's work in the Bush administration covered a wide range of areas, from ensuring that government programs are evaluated for effectiveness as part of the budget process, to enhancing the federal government's financial systems and controls, to strengthening the government's human capital programs.

An area in which I was intimately involved was the "Expanding E-Government" initiative, which sought to bring an integrated approach to the hodgepodge of federal government information technology programs. As chairman of the PMC's E-government Subcommittee, I worked with the Office of Management and Budget and other agency COOs both to ensure that agencies were not purchasing duplicative IT systems and applications and to develop and implement innovative e-government initiatives that crossed agency boundaries. Sometimes we decided that an agency would not be permitted to buy something it wanted—even if it had money in its budget to do so—and sometimes we called upon a particular agency to take on a leadership role in pushing forward an enhancement to e-government that went beyond its own programs.

As part of this process, we asked my own department, the Department of Labor, to champion a new website called [www.govbenefits.gov](http://www.govbenefits.gov), which provided comprehensive information to an individual citizen as to the programs for which that person might be eligible. Today anyone can log on to the govbenefits website, answer a few questions, and instantly find out the programs that might be applicable to him or her, regardless of which department offers a program. In the past, one might have had to visit dozens of different agency websites to get that information.

While the PMC made significant progress in a number of areas such as e-government, equally important is that the PMC succeeded in fostering a sense of collaboration among agencies and in creating personal relationships at the deputy secretary level. I know that I and many other fellow deputy secretaries learned a great deal from our colleagues and formed friendships that came in handy when we needed to reach across agency boundaries.

## **Interagency Councils in Action: The Ad Hoc Task Force on the Economic Effects of the September 11 Attacks**

Another quite different interagency body on which I worked was an ad hoc group formed by President George W. Bush to deal with the economic aftershocks of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon. In the days following 9/11, the federal government had to deal not only with the immense national security implications of the attacks but also with a truly unique economic crisis. Stock markets around the world had plummeted; the livelihood of tens of thousands of people in lower Manhattan had been disrupted; the airline industry was devastated; and new controls were immediately necessary to prevent the transfer of funds among terrorist groups.

To deal with these issues in an integrated and expeditious way, then-White House Deputy Chief of Staff Josh Bolton convened an ad hoc group of the departments and agencies with responsibilities for various aspects of the economy, from the Department of the Treasury to the Securities and Exchange Commission to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. I served as the Department of Labor representative on this group. In the months following 9/11, the task force worked tirelessly to ensure that benefits flowed to affected individuals, to steady uncertain financial markets, and generally to return a state of normality to the economy. In my own department, for instance, we immediately established temporary emergency unemployment benefit operations in New York to assist the cabdrivers and shop workers who had been put out of work as a result of the attacks.

This was hard work, but it was perhaps the most rewarding effort in which I participated during my time in government. The task force was an excellent mechanism to tackle the economic effects of 9/11 in a coordinated way, and it accomplished much more through interagency coordination than all of the various agencies could have done on their own.

### **Learning to Work in Interagency Councils**

While working in an interagency body can be an effective way to coordinate efforts across agency boundaries, it is plainly different from working in your own agency. Agencies are hierarchical bodies in which secretaries, deputy secretaries, assistant secretaries, and so on are able to send “command and control” orders down the chain of command and, at least in most cases, expect some degree of deference. In an interagency council, by contrast, an otherwise all-powerful agency head or chief operating officer is merely an equal to the other members of the council and must work collaboratively to get things done. Here are some useful lessons that I learned during my experience working with other agencies:

- **Check your ego at the door.** When working in interagency councils, expect to be viewed as a peer, not as the head of an agency. Get used to being treated differently than you are back at your home agency.
- **Try not to fall into the “representation trap.”** While there are some interagency councils in which your role will be to represent your agency, there will be other interagency councils (like the PMC) in which you’ll be expected to brainstorm collectively and not present parochial views based on what might be best for your own department.
- **Listen and learn.** I was surprised to learn just how “siloeed” the federal government is. Different agencies not only had different payroll systems and outsourcing contracts, but also had entirely different ways of accomplishing similar objectives. There is much to be learned from other agencies, whether through formal interagency councils such as the PMC or merely by picking up the phone and talking to a peer from another agency you’ve met through an interagency body.
- **Be proactive in reaching out to other departments.** Don’t wait for the White House or Congress to decide that interagency collaboration is needed. When you are working on an issue and it becomes clear that the interests or expertise of another agency may be relevant, call your counterpart at the agency and set up an ad hoc interagency working group to tackle the issue together.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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# Office of Personnel Management

Government Accountability Office **Citizens**

White House Office of Management and Budget

Interest Groups and Associations **Interagency**

**Councils** State and Local Governments

**Unions** White House Policy Councils **Media**

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Solly Thomas  
IBM Global Business Services

# OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

*By Solly Thomas*

Given its name, you might get the impression that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is just another central management organization with which you will have little interaction. To the contrary, OPM's government-wide human capital management responsibilities have a significant impact on each federal agency. OPM is responsible for human capital management programs, and the regulations and policies affecting the federal civilian workforce. Since many of your challenges will be workforce related, it is important that you and your staff understand how OPM can help you in accomplishing your agency's mission.

You will see very quickly that the success of your agency in carrying out its mission depends greatly on the people in your agency. Consequently, your agency must have robust human capital strategies that meet current and future program needs. These strategies will help you recruit, retain, develop, and manage employees—and ultimately ensure that you have a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. Working with OPM can help you accomplish that goal.

OPM provides human capital advice and leadership to the administration and to federal agencies, supporting this role with human capital policies and holding agencies accountable for their human capital practices. OPM sets policies and takes the lead for the administration on human capital programs and initiatives affecting federal agencies and their employees. OPM provides services, support, policies, and guidelines on a number of human resource programs related to hiring, performance management, leadership development, alternative personnel systems, electronic government, and strategic human capital. All of these programs are designed to provide agency leaders with the standards and flexibilities needed to strategically manage their workforce.

## **You Will Face Workforce Challenges**

Your agency, like all federal agencies, is experiencing a number of workforce challenges that you will need to address. First, there is the expected retirement wave of the baby boomers—more than 50 percent will be eligible to retire over the next five years. Second, many of these individuals hold key leadership positions and your agency will need to have succession plans in place to replenish this leadership. Third, there is tremendous competition for talent from both the public and private sectors. Consequently, your agency will need to have effective hiring and workplace practices in place to successfully compete for—and retain—this talent. Finally, as your agency mission, goals, and objectives change, your agency will need to have the right

skills to adapt to these changes. As a result, you will need to have plans in place that target mission-critical skills and close any skills gaps.

## **OPM Can Help You Gain Flexibilities and Waivers**

When you arrive as the new agency head, you will bring a new agenda with priorities, goals, and objectives for the agency. One of the most critical success factors for you will be the ability of the agency workforce to support and implement these goals. Thus, it is imperative that your agency has the right people in the right place with the right set of skills. How your agency recruits, retains, develops, and manages its workforce will greatly depend upon its ability to successfully implement human capital strategies. As a result, understanding the OPM authorities, policies, regulations, and flexibilities will greatly assist you and your agency's ability to make human capital decisions.

