

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

1.1 Executive Overview/Introduction

Each day, the programs offered by USDA impact the majority of our citizens. These varied and dynamic programs require efficient and integrated delivery in order to shepherd a constantly developing food and agriculture system. The USDA mission is to “...provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management.” There are various activities which are critical to accomplishing the agency mission and shaping the strategic direction. The activities are as follows (as outlined by Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack):

- Promotion of a safe, sufficient, and nutritious food supply for all Americans and for people around the world.
- Sustainable agricultural policies that foster economic viability for small and mid-size farms and rural businesses, protect natural resources, and promote value-added agriculture.
- National leadership in climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Focus on information technology and process improvements.
- Utilities and infrastructure support for 21st century rural communities.

In accordance with OMB Memorandum M-09-20, Planning for the President’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Budget and Performance Plans, USDA communicated several high-priority goals as an integral aspect of the FY 2011 Budget and Performance Plan. The agency goals are similar in that each has a high direct value to the public, each is contingent upon congressional authorization for successful implementation, and each has significant coordination or implementation challenges. USDA goals are as follows:

- Program Goals
 - Help America promote agricultural production and biotechnology exports as America works to increase food security.
 - Ensure that all of America’s children have access to safe, nutritious, and balanced meals.
 - Assist rural communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and economically thriving.
 - Ensure our national forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources.
- Overarching Management Goal

- Improve collaboration among mission areas and agencies, and strengthen the effectiveness of USDA programs.

1.2 Acquisition Function Overview

The acquisition function at USDA is highly decentralized. Acquisition of goods and services needed to support USDA programs is accomplished through contracting activities managed by the various mission areas or agencies within USDA. Procurement of agricultural (food) commodities is a separate program and is accomplished by two (2) organizations - the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Kansas City Commodity Office of the Farm Service Agency. The following is a list of contracting activities at USDA:

- **Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services**
 - Farm Service Agency
 - Foreign Agricultural Service
 - Risk Management Agency
- **Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services**
 - Food and Nutrition Service
 - Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion
- **Food Safety**
 - Food Safety Inspection Service
- **Marketing and Regulatory Programs**
 - Agricultural Marketing Service
 - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
 - Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration
- **Natural Resources and Environment**
 - Forest Service
 - Natural Resources Conservation Service
- **Research, Education And Economics**
 - Agricultural Research Service
 - Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service
 - Economic Research Service
 - National Agricultural Statistics Service
- **Rural Development**
 - Office of Community Development
 - Rural Utilities Service
 - Rural Housing Service

- Rural Business-Cooperative Service
- **Departmental Management**
 - Assistant Secretary for Administration
 - Chief Information Officer
 - Chief Financial Officer
 - General Counsel
 - Executive Operations
 - Director of Communications
- **Office of the Inspector General**

During FY 05 there were 636 USDA Contracting Officers in the 1102 series who awarded 36,882 procurement actions. In FY 09 there were 612 Contracting Officers in the 1102 series who awarded 69,778 actions. As these numbers reveal, the quantity of actions has almost doubled over the past few years. The following table provides further information analyzing details of contracting output to inform the appropriate composition of the acquisition workforce.

Table 1 - USDA Acquisition Profile Information

Total \$ Contract Obligations FY 07	\$4,602,026,996.71
Total \$ Contract Obligations FY 08	\$5,331,765,540.48
Total \$ Contract Obligations FY 09	\$5,268,034,745.52
New Contracts awarded in FY 07 (# of unique PIID's)	46,846
New Contracts awarded in FY 08 (# of unique PIID's)	43,162
New Contracts awarded in FY 09 (# of unique PIID's)	45,962
Projected \$ Contract Obligation upcoming FY 11 (from agency budget)	\$5,400,000
Projected \$ Contract Obligation FY 12	\$5,500,000
Total \$ Contract Obligations in Contract Administration Phase FY 09	\$802,178,668
% of agency open contract actions in cost/price type arrangements average over FY 07, FY 08, and FY 09	25.57%
% of agency open contract actions in fixed-price type arrangements average over FY 07, FY 08, and FY 09	74.43%
Projected % of contracts obligated FY 12 in cost/price type arrangements	20%
Projected % of contracts obligated FY 12 in fixed-price type arrangements	80%

