

ACQUISITION HUMAN CAPITAL PLAN
For United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

1.3 Acquisition Workforce Overview

b. The size of USDA’s workforce, by functional area, is illustrated in the table below.

Table 2 - Acquisition Workforce Size

Segment of AWF	#FY 10	% Certified FY10
1102 Workforce	658*	72%
Non-1102 COs	618	4.6%**
P/PMs	323	100%
COTRs	1445	100%
* Data from www.fedscope.opm.gov		
** Most non-1102 COs are not FAC-C certified because their warrant authority is mostly limited to simplified acquisitions.		

1.4 Acquisition Workforce Projection – Building Capacity

Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the agency OPM Human Capital Management Report acquisition workforce resource chart.

There are various methods which USDA plans to collaboratively explore in an effort to build the capacity of the acquisition workforce. Developing a more robust acquisition workforce will serve as a critical link in effectively managing the growing contract-related workload. USDA hopes to expand the use of hiring authorities and career development programs to bolster capacity.

Hiring Authorities

USDA’s Office of Procurement and Property Management (OPPM) is currently working with USDA’s Human Resources Policy division to explore the benefits of the direct hire authority for acquisitions professionals. The HR policy division now has an HR Specialist working to develop a justification for permission to implement direct hire to quickly fill critical positions with qualified individuals. USDA also considers other hiring authorities, as appropriate, to place

qualified applicants including the following authorities: veterans hiring, student employment, Schedule A excepted service, reemploying annuitants, etc.

OPPM works tirelessly to communicate hiring flexibilities and to provide staffing support to achieve an optimal acquisition workforce capacity. USDA's procurement website includes links for the following: Office of Federal Procurement Policy memo on Attracting Talent to the Acquisition Workforce, Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Federal Hiring Flexibilities Resources, OPM Hiring Toolkit, and Federal Acquisition Institute Hiring Authorities video.

Career Development Programs

Plans for establishing an acquisition intern, or fellows, program are being considered as a hiring and career development tool. This program would utilize best practices from the FAI Federal Acquisition Fellows Coalition guidelines which are currently being developed. Our hope is that the intern program would posture USDA to better compete with other agencies in attracting and retaining talented and proficient employees. An intern program would also help mitigate USDA's high retirement rate and increase the percentage of agency 1102's with bachelor's degrees. The intern program would include several key components to include training, rotational assignments, FAC-C certification, and promotions. Some of the benefits of each component include:

- Training- *to award / administer higher quality and more economical contracts. Soft skills training such as communication, leadership, and interpersonal skills.*
- Rotational Assignments- *to maximize the fit of the right intern with the right agency and to broaden intern development.*
- FAC-C Certification- *to validate understanding of specific competencies and justify individual warrant levels.*
- Promotions- *to implement grade structures featuring routine promotions to match increasingly challenging assignments.*

Implementation of an intern program is contingent upon funding and a federal hiring authority that would allow agencies to place recent college graduates.

A recently launched career development program which will assist in enhancing acquisition workforce capacity is the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Business Management Leaders Program established to recruit and retain a diverse group of talented college graduates. The USDA Business Management Leaders Program (BMLP) is a two-year career fellowship program with non-competitive permanent placement upon completion. This intensive program provides a combination of formal training with rotational work assignments in financial management, human resources, and contracting. NRCS has hired 100 college graduates for the BMLP program and the first class commenced training in January, 2011. The

program consists of a blend of formal education and on-the-job training over a two-year period that includes: formal education, skills assessments, individualized development planning, leadership shadowing, self-study, on-the-job training, rotational assignments, mentoring, and a capstone simulation/ assessment seminar.

Another tool to stretch capacity is part of the Secretary of Agriculture’s Cultural Transformation initiative. Among other things, the initiative included listening sessions to help promote the training and career development of USDA employees. The listening sessions revealed the need for a central source for advertising available details facilitating employee career development. To that end, the USDA Detail Registry was developed to provide a portal where all USDA organizations may post non-competitive detail opportunities. This allows current and prospective acquisition workforce members to search for detail opportunities consistent with their career goals and apply for the details if interested. Employees may also use the portal to post a Detail Request which informs human resources professionals about interest in a detail and the knowledge and skills the requestor hopes to develop.

A large segment of data points for the following tables was calculated using the Conceptual Combination Model Workforce Projection Tool which was provided by the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI).

