

Safeguarding Implementation Action Plan

Date: Feb. 25, 2004

Issue Group: Organizational Dynamics and Communication

Activity: Core Infrastructure Study for Area Offices

Recommendations Covered: Recommendation #65 stated, “Direct APHIS to immediately assess staffing needs;

-This in order to address significant losses in senior personnel, and the expected loss of more;

-Review and adjust compensation disparities, grade levels, and career pathway opportunities;

-Establish partnerships with state officials, academics, and industry representatives in order to augment and complement its own staffing resources; and

-Provide more staffing for the CVB-IC, CVB-LPD, and CVB-L, all of which are currently understaffed for their mandate.

This Action Plan does not address the entire breadth of #65, it focuses on core infrastructure in Area Offices and will address reviewing and adjusting compensation disparities, grade levels, and career pathways in those offices. Future action plans will address losses of senior leadership and CVB staffing.

The Primary Recommendation of the Review was “Congress and the United States Department of Agriculture must provide funding and act to rebuild the state and national infrastructure for animal disease control, emergency disease preparedness, and response.” Since this Issue Group is mandated to review infrastructure issues in general, it seems appropriate to review the leadership and administrative infrastructure that is the foundation for much of VS field activity.

This action plan also addresses the following key points noted by the Issue Group: 1) Identify and acknowledge the changes necessary for VS to successfully carry out its mission and 2) Assess what VS does and why they do it.

Issue Group Findings:

During a November 2002 meeting, the VSMT discussed personnel and staffing issues within the context of adding program personnel. However, because of the wide variation that exists between Area Offices, the VSMT believed it would be helpful to identify the essential VS core infrastructure necessary for those offices to help bring some consistency to the evaluation process. It also seemed an opportune time to tie into other Safeguarding Implementation efforts. For example, the Surveillance implementation group has been asking what field support is needed to develop a National Surveillance System. Is our ability to record and utilize disease program data compromised because we ask too much of low-level record clerks? In addition, the IT implementation group is wrestling with numbers versus grade issues. The old Central region states decided to have more IT positions with less responsibility at a lower grade, while the old Western region opted to have fewer positions with more responsibility at a higher grade. These

variations need to be resolved. Rather than repeat the process again and again each time such an evaluation as necessary, a core infrastructure project group was formed in late 2002 to create a model for this evaluation.

This action plan supports the effort already underway to review core infrastructure at the Area Office level. The Organizational Dynamics Issue Group feels this ongoing project will help address Recommendation #65.

Proposed Actions: In late 2002, the Western and Eastern Regional Directors appointed an Associate Director and a Management Analyst from each region to examine the administrative and leadership composition of Area Offices with the idea of identifying the essential core infrastructure, and creating an objective means to review future needs. A key first step in the process of identifying essential elements of VS core infrastructure at Area Offices is to develop objective measures of VS Area Office activity and complexity. For example, some high-activity Area Offices might need program managers, others an area epidemiologist or an assistant AVIC. Regional directors could use measures of activity and complexity to determine which Area Offices might qualify for additional resources.

In late 2002, an issue of immediate interest to the VS Management Team was the administrative support functions at the Area Offices, and because of the lingering need to finalize possible upgrade/reclassification of administrative support assistants (ASAs), it was a logical place to begin a wider review of the Area Office core infrastructure. This portion of the project is well underway nationally. Measures of activity and complexity will be used to determine which Area Offices qualify for a review by Human Resources in MRPBS. The HR review will determine if a qualifying Area Office can justify the upgrade/reclassification of the ASA position. This objective measure will be the basis for future position reviews also.

After the ASA positions, the core infrastructure project team began to evaluate a proposal to provide assistance to the AVICs by establishing an assistant AVIC or creating a new program manager position. Unlike the ASA positions, though, this evaluation would only occur for those Areas where there was a perceived need. The team utilized the data relating to complexity and activity to establish a starting point for this review. The central question investigated was whether there is a need for more leadership or a need for more people to do program work. The Eastern Region took the lead in the summer of 2003 by examining current position descriptions for Assistant AVICs. Also during the summer of 2003 Human Resources in MN developed a matrix identifying leadership criteria and technical elements used to establish this position.