For example, what flexibilities do you have to hire, reassign, and manage the Senior Executive Service employees? If you need more SES positions, how do you get them? How do you make political appointments, including Schedule C, non-career SES, and other appointments? How can your agency improve its hiring and/or performance management practices? How does your agency improve its HR operations and implement e-government programs? What flexibilities do you have to recruit and pay your employees? OPM senior staff can work with your chief human capital officer to determine what flexibilities or waivers of rules can best help you accomplish your agency's mission.

As you try to address your workforce challenges, you may find that you need to have more flexibility in hiring or that you need to reshape your workforce to obtain different skills. Similarly, you may see that you need to improve the overall agency performance as well as that of the agency employees including your executives. And you may find that the existing regulations governing your human capital program need to be changed. Finally, you may find that there is a critical need to use HR technology to reduce your overall administrative costs and improve services. OPM can assist you in each of these areas—either by advising you of existing authorities or helping you obtain new authorities.

### **Recommendation One: Get to know the director and deputy director of OPM.**

Because of the role OPM plays in the management of human capital, it is important that you develop strong working relationships with OPM leadership. It will give you a venue to articulate your agency's human capital challenges. Similarly, your agency human capital leadership needs to maintain an ongoing and open dialogue with the OPM staff in order to better understand OPM regulations and flexibilities.

## **Recommendation Two: Become familiar with the Chief Human Capital Officers Council and the Federal Executive Boards.**

Two communities that OPM manages can help you implement human capital programs:

- **Chief Human Capital Officers Council.** The Chief Human Capital Officers Act of 2002 required the heads of 24 agencies to appoint a chief human capital officer and established the Chief Human Capital Officers Council. The council is managed by OPM. As a result, your agency chief human capital officer is critical in advising you on human capital activities and can also be your advocate with OPM.
- **Federal Executive Boards.** OPM also manages the Federal Executive Boards, which help coordinate field activities among federal organizations; almost 90 percent of the federal workforce is located outside of Washington, D.C. The 28 boards across the country assist federal agencies in a number of activities including recruitment, emergency preparedness, and continuity of operations, and coordination of state and local activities.

## **Recommendation Three: Consider OPM as your partner.**

Because of OPM's oversight role for government-wide human capital programs and its responsibilities for merit systems compliance, there is a tendency for some agencies to think of their relationship with OPM as adversarial. That's not the way it should be. In order to ensure that your human capital programs are successful, your agency and OPM need to maintain an open dialogue and work together in a cooperative and partnering relationship. In doing so, you will be able to leverage the advice, knowledge, experience, and many services that OPM can provide.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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**Citizens** Government Accountability Office  
Interagency Collaborators **Congress** White House  
**Office of Management and Budget** Interest Groups  
and Associations **Interagency Councils** State  
and Local Governments **Unions** White House  
Policy Councils **Media** **Inspectors General**

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Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer  
*AmericaSpeaks*

# CITIZENS

*By Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer*

You are taking office at a unique time in American history. We now stand at the beginning of a transformation in democratic government that places the regularly convening of the public in decision making as a core feature of government.

The new “convenor” conceptualization of government involves a key shift from the modern “push” model of citizen advocacy—which relies upon interest groups—to a “pull” model in which government actively seeks policy input from citizens. This pull model of engaging citizen stakeholders requires that agency heads like you develop the policies, procedures, and institutional frameworks necessary to ensure that “new governance mechanisms” involve citizens in the design and implementation of public policies that respond to their needs and aspirations for a healthy and vibrant nation.

Transforming government administration into a set of key institutions that consistently seek public input in setting policy priorities and preferences through well-defined governance mechanisms is not about direct versus representative democracy. Nor is it about online versus face-to-face modes of citizen-government interaction. Rather, it’s about a reform agenda that views the collective voice of citizens as an effective feature of policy making in the new, networked governing environment that is enabled through new technologies, human and physical.

## **The ‘Convenor’ Paradigm**

The public appetite for engagement is there, and is the underlying recognition of groups like *AmericaSpeaks* (which I founded and now lead) who are now developing new modes of citizen-government partnerships and new governance mechanisms for the future. This paradigm creates new space and structures for authentic citizen participation in governance. This is the new role for government as the “convenor of the public.” The government today is well on its way toward realizing its new role as a convenor of the public. As Lester Salamon has written, a massive proliferation of new tools of public action has occurred, and what is required now is further evolution of public administration’s basic forms. In other words, the instruments are there; what is needed are the structures, processes, and bureaucratic culture to put them to effective use.

Consider, for example, the case of the New Orleans city government before and after Hurricane Katrina. Prior to the disaster that inundated the city, government was structured along traditional lines of bureaucratic hierarchy. When the floodwaters receded, city officials recognized a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity (if not necessity) to rethink local governance and

develop mechanisms that would ensure citizens had an authentic voice in shaping the future of the city.

It wasn't easy to achieve. It took two failed attempts and nearly two years before city officials were able to say they had a master plan for reconstruction and redevelopment that represented a consensus compromise among key stakeholders: citizens, private interests, and community-based organizations. More importantly, the new plan for city redevelopment included an assurance that participatory input mechanisms developed during the citywide planning process would remain intact and form a core value of city administration going forward.

Such a shift in the way agencies fulfill their public mission requires dramatic changes—reforms that can be anticipated rather than crisis-driven. Over the years, we've been able to identify several institutional barriers to an effective transformation of government as "convenor." These can be summarized as three principal deficits:

- Low levels of trust by government in the quality of what the public can contribute to the policy-making process
- Uncoordinated, often inconsistent policy guidelines that do not provide sufficient direction to apply new tools to convene the public
- A lack of institutional knowledge-building activities and coordinated information sharing to promote, fulfill, and improve the practices of "convening the public" within and across agencies

## **Recommendations**

Six recommendations stem from these observations. The first three recommendations are internal reforms that you can begin to implement on your own in your agency. The last three are external reforms that will require government-wide reform.

### **Recommendation One: Carry out a top-to-bottom review of policy and practice.**

An assessment of existing public involvement in policy and practice will be central to the development of sustained and successful new techniques. A focused review and integration of participative frameworks that affect central, regional, and state agencies will ensure proliferation of key values, principles, and successful practice techniques.

### **Recommendation Two: Create management-level staff positions focused on improving agency participation.**

Public involvement often falls within "communication" and "public affairs" activities of an agency. Successful, sustained convening of the public requires

its own office, resources, and activities separate from the information communication, education, and image-building activities of an agency.

**Recommendation Three: Incorporate citizen engagement practices into performance management reviews.**

Performance management reviews for public involvement programs and personnel will require standards for successful “convening” practices. These may also require the development of participatory performance appraisal techniques that engage the public in the performance feedback cycle.

**Recommendation Four: Establish an interagency task force to review existing policy guidelines.**

The task forces would identify and resolve inconsistencies and obstacles to effective citizen engagement practice that reside in existing policy frameworks. Either Congress or the president should establish a neutral, credible body to review the primary legal frameworks impacting public participation today and recommend ways those policies can be updated and improved to incorporate best practice and new opportunities.