Table 4a - Workforce Projections

	FY 2011			FY 2012			FY 2013			FY 2014		
Hires to Manage Attrition	Entry (5,7,9)	Mid (11,12)	Senior (13,14,15)	Entry	Mid	Senior	Entry	Mid	Senior	Entry	Mid	Senior
#1102s	12	12	12	12	12	11	12	12	12	12	12	11
Growth (new positions)												
#1102s	9	0	0	5	4	0	4	2	2	4	2	2
Growth (through identification of existing agency positions into the acquisition workforce)												
# contracting officers	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Retention of retirement and transfer eligible employees												
% 1102s	88%			88%			89%			89%		
Certification Targets												
#1102s	151			159			167			175		

#contracting officers	17			18			19			20		
Interns (entry level personnel participating in structured development program including training, rotation, mentoring)												
contracting	10	0	0	10	10	0	0	20	0	0	10	0
P/PM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other acquisition professions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4b - Further Workforce Projections

	FY 11	FY12	FY13	FY14
Hires/assignments to manage attrition				
#COTRs	100	100	100	100
#P/PMs	1	2	1	2
Growth (new positions)				
#COTRs	9	9	9	9
#P/PMs	0	0	0	0
Growth (assignment into AWF)				
#COTRs	109	109	109	109
#P/PMs	1	2	1	2
Certification Targets				
#COTRs	90	92	94	96
#P/PMs	1	2	1	2

1.5 Acquisition Workforce Training and Development –Building Capability

Training and development is a critical component in strengthening the capability of USDA’s acquisition workforce. The following briefly summarizes highlights of various strategies and initiatives developed to build capacity.

One-on-One Meetings

USDA has at least one acquisition workforce employee in every county in the United States, eleven distinct contracting activities, and over 2,700 employees designated as acquisition

workforce members (includes GS-1102s, non-1102 Contracting Officers, COTRs, and P/PMs). In order to improve communications and better understand workforce needs, the ACM visited every contracting activity during late FY 10 and early FY 11. Each meeting was unique, primarily because each contracting activity has a unique mission and provides differing services. However, the ACM was able to learn opportunities in which contracting activities could share success stories, best practices, and collaborate for economies of scale and scope. The meetings also helped to formulate and prioritize the strategies that were most likely to strengthen workforce capability. Furthermore, we discussed each contracting activity's Acquisition Workforce Competency Survey results and plans to enhance surveyed competencies with low proficiency ratings.

FAC-P/PM Program

USDA continues to make huge strides in developing Program and Project Managers through the recently established FAC-P/PM program. During FY 10, USDA's policy memorandum was issued for the FAC-P/PM, program requirements were communicated, a competency based application was developed and disseminated, and meetings with vendors (e.g. ESI International, Management Concepts) were held to explore strategies for optimizing learning. In addition, USDA participated in an industry-led assessment to assist in determining certification levels for FAC-P/PM applicants (i.e. Entry, Mid, Senior). Finally, USDA anxiously awaits guidance from a functional advisory board, currently in session, on ways to improve the agency FAC-P/PM programs.

FAC-C Program

The core level I, II, and III contracting courses are a critical component of development for USDA 1102s and non-1102 Contracting Officers. To that end, significant strides are being made to improve course enrollment and monitor certifications needed for positions and/or warrant levels. Required course completion and applications for FAC-C applications are at record high levels within USDA. During FY 2010, 113 FAC-C applications were submitted, and thus far in FY 2011, over 85 applications have been submitted with six months still remaining! USDA has also recently implemented a fulfillment policy to ensure that credit is conferred, as appropriate, to those who mastered competencies in required classes through other documented training or developmental experiences.

FAC-COTR Program

USDA is already leveraging the Federal Acquisition Institute's recently updated COR 222 – contracting Officer's Representative Course to train and facilitate certification of our COTRs. In areas where numerous prospective COTRs are present, we have secured USDA specific COTR

training, enabling numerous COTRs to be simultaneously certified through a shared learning process. OPM is considering improvements to the existing FAC-COTR program and USDA has provided comments and input for various procedures in an effort to make the program even more effective!

Mentoring

Partnering with FAI and other civilian agencies, USDA expanded acquisition workforce development offerings with the launch of an Acquisition Inter-agency Mentoring Program Pilot in 2010 to support the career progression efforts of the acquisition community. Over the course of the Pilot, from August 2010 - December 2010, USDA participants had the unique opportunity of working with and learning from highly qualified and talented individuals in the acquisition workforce, and/or the opportunity to share knowledge with seasoned acquisition professionals, and contribute to the development and retention of talent. Both mentors and mentees completed mentorship training, professional development activities, and networking events.

The USDA Acquisition Workforce website was recently updated to include a link to the recently launched FedMentors virtual movement to inspire the next generation of government leaders. FedMentors features leaders from across government in a series of short videos, answering questions ranging from "What is the best career advice you have ever received?" to "What advice do you have for young employees who feel overwhelmed in their new roles?" The video clips run from 1 to 2 minutes and address lessons learned and career advancement tips based on each mentor's individual government experience.

Knowledge Management

Implementation of a knowledge management tool is currently being considered to augment capabilities of USDA's acquisition workforce members. If implemented, the tool would be used by the acquisition workforce to share regulatory guidance, best acquisition practices, tools, templates, and lessons learned. Users would be able to find, learn about, and identify emerging or well-proven acquisition practices that have been implemented and proven effective. These practices would not be limited to mandatory regulatory guidance; instead they could view techniques, varying viewpoints, practical applications, etc. that we hope will prove useful for enriching acquisition skill sets, which will result in more effective acquisition support.