The core infrastructure project team will be evaluating the following factors to determine when to establish an assistant AVIC position:

- What activities take the AVIC away from the office?
- What level of support does the State provide for disease programs?
- Does the AVIC have responsibilities to manage new and/or emerging programs?
- Does the AVIC manage large programs such as TB, scrapie, import/export?

- Would the creation of additional area epi positions provide more assistance than the establishment of an assistant AVIC?

Ultimately, this process should result in a systems approach to evaluation of position requests for not only Area Offices, but also positions requiring specialized skills throughout VS.

Implementation Plan:

Tasks for ASA positions:

- Develop a matrix of Area Office personnel and update organization charts for each Area Office. **Completed Dec. 2002**
- Survey AVIC's to document work performed by ASAs (a copy of the survey is attached). **Completed Dec. 2002**
- Search the Generic Data Base and NASS data bases to develop inputs describing Area Office activity **Completed March 2003**
- Survey AVIC's to develop inputs describing Area Office complexity. **Completed March 2003**
- Use inputs to develop objective measures of Area Office activity and complexity. **Completed March 2003**
- Determine which offices should be reviewed **Completed March 2003**
- Have AVICs in those areas under consideration work with MRPBS Classifiers to create a relevant position description, and grade **Task began in June 2003**
- Advertise and fill positions under new grade and title **Task began in July 2003**

Tasks for Assistant AVIC/program manager positions:

- Using existing tools created for the ASA review, a model will be developed that will serve as the template for use when AAVIC/program manager positions are requested or thought necessary. Some positions have already been evaluated and advertised, and others are just being identified. **Estimated completion date for creation of the model is September 2004.**

Accountable Group: VS Western and Eastern Regional Directors

Other Key Players: VS Management Team and the Area Veterinarians in Charge. Also impacted will be current staffs of Area Offices.

Resources Needed: Time spent by those involved mostly at duty stations. \$5,000 is requested to cover travel costs for four people related to implementation of the project. These funds will cover presentation at meetings (i.e. VSMT), and one meeting of the team.

Statutory/Regulatory Impacts: None

Political Sensitivities: Staffing decisions invariably involve political considerations, especially when someone believes they have been treated unfairly. Data collected will be closely scrutinized. Assumptions will be contested. There will always be some who benefit from the conclusions made and some that do not. VS Regional Directors will need

to work diligently to ensure that their decisions are communicated clearly in order to gain understanding and promote cooperation among VS Area Office staffs.

Sequencing: Already underway. The measures of activity and complexity have been developed. These measures were used by the Regional Directors to qualify ASA positions for a review by Human Resources in MRPBS. The HR review will determine if a qualifying Area Office can justify the upgrade/reclassification of the ASA position. Next steps call for the use of the activity and complexity measures to qualify Area Offices that might need additional resources such as a program manager, area epidemiologist or an assistant AVIC. A similar process will exist for future reviews.

Partnering/Cooperation/Communication: The main intent of this action plan is to help the Western and Eastern Regions develop a more objective method for making staffing decisions. However, the Issue Group also believes the same methodology could be applied to other units in VS and APHIS.

Expected Outcome and Performance Indicators: Successful implementation of this plan will allow VS Regional Directors to use mathematical formulas to make staffing decisions based on reliable, objective data. This should reduce criticism of unfairness, but more importantly, it will help VS hire the right person for the right job at the right time.

Linkage to the VS Strategic Plan: This action plan supports Goal 5 of the Strategic plan: *Create an organizational environment that fosters VS' ability to carry out its animal health mission.*

Attachment

VS Core Infrastructure – Work Performed by ASA’s

1. Please assess the *overall program activity* for your area using the five-point scale from Low to High 1 = Low and 5 = High. Examples of areas with a high level of program activity are New York, California, Texas, Florida, New England

Overall Program Activity	Low				High
	1	2	3	4	5

2. For the following program activities, assess your *ASA’s involvement* using the same five-point scale from Low to High.