**Recommendation Five: Adopt consistent federal guidelines for public involvement.**

Agencies will benefit from a consolidated framework for effective citizen participation. To ensure the proliferation of a culture and practice of participation in government, oversight agencies like the Office of Management and Budget and the Government Accountability Office must provide more explicit guidelines for citizen engagement and ensure that existing policies do not constrain agency best practice.

**Recommendation Six: Adapt administrative process.**

Ensure that the procedures, budgets, and time cycles for policy and program development create sufficient opportunities to include citizen engagement, achieve an appropriate balance of expert and public input, and are tied to a transparent and accountable decision-making structure.

**Conclusion**

The great opportunity for you and the new administration will be to recognize the public demand for new governance mechanisms and to meet this demand by positioning government to convene the public strategically

on the issues that the leadership team most wants to move on. Likewise, you will have a similar opportunity to think through the challenges at the core of your agency mission and to discover, design, develop, and implement new mechanisms to bring citizens into the processes of government.

Bringing citizens into partnership in agenda setting, policy design, program development, and implementation through new governance mechanisms—in short, transforming government into a “convenor of the public”—holds the potential to dramatically change the public’s experience and perception of government, improve the substance of policy, and enhance the prospects for lasting, successful policy implementation. This will be one of the key challenges and opportunities for the next administration when it takes office.

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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**Unions** Government Accountability Office  
Interagency Collaborators **Citizens** White House  
**Office of Management and Budget**  
Interest Groups and Associations **Interagency**  
**Councils** State and Local Governments  
Congress **Inspectors General** **Media**

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Robert M. Tobias  
American University

# UNIONS

*By Robert M. Tobias*

You are assuming the leadership of your agency at a time when 80 percent of eligible federal government workers have union representation. While much of the tone of your relationship will be set by the president and the administration, it will be up to you to create the labor-management relationship you desire. Based on my observations and experience over the years, I recommend that you develop a collaborative approach based on mutual trust and engage employees through their elected representatives. The choice you make will have a direct impact on the achievement of your agency goals.

## **Background on Labor Relations in the Federal Government**

The formal history of labor-management relations in the federal sector dates to 1963, when President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order (EO) 10988. Through subsequent Executive Orders issued by President Richard M. Nixon, and the codification of labor-management relations in President Jimmy Carter's 1978 Civil Service Reform Act, a period of compliance ensued. That is, the parties litigated to enforce their respective rights. The period was summarized in a 1991 GAO report: "We have never had so many people spend so much time, blood, sweat, and tears on so little."

In 1993, President William J. Clinton issued Executive Order 12871 to transform this adversarial history by creating collaboration through labor-management partnerships. "Only by changing the nature of federal labor-management relations so that managers, employees, and employees' elected union representatives serve as partners will it be possible to design and implement comprehensive changes necessary to reform government," EO 12871 explained.

President Clinton assumed that to increase executive branch productivity, employees must be involved in designing new work processes, procedures, and organizational structures. He believed employee involvement was necessary to unlock the mystery of how work is actually performed, how it can be performed more efficiently and effectively, and how necessary changes might be implemented promptly. He also recognized that in the federal sector, involvement must be fostered through the employees' union representatives.

## **What Can Be Achieved by Developing an Effective Working Relationship with Unions**

There is much evidence that by developing an effective relationship with unions, you will enhance the performance of your organization and

significantly increase the chances of achieving agency goals. Based on the experience during the Clinton administration, the National Partnership Council (NPC) reported in 1997 that 72 percent of all federal sector bargaining unit employees were covered by partnership agreements. The overall result was fewer grievances and unfair labor practices filed, fewer days spent in formal negotiations, and movement from addressing “traditional” labor-management issues to solving “non-traditional” issues—like agency reorganizations and improvement in customer service—and examining issues such as the impact of new technology, reductions in force, budget, staffing, and privatization. Although the non-traditional issues were not bargainable, pre-decisional discussions with unions led to faster implementation of needed changes. The NPC report reflected significant movement from compliance to more collaborative labor-management relations.

There is not as much quantitative analysis of the impact of collaboration on agency performance as we would like to have. The only comprehensive analysis of return on investment was an examination of the partnership initiative between the United States Customs Service and the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) over the period FY 1994–1998. The study calculated all of the costs (primarily labor and travel) associated with the design, implementation, and subsequent meetings of labor and management officials across the country, and found a 25 percent (\$3 million) return on a \$12 million investment, not including non-quantifiable factors:

The benefits generated since the implementation of the partnership from 1994 to 1998 equate to total return on investment of approximately 25 percent. In addition to the dollar benefits, the non-dollar benefits from partnership [increased drug seizures, improved customer service, increased compliance with Customs and U.S. laws and regulations, and decreased process time] increased Customs efficiency and effectiveness in meeting its mission.

The success of the Customs/NTEU partnership represented the integration of employee, union, and management interests. Knowledge-based federal employees were enthusiastically involved in accomplishing the Customs mission; union leaders were able to involve many more of their members and potential members (the 95 percent who never file a grievance); and agency managers achieved a more efficient and effective Customs Service.

## **What You Can Do in Your Agency**

The historical relationship between unions and the federal government is played out at two levels: (1) at the government-wide level in which the president and the Office of Management and Budget set the tone for the

## A Note to the President of the United States

Mr. President, you are assuming office at perhaps the most critical juncture of our nation's history. Your administration's legislative and policy initiatives to meet the challenges before you are ambitious. But the indispensable element in addressing those challenges—the crucial link between policy and achievement—is federal employee performance.

Thus the question I pose is: What kind of a labor-management relationship do you envision to maximize federal employees' contributions to achieving your administration's goals? It seems to me that a relationship built on mutual agreement to problem-solve collaboratively would serve both your administration and the nation better than one focused on ensuring compliance with statutes, regulations, and collective bargaining contracts.

The history of federal sector labor-management relations suggests combining the best of the two prior administrations: a collaborative labor-management environment focused on increasing performance, with performance measurement enforcement and support provided by the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management.

With this approach, agencies' and departments' desire to perform efficiently and effectively, union leaders' desire to involve members in devising better methods to achieve agency mission, and your desire to deliver better service to the public will dovetail perfectly.

– Robert M. Tobias

relationship, and (2) at the agency level in which individual agency heads can develop effective working relationships with the unions represented in their agency.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) followed the pre-decisional involvement path when it decided to reorganize the IRS from a geographic to a functional organization. Every bargaining unit job was placed in a different organizational structure, and the work performed was often substantially different. Then-Commissioner Charles O. Rossotti chose to include elected union officials and employees appointed by the union to participate in every facet of the design and implementation of the new organizational structure. In *Many Unhappy Returns*, Rossotti quoted an e-mail message from an employee who was given the opportunity to participate in the design of the reorganization through the union: “[W]hen we as employees are allowed to help structure the change that will affect our work life, it helps to ease the uneasiness and abate much of the fear that is often associated with change.” When the IRS “flipped the switch” on the reorganization, affecting approximately 85,000 bargaining unit employees, not one grievance was filed.