In order to reduce the number of high risk, fixed price, contracts in the coming years USDA is exploring various measures which may have a significant impact. USDA is considering:

- Identifying contracts in which other direct costs (ODCs) were a cost reimbursement element and potentially restructuring to a fully fixed price contract.
- Increasing the amount of contracts awarded competitively.
- There are various labor hour contracts including Public Web Support, IT Governance, Store Tracking and Redemption System (STARS), and Food Product Reporting System (FPRS)-National Data Bank that may possibly be converted to fixed price terms.
- Implementing agency guidance requiring review and approval for the award of any non-competitive, cost reimbursement, time and materials (T&M), and labor hour contracts prior to award. During the review and approval process, USDA will verify that the contract vehicle chosen is the best method, justifying why fixed pricing was not reasonable and ensuring that full and open competition was utilized whenever possible. Peer and/or supervisor reviews will be used for low-dollar acquisitions, whereas, approval by the Head of the Contracting Activity Designee (HCAD) and/or the Senior Procurement Executive (SPE) will be required for high-dollar value contracts. These review and approval procedures will not only provide a mechanism to ensure that USDA reduces its use of high-risk contracting authorities, but it will enable USDA to identify areas where additional training and enhanced acquisition processes may be required.

The Secretary of Agriculture has various top priorities which are related to USDA performance goals. The Secretary in a message to all employees, outlined these priorities on February 23, 2010. Listed below are a few which are directly linked to human capital/workforce planning and are supported by both the Chief Acquisition Officer (CAO) and SPE:

- **Full utilization of all available Hiring Authorities and Flexibilities** - Ensuring we [USDA] use Hiring Authorities and Flexibilities fully will provide us with significant pliability and speed in expanding our diverse, talented workforce. This will also give us a great means to entice our talented employees to stay with USDA.
- **Employee development and talent management** – I [Secretary of Agriculture] understand the importance of providing employees with opportunities to grow personally and professionally. Effective training is a cornerstone in building a modern workforce. In this time of budget cut-backs, it is important that training is not forsaken to fund other initiatives. As part of ensuring the strength of our workforce in the years ahead, we are developing a framework for a comprehensive Talent Management and Growth Program. This initiative will identify, develop and target high-potential employees for future leadership opportunities within USDA.
- **Cultural Transformation** – As a part of my [Secretary of Agriculture] commitment to making USDA a high-performance organization, I have initiated an effort to identify

opportunities to engage the full power of our diverse USDA team to achieve our mission. As a result of this effort, plans were presented for opportunities for breakthrough performance in the areas of Leadership, Employee Development, Talent Management, Recruitment and Retention, and Customer Focus and Community Outreach. The teams outlined action strategies, timelines for completion, and identified measures for success.

Successful transformation of USDA will include five key tenets that align with development of the acquisition workforce. They are as follows:

- An inclusive workplace environment where there is equity of opportunity and all employees are empowered to reach their full potential;
- Modernization of technology and systems that will enable us to provide the highest level of service;
- A commitment by USDA employees to improving USDA’s past and future record of civil rights, including expanded outreach efforts to socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers;
- Systems of accountability that encourage all employees to achieve high standards of performance and customer service; and
- A renewed commitment to creating diversity in the workforce and succession planning.

The future vision for the acquisition process is in tandem with the Secretary of Agriculture’s goal of building a “modern workplace with a modern workforce” that has the appropriate levels of development and support. Once this is realized, employees will be empowered to work at an optimum level “to make a difference--Every day in Every way” to improve the acquisition process, increase efficiency, and reduce risk. The strategic direction of the acquisition function is to better facilitate USDA’s vision “to be recognized as a dynamic organization that is able to efficiently provide the integrated program delivery needed to lead a rapidly evolving food and agriculture system”.

1.3 Acquisition Workforce Overview

USDA’s acquisition workforce consists of General Schedule (GS) 1102’s who have varying titles including Contracting Officer, Contract Specialist, Procurement Analyst, etc. The workforce also includes non GS-1102 Contracting Officers, Program and Project Managers (P/PM), Contracting Officer’s Technical Representatives (COTRs), Heads of Contracting Activity Designees, and any other position designated by the CAO as an acquisition workforce position. The size of USDA’s workforce, by functional area, is illustrated in the table below.