Specific Program Activity	Low				High
	1	2	3	4	5
TB	1	2	3	4	5
PRV	1	2	3	4	5
BR	1	2	3	4	5
Scrapie	1	2	3	4	5
AI	1	2	3	4	5
Aquaculture	1	2	3	4	5
CWD	1	2	3	4	5
FAD	1	2	3	4	5

3. Please assess the *organizational complexity* for your area using the five-point scale from Low to High 1 = Not Complex and 5 = Highly Complex. Examples of states with High Complexity are Florida and California.

Organizational Complexity	Not Complex			Highly Complex	
	1	2	3	4	5

4. Please describe the *level of supervision* you provide for the ASA. Do you

1-assign specific projects and set deadlines

2-assign most projects and sets most deadlines

3-work with the ASA to develop project priorities and milestone deadlines

4-let the ASA develop most project priorities and deadlines

5-give the ASA freedom to plan and organize projects and deadlines

5. For each work category listed below, please describe how the ASA is utilized.

(A.) Budget (Planning, forecasting, reporting)

- 1-Does not work in this area
- 2-Seldom works in this area
- 3-Does some work in this area
- 4-Works often in this area
- 5-Works in this area on a regular basis

As a guide to determine how an ASA is utilized, we suggest the following:

Seldom works = plugs numbers into IPBS

Does some work = Helps AVIC construct yearly budget

Works often in this area = Keeps AVIC apprised of status of budget in all areas of program work

Works on a regular basis = Plans ahead and forecasts budget overloads and shortages

(B.) IT

- 1-Does not work in this area
- 2-Seldom works in this area
- 3-Does some work in this area
- 4-Works often in this area
- 5-Works in this area on a regular basis

As a guide to determine how an ASA is utilized, we suggest the following:

Seldom works = Able to load software

Does some work = Able to fix most problems with help of ATAC

Works often in this area = Backs up server, people often ask ASA to solve computer or server problems

Works on a regular basis = Functions as the backup to the IT specialist

(C.) Supervisory Responsibilities

- 1-Does not work in this area
- 2-Seldom works in this area
- 3-Does some work in this area
- 4-Works often in this area
- 5-Works in this area on a regular basis

As a guide to determine how an ASA is utilized, we suggest the following:

Seldom works = Works with others on specified projects

Does some work = Routinely works with others to complete projects

Works often in this area = Supervises others on particular projects

Works on a regular basis = Supervises others on a regular basis at least 25% of their time

(D.) Personnel Responsibilities

- 1-Does not work in this area
- 2-Seldom works in this area
- 3-Does some work in this area
- 4-Works often in this area
- 5-Works in this area on a regular basis

As a guide to determine how an ASA is utilized, we suggest the following:

Seldom works = Sometimes is asked to file 52's

Does some work = Works with MRPBS to request assistance

Works often in this area = Frequently is asked to write position descriptions

Works on a regular basis = Participates in the interviewing process

(E.) Forms & Records

- 1-Does not work in this area

- 2-Seldom works in this area
- 3-Does some work in this area
- 4-Works often in this area
- 5-Works in this area on a regular basis

As a guide to determine how an ASA is utilized, we suggest the following:

Seldom works = Keeps most records and forms organized, able to obtain forms in a day or two

Does some work = Keeps records filed and organized. Can find most information quickly.

Works often in this area = Works out additional methods to handle records and forms. Information is available on request.

Works on a regular basis = Organizes records and forms in an efficient manner. Files are kept up-to-date. Can produce every record or form upon request.

(F.) Travel

- 1-Does not work in these areas
- 2-Seldom works in these areas
- 3-Does some work in these areas
- 4-Works often in these areas
- 5-Works in these areas on a regular basis

(G.) Procurement,

- 1-Does not work in these areas
- 2-Seldom works in these areas
- 3-Does some work in these areas
- 4-Works often in these areas
- 5-Works in these areas on a regular basis

(H.) Fleet Management

- 1-Does not work in these areas
- 2-Seldom works in these areas
- 3-Does some work in these areas
- 4-Works often in these areas
- 5-Works in these areas on a regular basis

(I.) T & A's

- 1-Does not work in these areas
- 2-Seldom works in these areas
- 3-Does some work in these areas
- 4-Works often in these areas
- 5-Works in these areas on a regular basis