You can develop good working relationships by doing some of the following:

- Hold initial meetings with union representatives to build trust prior to having to meet with them for the first time when there is a serious issue.
- Mutually create a process and structure to enable regular discussions with the union representatives about both traditional and non-traditional labor-management/business issues.
- Mutually create a process to solicit ideas from frontline employees. It has become well known that many of the best ideas on improving performance on the front line come from workers themselves.

**Robert M. Tobias** is Director and Distinguished Adjunct Professor, Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation, American University. He has also served as a member of the IRS Oversight Board and National President of the National Treasury Employees Union.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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# State and Local Governments

Media  
Government Accountability Office Interagency  
Collaborators Citizens White House Office  
of Personnel Management Inspectors  
General Interagency Councils Congress  
Unions White House Policy Councils

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Robert J. O'Neill  
International City/County Management Association

Elizabeth K. Kellar  
Center for State and Local Government Excellence

## STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

*By Robert J. O'Neill and Elizabeth K. Kellar*

The beginning of a new administration is an exciting time. New actors and a new agenda meet complex challenges. Governing in the 21st century will require new skills and approaches to develop solutions to the world's most significant challenges and opportunities.

The public consistently tells pollsters that these are the five most important issues facing the nation (other than the war in Iraq):

- Jobs
- Health care
- Safety and security
- Education
- Environment

None of the issues can be addressed without a national strategy; however, that alone will not be sufficient. Each requires the federal government to engage a broad network of actors in order to produce the outcomes desired. That network must include both state and local governments to be effective. In fact, there will be few issues of national domestic policy in which state and local governments will not play the most important role.

When asked about the quality of the partnership between federal agencies and state and local governments, most state and local officials will grimace. They describe the level of interaction and engagement with federal agencies as:

- Paternal
- Directive
- Lack of shared goals and strategies
- Not a partnership
- One-way communication
- No organized effort for serious engagement

Given the importance of this relationship, what can you do to build a more effective partnership? We present three recommendations on how you can effectively work with one set of your stakeholders: state and local governments.

### **Recommendation One: Understand the landscape of the intergovernmental system.**

State and local governments often do not always agree with one another, but they have a long history of working together to address priorities and to develop solutions to vexing problems.

The state of Florida's approach to emergency management issues is a good example of how state and local governments in Florida engage and cooperate. With its history of multiple hurricanes wreaking havoc on the state and its economy, there was no question about the importance of strengthening preparedness and response capabilities.

Local governments in Florida built strong mutual aid agreements with neighboring jurisdictions and sought to expand their regional approach so that one region could help a region in another part of the state in the event of a catastrophic event. Local leaders approached state leaders to discuss the idea and to seek financial support to build a statewide mutual aid system that can identify and organize resources for rapid deployment. The state agreed that it was a good strategy and became a fully engaged partner in developing a system. There has been an effective state-local dialogue, even though each level of government has a somewhat different perspective on tactics and approaches.

The relationship between state and local governments with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been more strained. While FEMA received consistently high marks from state and local officials in the 1990s, those improvements faded away in the early years after DHS was created. FEMA is making efforts to reengage with state and local officials, but it will take time to reestablish the level of communication needed for an effective partnership.

The good news for federal agencies is that state and local governments generally want to be good partners. They recognize that federal government goals are important and want to do their part to help the nation move forward.

### **Recommendation Two: Design engagement strategies with state and local officials around core principles.**

Your starting point is to engage state and local government leaders thoughtfully and to seek agreement on the outcomes that you want to achieve. Whether the goal is to address climate change or to improve health care outcomes, keep these principles in mind:

- Focus on "what you want to achieve," not how.
- Develop strategies with as much flexibility as possible to accommodate local circumstances.
- Seek agreement on the metrics up front so everyone has the same vision of success.
- Leverage the resources of national public interest groups such as the National Governors Association, National League of Cities, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Association of Counties, Council of State Governments, International City/County Management Association, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. These organizations have deep reach into the state and local government community and

can aggregate information, build awareness of the issues, and contribute to strategic discussions.

- Cultivate relationships. Your first call to a state or local government official should not be in the midst of a crisis.
- Recognize that meaningful engagement is a long-term strategy.
- Take advantage of new technologies for large-scale engagement whenever possible.
- Communicate. Two-way communication improves outcomes; while it requires an investment of time at first, it pays dividends over time.

These principles have been used effectively in the past, but often in a sporadic way. Look for ways to reinforce the value of intergovernmental engagement as a measure of success for your agency's leadership staff. Making it clear that collaboration with state and local governments is a core strategy is important. That message may need reinforcement in formal performance management processes, performance evaluations, and staff development activities as well.

Ask your colleagues in state and local governments to give you examples of what has worked well and what needs to change. They can tell you stories about how the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), for example, learned that consultation with local governments was essential to achieve results. A one-size-fits-all environmental standard cannot be expected to work well in a country with so many differences in climate, geography, and industries. Once EPA built relationships with local officials, they found partners who could help them develop the range of solutions that were needed to achieve environmental goals.

Likewise, state officials will be quick to compliment those occasions when the federal government has provided waivers to allow them to experiment with improvements in the welfare system or with Medicaid programs. However, these successes seem idiosyncratic and have seldom been sustained or shared broadly across the federal system.

### **Recommendation Three: Take advantage of the laboratories of democracy.**

Creativity and innovation can be found at all levels of government. The unique advantage of this country's federal system is that it allows a great deal of experimentation. A good idea that starts in a federal agency may become a great solution when state and local governments see it as a springboard to make progress on a challenge they face.

Likewise, good ideas bubble up from those who work on the front lines of democracy. Local governments may be at the forefront of the movement to work across boundaries. They understand readily that one community alone cannot solve issues of water scarcity, air quality, crumbling infrastructure, housing, energy, or global economic pressures. States, too, are building

more network capacity to work on shared agendas, such as strengthening their Emergency Management Assistance Compact to share resources across state lines.

The nation has common goals. Too often in recent years, the federal government has looked to state and local governments as a source of revenue rather than talent. In times of scarcity, you can't afford not to tap all of your resources, including state and local governments. Call us.

**Robert J. O'Neill** is Executive Director of the International City/County Management Association. He also served as County Executive of Fairfax County, Virginia, and City Manager of Hampton, Virginia.

**Elizabeth K. Kellar** is Executive Director of the Center for State and Local Government Excellence. She also serves as Deputy Executive Director of the International City/County Management Association.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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# Interest Groups and Associations

Government Accountability Office Citizens  
Interagency Collaborators White House  
Office of Personnel Management  
Congress Interagency Councils State and Local  
Governments **Unions** Inspectors General

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Stan Soloway  
Professional Services Council

## INTEREST GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

*By Stan Soloway*

As an agency head, you will be faced with making scores of decisions, often on complex, highly charged issues. Needless to say, there are many individuals and groups (both inside and outside of government) who would like to influence your decision. As such, a key challenge you will face is evaluating the quality of information that will underpin your decisions. After all, seeking, parsing, and synthesizing information into an actionable framework is an integral part of leadership. The best leaders I've seen throughout my career are those who seek out information and input from diverse sources, and who know how to ask the tough questions of any and all who provide it.

It is also axiomatic that your time is precious and information overload is a constant risk. That's where interest groups and associations can be of real value. By definition, their role is to provide perspectives from across one stakeholder community—be it an industry (generally represented by a trade association) or a profession (generally represented by a professional association). As such, they can serve as important resources and can become “one stop shops” that enable you to gain valuable insight from a wide range of interests without having to communicate directly with each and every member of that stakeholder community.

Make no mistake about it; as an agency leader, you will rapidly be introduced to the alphabet soup of organizations representing your agency's stakeholder community. To optimize their value to you, there are several good rules that you might follow—and insist that your key advisors follow as well.

### **Rule One: Ask them before they ask you.**

Every interest group, whether a trade or professional association or labor union, has its own agenda. As long as you know what their agenda is, don't shy from engaging them in the process of finding solutions to your toughest problems. Often, the best way to maximize the benefit of associations is to proactively present them with specific challenges or questions to which you are seeking answers.

The best organizations will respond with thoughtful inputs that reflect real effort on their part to both understand *your* priorities and needs, as well as to provide substantive strategies for you to consider. Whether you agree with their solutions or not, this outreach allows you to quickly separate the “doers” from the “talkers” and to recognize those organizations where ongoing and open communications are of real value to you, rather than just a political necessity.

**Rule Two: Stakeholder consensus cannot always be your goal.**

While it is helpful to have alignment with key stakeholder groups around important policy and other priorities, there are limits to the possible. Indeed, when it comes to driving change, some external stakeholders will be as resistant to change as your internal bureaucracy may be. Industries or professions are rarely monolithic, and some have even evolved in ways that mirror your internal bureaucracy.

For example, within the government contractor industry, different associations sometimes have different points of view. In addition, even within individual associations there may be divisions of opinions. As such, every industry and every organization representing elements of that industry will occasionally have difficulty finding consensus on complex issues that affect different elements of their membership differently. Recognize this reality; don't be afraid to challenge it and, most importantly, don't shy away from asking for those conflicting perspectives.

**Rule Three: Make external communications a routine, not an exception.**

You should ensure a regular flow of two-way communications exists between your office and key associations. Ongoing dialogue is far more effective and useful than episodic meetings driven by immediate crises. These routine communications can significantly aid both sides. Without them, the communications might well be conducted in other more public venues, like the media or on Capitol Hill. The more frequent the dialogue, the less likely you will be surprised about positions or have an unpleasant public debate that might have been avoidable.

**Rule Four: Be focused and structured in your communications.**

Routine communications and dialogue are not the same as open-ended discussions. Informal, open-ended contact can have value; but when it comes to problem solving, the more focused and structured the communications, the more you will get out of it.

When I conducted roundtable discussions at the Department of Defense, there was always an agenda, composed of specific questions submitted to me or that I had submitted in advance to the associations participating in the roundtable. These structured discussions were not staged or contrived but ensured we used the time and the opportunity wisely and effectively.

**Rule Five: Be transparent.**

Transparency and openness are essential. Engaging with interest groups and associations and professional organizations is often very valuable. But such communications do not exist in a vacuum. Even when you know a

group is likely to oppose your policies or initiatives, engage them as early and openly as those who are likely to support you. Picking and choosing which organizations to engage is not an option.

Listening to the possible opposition may give you valuable insights, blunt any criticism, or at least keep the lines of communication open. The best associations do their homework and offer substantive input and are essential to the policy process. Moreover, communications with stakeholders across the board is part and parcel of a sound democratic process. Trouble arises most often when government leaders try to avoid communication or talk to only one portion of a stakeholder community.

As an agency leader, you are, by definition, a “change leader.” Your role is to successfully implement the new president’s vision and agenda. Indeed, these basic rules reflect the fundamental tenets of effective change management as practiced in the most successful institutions. Following them will help you achieve that change and your goals, and provide many valuable insights to help inform your decision making. Moreover, they can help to enhance your agency’s credibility—another crucial component of success.

Managing time and information are but two of the most difficult challenges you will face. Interest groups and associations are key to solving those challenges. By effectively integrating them into your process, you can gain the benefit of diverse and numerous voices coming together.

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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# **Government Accountability Office**

Congress Interagency Collaborators **Citizens**

**White House** Office of Management and

Budget Interest Groups and Associations **Interagency**

**Councils** State and Local Governments

**Unions** White House Policy Councils **Media**

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Judy England-Joseph  
Partnership for Public Service

# GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

*By Judy England-Joseph*

You may have heard of the Government Accountability Office, but may not understand exactly what it does and how you can leverage it to further your agency's mission. The General Accounting Office was established in 1921 and was renamed the Government Accountability Office in 2005 to better reflect its current role and responsibilities. You probably know GAO as the "watchdog" of the Congress, but during your time in government you will find out that it is more than that.

GAO is a place you can go for an independent perspective on your agency and its programs. GAO's role in government is to assess government programs, analyze key issues facing the nation, state the facts, and make recommendations for improvement. It is able to look across the federal government at similar programs, operational activities, and management approaches to identify leading practices and present lessons learned to any leaders that will listen.

Step back for a moment and ask yourself if you have all the information you need to effectively lead and manage your agency. How effective are the programs administered in your agency? Does the agency operate in an efficient and effective manner? Are there areas where the risk of fraud, waste, or abuse is high? What actions can you take to improve your agency's performance and achieve greater results? GAO may be able to help you answer these questions.

## **What Is GAO?**

GAO is a legislative branch agency with the mission to support the Congress "in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people." GAO's mission statement states that it aims to provide Congress with timely information that is objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, non-ideological, fair, and balanced. It performs a broad range of research and evaluation work to assist its congressional clients in their authorization, appropriation, and oversight roles. To ensure its objectivity and independence, GAO is authorized only two political appointees, including the comptroller general, who has a 15-year term of office. As a result, there is very little leadership turnover and deep institutional memory.

GAO's staff has expertise in front-office programs as well as back-office operations (budget, financial management, information technology, procurement/acquisition management, strategic and performance management, and human capital management). It can be a one-stop source of independent, objective, verified information on government management. Most importantly,

its people have an extraordinary amount of information and a desire to help you use that knowledge to your advantage.

GAO's work is primarily congressionally requested or mandated in legislation. The demand for GAO resources is so great today that it gives priority to chairs and ranking members of committees with jurisdiction over the issues to be studied. The Congress determines the topic, but GAO defines the research questions and determines how the work will be performed. To further ensure its objectivity and independence and to provide transparency to everything it does, GAO insists on making its information public even when clients might wish otherwise. However, when information must be protected for national security reasons, GAO will disclose it only to those authorized to receive it and with a need to know. GAO also conducts investigations, rules on bid protests, and assists Congress with developing legislation and oversight agendas.

During your tenure, you are likely to interact with GAO in several different ways. The most frequent interactions will involve studies it is performing within your agency and the reports that result from these studies. But there are other ways you might interact with GAO, starting with a request from you for a briefing on previous GAO studies both in your agency and government-wide.

## **Using GAO as a Management Resource**

You may be surprised to learn that before you were nominated, confirmed, or appointed, GAO was pulling together information on its work at your agency and looking forward to sharing that information with you in a consultative, non-adversarial environment. GAO operates on the premise that the possibility of improving government far exceeds the benefit of simply criticizing it. It also develops best-practice-driven guidelines for implementing government-wide legislation and models that agencies can use to self-evaluate.

GAO can contribute to your understanding of what works and what doesn't work, as well as suggest actions needed to achieve performance improvement or program success. Knowing what GAO knows about your agency gives you an added perspective of knowing what has interested Congress in the past and where Congress might focus in the future. In the end, GAO's facts, analysis, and recommendations can provide the leverage you need to find the common ground essential to bringing about desired changes.

## **Interacting with GAO at the Start of a Review**

At the beginning of every review, GAO requests a meeting to discuss the review's questions, scope, and methodology. Often that meeting is held with

the program officials closest to the issues planned for review. Your GAO liaison should participate in those discussions as well.

This initial meeting will provide your staff an opportunity to learn about the objectives of the review. Your staff will also have the opportunity to provide input and insights into the issues or areas being reviewed and to make suggestions that might enhance the usefulness of the review's results for your agency. GAO believes that agency leadership and organizational buy-in are crucial to meaningful performance improvement and lasting change. As a result, your understanding of the work GAO plans to perform and how you might use what is learned to enhance your agency's activities is of mutual importance.

Throughout the review, GAO is willing to brief agency officials on the status of the review. If you work closely with GAO to inform them of any actions you have taken, these efforts might be recognized in any report, testimony, or briefing product discussing the results of the review. GAO will still report the problems found, but the report title could be more in the vein of "Agency Correcting Problems" than "Problems Plague Agency."

More frequently than you may think, there will be occasions when the topic of a GAO review should be on your radar screen. Consequently, you want to be sure that you have a reliable system in place to inform you of all GAO reviews ongoing at your agency. While you are not in the driver's seat regarding what a GAO review will cover, you can make suggestions that might enhance the effectiveness of the review results. At the completion of the review, GAO will conduct an exit meeting to brief agency officials on the results of its work. Here again is an opportunity for the agency to react to GAO's findings and conclusions and provide additional information to ensure GAO's work is complete.

## **Interacting with GAO Once a Report Is Written**

GAO work generally results in products such as written reports, testimony statements, or correspondence to its congressional clients. It frequently briefs congressional clients on the results of its work and other matters of interest. GAO will include recommendations to Congress whenever legislative actions are appropriate, and to agency heads when opportunities exist to improve agency management or program performance. Before GAO issues the final report, it will provide you with an opportunity to comment on the draft. The opportunity to comment should be taken very seriously. GAO might revise the report, where appropriate, to note changes that are based on agency feedback and include a copy of your formal response in the final report.

## Recommendations

As you set your agenda and priorities, you should consider ways to leverage GAO's work.

### **Recommendation One: Review the recommendations GAO has made to the Congress regarding your agency's programs and activities.**

It is very possible that one or more of those recommendations would actually help you accomplish your goals. If so, use GAO as a lever to convince Congress that actions on those recommendations are needed.

### **Recommendation Two: Review the recommendations from past GAO reports.**

Unless your agency has implemented them, they are likely not to go away and can become the subject of future reports or congressional hearings. Determine whether those recommendations should be part of your strategic priorities.

### **Recommendation Three: Throughout your tenure, make use of GAO's knowledge about your agency's programs and their effectiveness to inform your policy and programmatic strategies.**

Through GAO, you can learn about the experiences of past agency leaders across the federal government who have set similar programmatic goals and objectives. Find out what worked and didn't work and why.

If you take advantage of the opportunities to engage GAO, you will have established the foundation for leveraging GAO to improve your agency's performance in accomplishing your programmatic and operational goals.

*Judy England-Joseph is currently a consultant to the Partnership for Public Service. She served at GAO for 26 years, where she held positions responsible for energy, housing and community development, small business, natural disasters, and telecommunications issues. She oversaw hundreds of congressionally requested studies and testified frequently before Congress.*



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

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**Inspectors General** White House Policy  
Councils Government Accountability Office  
Interagency Collaborators **Citizens** White House  
Office of Personnel Management Interest  
Groups and Associations **Interagency Councils**  
**Unions** State and Local Governments **Media**

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Gaston L. Gianni

# INSPECTORS GENERAL

*By Gaston L. Gianni*

The Office of Inspector General is a unique function in the federal government. The inspector general has a broad range of independent statutory authorities to examine the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of his or her agency's operations and to detect fraud, waste, and abuse in the agency's programs. Understanding the IG roles and responsibility is one of the key steps to a successful tenure in government and the establishment of an effective working relationship with the IG.

Collectively, the Offices of Inspector General have identified billions of dollars in potential savings as well as program efficiencies and enhancements from a range of audits, investigations, evaluations, and inspections. For example, in fiscal year 2007, their efforts resulted in over \$11 billion in potential savings from audit recommendations, \$5 billion from investigation recoveries and receivables, and over 8,900 successful prosecutions.

Properly managed, the relationship between an agency head and the IG can be mutually productive and help ensure the integrity, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of agency programs. However, during past administrations, some difficulties have occurred in agency head relationships with their IG, especially when new agency heads have had little knowledge of or experience with the federal IG concept.

## **Recommendation One: Agency heads should learn about the IG's mission, role, and authorities.**

The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, provides the basic authorities for the creation and operation of an Office of Inspector General (OIG). Each executive department, and some larger independent agencies, has an IG appointed by the president and subject to Senate confirmation. The IG Act also provides for the agency head at selected Designated Federal Entities to appoint their IG. These IGs have the same authorities and responsibilities as a presidentially appointed IG.

IGs are to be appointed without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of integrity and demonstrated ability in accounting, auditing, financial analysis, law, management analysis, public administration, or investigations.

IGs have two primary roles:

- To independently find and report on current problems in accordance with professional standards
- To prevent future problems by fostering integrity, accountability, and excellence in government programs

In carrying out these responsibilities, IGs are to:

- Independently conduct and supervise audits, investigations, inspections, and evaluations of agency programs and operations
- Review existing and proposed laws and regulations to agency programs and operations
- Provide leadership for activities designed to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, and to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse
- Inform their agency heads and the Congress of problems in their agencies' programs and operations and the need for and progress of corrective actions

Furthermore, the IG Act gives IGs access to agency records and personnel to obtain the information needed for the above work. For records located outside the agency, the IGs have subpoena authority to obtain needed documents. There are several other operational matters that are unique to the OIG that warrant brief mention.

The IG Act has several provisions to help ensure and protect IG independence. IGs have full authority to select, plan, and conduct their work. Further, as a means to protect the IGs' objectivity, the act prohibits them from managing any operational program of the agency or supervising the activities of agency employees outside the OIG. In addition, IGs have independent personnel and contracting authority, separate from their agencies, and their budgets are independent line items in their agency budget requests. Also, the IG is authorized to establish its own office of counsel separate from the agency's general counsel. Finally, because of their dual reporting responsibility to the agency head and to the Congress, the IG is the only official in a department or agency that can communicate directly with the Congress without being first cleared by its agency or the Office of Management and Budget.

Virtually all IG criminal investigators exercise law enforcement authority, either through a direct statutory grant or under deputation by the Department of Justice. Under this authority the investigators can carry firearms, make arrests, and obtain and execute search warrants. IGs are required to report suspected violations of criminal law directly to the attorney general and work closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. District Attorney Offices.

IGs are required to issue a report semiannually to their agency/department head and the Congress about OIG activities in the prior six months. These reports contain a statement from the IG, summaries of major problems and abuses identified, corrective actions taken on recommendations, previous recommendations not acted on by the agency, and lists of cases sent for prosecution. The IG also must identify instances where the agency declined to provide requested information to the OIG. The agency head is to forward the report to the Congress with comments on how the IG recommendations have been addressed, along with other comments on significant efficiency and integrity issues being addressed by the agency.

While the presidentially appointed IGs serve at the pleasure of the president, the Congress in the past has requested incoming administrations to treat the current IGs as careerists and keep them in place. However, if an IG is removed, the president, for presidentially appointed IGs, or the agency head, for executive appointed IGs, must notify the Congress in writing.

The IG Act specifies that the IG is under the general direction of the agency head, but provides no further guidance. Given the above mission, role, and authorities of the IG, it is imperative that the agency head quickly establish communications with the IG and begin to build a cooperative and effective working relationship.

### **Recommendation Two: New agency heads should reach out to their IG.**

Reaching out to the IG as soon as possible after taking office will help ensure the establishment of a cooperative and constructive working relationship. In addition, the IGs' unique position within a department or agency gives them an opportunity to independently develop a broad, objective perspective on the major operational challenges and problems that face the new leadership. This type of information will be helpful to you and your team as you develop your future goals and objectives.

### **Recommendation Three: Work with the IG.**

The key to a successful relationship between you and the IG will depend on a great deal of professionalism from both you and the IG. Specifically, you should:

- Recognize and respect the IG's independent role in carrying out its mission within the agency and its reporting responsibilities. This independent relationship will provide an ongoing challenge in your relationship, but remember that the IG Act was enacted to provide this independence.
- Interact with professionalism and mutual respect at all times. Both must remember that you share a common goal, which is the successful accomplishment of the agency's mission.
- Foster open communications at all levels in the organization. The degree to which you respect and value the IG's role and demonstrate a professional relationship will set the tone for the rest of the agency.
- Keep the IG up to date on current matters and events in your agency.
- Implement mechanisms, both formal and informal, to ensure prompt and regular dialogue. The IG's ability to maintain an ongoing dialogue and to have ready access to the agency head can serve to alleviate some inherent conflicts in roles. For example, one agency head would meet with the IG biweekly to discuss agency and IG operations. In addition, the IG was invited to attend the agency head's weekly senior management meetings. This type of openness created an environment where agency officials,

the IG, and the IG staff worked cooperatively in the pursuit of common agency goals. It also enabled the IG to communicate information, such as upcoming reports and sensitive investigations, to the agency head in a timely manner.

Given the complexity of the management and policy issues within an agency, from time to time an agency head and the IG may disagree on the extent of a problem and the need for and scope of corrective action. However, if effective working relationships have been established based on cooperation, mutual respect, and trust, such disagreements should not cause the relationship to become unproductive. Instead, effective relationships will result in more efficient and effective use of government resources; the reduction of fraud, waste, and abuse; and a more successful accomplishment of agency goals and objectives.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

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**Media** Government Accountability Office  
Interagency Collaborators **Citizens** White House  
Office of Management and Budget Interest Groups  
and Associations **Interagency Councils** State  
and Local Governments **Unions** White House  
Policy Councils **Congress** Inspectors General

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Lawrence J. Haas

# MEDIA

*By Lawrence J. Haas*

Two centuries ago, philosopher Edmund Burke labeled the media “the fourth estate,” one that jockeyed for influence with the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners of France after the revolution. The term took root in America, nourishing an image of media power that you would be wise to take seriously.

The media are here to stay, and they will be a big part of your professional life. You can’t wish them away. Nor should you try to work around them, for that’s a strategy doomed to failure. They are too powerful, with too many ways to shape public opinion to your detriment. As Mark Twain said, “Never pick a fight with someone who buys his ink by the barrel.”

Instead, you need to: (1) understand who they are and what they require, and (2) hire the right people and create the right process for interacting with them.

## Understanding the Media

With the information revolution of recent years, media come in greater variety than ever. They are newspaper, magazine, and wire reporters, columnists, and editorial writers; TV and radio anchors and producers; and online reporters and bloggers. They reach different audiences, they need different kinds of information, and they face different deadlines.

Your relationship with them will be adversarial—inherently so. They will want to know everything that’s happening in your agency, especially the very things you may want to keep out of the public sphere, and they will want to know it before their competitors do. They will look for negative stories, which will more likely get them on page one or on air in a news broadcast.

Stiffing them will not work. That will just anger reporters, who will then go out of their way to portray you negatively. They can always find someone to say something bad about you, whether a congressional aide, a lobbyist, or even a jealous colleague from within the administration.

Instead, you should accept the media as a given and work with them as effectively as possible.

## Working with the Media

**Hire the right communications director.** You can’t be the day-to-day “go to” person for the media; you’ll be too busy running your agency. You need a communications director who will be your spokesperson. You need

someone whom you trust, someone with whom you can work closely to ensure that he or she is disseminating your message. Hire a professional, someone who has done similar work in the past or someone from the media who wants to make a career change—that is, someone who understands how the media work, what they need, how they develop stories, and so on. If possible, find someone who understands the substance of your agency's work. A communications director who can explain your agency's work will garner greater respect from the media and will let you concentrate on your own job.

**Empower your communications director.** Your communications director needs to know as much as possible about what's happening in your agency. Only then can he or she make the right judgment, in consultation with you, about how to accurately portray the agency's business. Allow that person to attend as many of your meetings as possible. Let him or her speak "on the record"—that is, with that person's name and title identified publicly—sending a strong signal to the media that you trust your communications director to speak on your behalf.

**Empower yourself and your top senior staff.** Your communications director can't do it all. You will want to, or have to, speak with the media from time to time. If you have a large agency with many issues, you may need other senior members of your team to do the same. You should rely on the communications director, however, to coordinate all such conversations or e-mail exchanges, ensuring that one person is tracking all media interactions.

**Coordinate your communications activities.** Neither you nor your communications director will work in a vacuum. Your agency probably sits within a larger department, but even if you run a stand-alone agency, you are part of a new administration. The administration will want to coordinate the timing of news-making announcements by departments and agencies. You and your communications director should keep your counterparts—in the department and, if appropriate, in the White House—apprised of major communications activities that you want to undertake, such as a press conference to launch a new initiative. When it comes to intra-administration coordination, the rule is: no surprises.

**Protect the career staff.** You should *not* expect career staff to speak with the media (except at the direction of, and supervision by, your communications director). They are civil servants; they were hired for their jobs before you arrived and many will still be there after you depart. Although they manage federal programs at your direction, they were not hired to promote the political agenda for any particular administration, including yours. You should not ask them to do so. Instead, you should make clear that when career staff receive calls or e-mails from the media, they should send them to the communications director.

**When opportunity knocks, don't be shy.** When important issues arise, your communications director may suggest, or the media may demand, that you speak to reporters (one on one or in group settings such as press

conferences). You should be prepared to do so and you should work with your communications director to decide what other top staff should speak as well. Also, you should consider mechanisms of regular communication with key media, such as weekly roundtable discussions, through which you can educate reporters about your work and draw attention to your most important initiatives.

**When problems arise, don't be shifty.** "Trust is the coin of the realm." Your credibility takes time to establish but a mere moment to destroy. From time to time, things will go wrong. You will make a mistake or one of your staff will break the law or a watchdog group will write critically about one of your programs. In speaking with the media, you will be tempted to shade the truth or hide some information. Don't. Instead, explain what went wrong and what you're doing to prevent it from happening again. Otherwise, the media will likely learn later that you were less than forthright, and they will never trust you again.

**Know the rules.** The media operate under rules that define how they use information. Unless otherwise noted, you must assume that when you speak to the media, you are "on the record," meaning they can identify you and use everything you say. You may, however, want to speak "on background," which generally means they must hide your identity (for example, "an administration official"); on "deep background," which generally means they can use your information but not attribute it to anyone at all; or "off the record," which generally means they can't use the information at all. But because these terms are ambiguous, you should pin down the ground rules with the media *before* you start any conversation with them.

**Set your message.** The best people and the best process can only go so far, however. You need to decide: What do you want to tell the media, and what should your communications director say on your behalf? What are your highest priorities? Your most important initiatives? Only you can answer these questions. It's your agency—and your message.

*Lawrence J. Haas, a public affairs consultant and writer in Washington, D.C., was a senior communications official in the Clinton White House and, before that, a correspondent with the National Journal and other publications.*

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## **About the Editors**

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## ABOUT THE EDITORS



**Mark A. Abramson** is the President of Leadership Inc. He was instrumental in establishing two cutting-edge organizations dedicated to improving management in government. In 1998, he helped create what became the IBM Center for The Business of Government and served as its executive director from 1998 to 2007. Earlier in his career, Mr. Abramson conceived and helped launch the Council for Excellence in Government and served as its first president from 1983 to 1994.

Mr. Abramson began his career as a public servant in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 1992, he was elected a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration. Mr. Abramson is past president of the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration.

Mr. Abramson serves as editor of the IBM Center for The Business of Government Book Series, published by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. He is also the author or editor of 16 books and has published more than 100 articles on public management. He is a member of the editorial board of *Public Administration Review* as case study editor, and has served as a contributing editor to *Government Executive* and a member of the Board of Editors and forum editor for *The Public Manager*. He received a Master of Arts in Political Science from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, a Master of Arts in History from New York University, and a Bachelor of Arts from Florida State University.



**Jonathan D. Breul** is Executive Director of the IBM Center for The Business of Government and a Partner with IBM Global Business Services, where he helps public sector executives improve the effectiveness of government with practical ideas and original thinking. The IBM Center sponsors independent research by top minds in academe and the nonprofit sector, and creates opportunities for dialogue on a broad range of public management topics. Formerly senior advisor to the deputy director for management

in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in the Executive Office of the President, Mr. Breul served as OMB's senior career executive with primary responsibility for government-wide general management policies.

Mr. Breul helped develop the President's Management Agenda, was instrumental in establishing the President's Management Council, and championed efforts to integrate performance information with the budget process. He led the development and government-wide implementation of the Government Performance and Results Act. In addition to his OMB activities, he helped Senator John Glenn of Ohio launch the Chief Financial Officers Act.

Mr. Breul is an elected fellow and member of the Board of Trustees of the National Academy of Public Administration, a principal of the Council for Excellence in Government, and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's Graduate Public Policy Institute. He holds a Master of Public Administration from Northeastern University and a Bachelor of Arts from Colby College.



**John M. Kamensky** is a Senior Fellow at the IBM Center for The Business of Government and an Associate Partner with IBM Global Business Services. During his 24 years of public service, he played a key role in helping pioneer the federal government's performance and results orientation. He is passionate about creating a government that is results oriented, performance based, customer focused, and collaborative in nature. He is co-author of *Managing for Results 2002; Collaboration: Using Networks and Part-*

*nerships; Managing for Results 2005; and Competition, Choice, and Incentives in Government Programs.*

Prior to moving to the private sector in 2001, Mr. Kamensky served for eight years as deputy director of Vice President Gore's National Partnership for Reinventing Government. Before that, he worked at the Government Accountability Office for 16 years, where he played a key role in the development and passage of the Government Performance and Results Act. He is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration and a principal of the Council for Excellence in Government. Mr. Kamensky received a Master of Public Affairs from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in Austin, and a Bachelor of Arts from Angelo State University.



**G. Martin Wagner** is a Senior Fellow at the IBM Center for The Business of Government and an Associate Partner with IBM Global Business Services. A 30-year veteran of the federal government, he led initiatives that set the tone and direction for major changes in government management. He played a key role in promoting electronic government, embracing commercial contracting methods, and using performance measures. Mr. Wagner helped initiate FirstGov (now USA.gov), the government's Internet portal, and Fed-

BizOpps, the gateway for all federal procurements. He established government-wide contracts for smart cards and electronic signatures, and co-chaired the federal government's first interagency electronic commerce effort.

As acting commissioner and later deputy commissioner of the Federal Acquisition Service of the General Services Administration (GSA), he oversaw the acquisition of more than \$50 billion of goods and services for other federal agencies. His programs included the government's information technology and telecommunications contracts, the management of 200,000 motor vehicles, disaster relief for hurricane victims, equipment for the U.S. armed forces, travel management, and the use of charge cards. As associate administrator for government-wide policy at GSA for 10 years, he developed and implemented policies for internal government management.

As a member of the federal government's Senior Executive Service, Mr. Wagner received both a Meritorious and a Distinguished Presidential Rank Award during his career. He is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration. Mr. Wagner earned a Bachelor of Science and Engineering and a Master of Science and Engineering from Princeton University, and received a Master of Economics and Public Policy from Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School.



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# **About the IBM Center for The Business of Government**

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## ABOUT THE IBM CENTER FOR THE BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT

Founded in 1998, the IBM Center helps public sector executives improve the effectiveness of government with practical ideas and original thinking. The IBM Center sponsors independent research by top minds in the academic and nonprofit communities. It focuses on the future of the operation and management of the public sector. Since its creation, the IBM Center has published 20 books and over 200 reports. All reports are available free of charge at the IBM Center website: [www.businessofgovernment.org](http://www.businessofgovernment.org).

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*– from the Introduction to Getting It Done*

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