Table 2a - Acquisition Workforce Size

Segment of AWF	#FY 07	#FY 08	#FY 09	#FY 10 planned	Change over FY 08-FY 10
1102 Workforce	630	605	612	619	2.3% increase
Non-1102 COs	1012	1014	1113	1115	.19% increase
P/PMs	0*	0*	16	16	** no change
COTRs	300*	360*	4133	4150	** .41% increase
* Many contracting activities did not begin tracking this data until FY 09					
** Change over FY 09-FY10, since many contracting activities did not track this data prior to FY 09					

The attrition rates for the 1102 function are shown below. The chart shows agency rates are steadily in the 14% to 15% range for the past few years. USDA's overall attrition rate for all functional areas is approximately half of the 1102 rate, ranging from 6% to 8%. USDA is currently unable to track attrition rates for COTRs and P/PMs as they are functional areas of which the agency just recently started tracking.

Table 2b -Attrition Rates

	1102's		
	FY 07	FY 08	FY 09
Headcount	630	605	612
<i>(add)</i> Accessions	68	48	72
<i>Subtotal</i>	698	653	684
<i>(subtract)</i>			
Separations	89	84	86
Adjusted Headcount	609	569	598
Separations / Adjusted Headcount	89/609=	84/569=	86/598=
Attrition Rate	14.61%	14.76%	14.38%

According to FAI's 2008 Acquisition Workforce Competencies Survey Results Report, the top three skill *gaps* for all functional areas of the workforce are (1) performance based acquisitions, (2) negotiations, and (3) defining requirements. These are all areas which, if improved upon, could result in acquisitions savings. The top three skill *strengths* are (1) preparing and issuing contract awards, (2) bid evaluations, and (3) defining contractual relationships.

USDA is diligently working to align workforce capability and capacity with agency acquisition improvement and savings goals. The agency is reviewing its acquisition processes at the

departmental and contracting activity levels to identify potential actions to improve these processes therefore reducing contract spend and improving contract quality. A few of the actions considered include, but are not limited to: more thorough acquisition planning; enhanced training for COs and COTRs focusing on topics such as negotiations, competition, performance-based acquisitions, and defining requirements; and intern programs to recruit and retain acquisition workforce employees to help combat the high attrition rate among 1102s. Specific agency initiatives include:

- A 30 month change management program in which one contracting activity promotes standardization and consistency, accountability, and communications activities that include a standardized, enterprise wide advance acquisition planning tool to allow for more effective planning and strategic sourcing.
- A USDA Acquisition Intern Program targeting the GS 1102 series. Through a competitive intern program, USDA hopes to attract and retain more qualified personnel and rebuild its acquisition workforce. USDA is coupling the intern initiative with an improved training curriculum that focuses on areas which, once improved, may be directly linked to improved acquisitions and cost savings.
- A policy and procedure project that promotes and enforces procurement planning based on need so that unnecessary contract actions are minimized.

During FY 09 USDA contracting activities combined to spend approximately \$1,310,000 on acquisition workforce training and development. This is comprised of an average of \$1,000 per 1102 employee or CO of any series and \$333 per COTR.

The chart below depicts a rudimentary workload analysis by detailing the number of COs and the number of open contracts. Expected FY 10 numbers are based on average increase/decrease from year-to-year with the exception of FY 08 to FY 09 as the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) created an anomaly.

Table 3 - Contracting Workforce and Contracts Comparison

Category	# FY 07	#FY 08	#FY 09	#FY 10 Expected	Change over FY08-FY10
Contracting Officers (all series)	1,451	1,473	1,678	1,684	14% increase
Open contracts (#unique PIIDS)	18,524	19,736	24,052	25,264	28% increase

1.4 Acquisition Workforce Projection – Building Capacity

The information in this section will address and analyze USDA’s acquisition profile and workforce profiles to project the need to strengthen capacity. Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the agency OPM Human Capital Management Report acquisition workforce resource chart.

A large segment of data points for the following tables were 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	300	300	300	300
#P/PMs	1	2	1	2
Growth (new positions)				
#COTRs	18	17	18	17
#P/PMs	0	0	0	0
Growth (assignment into AWF)				
#COTRs	53	53	53	53
#P/PMs	1	1	1	1
Certification Targets				
#COTRs	27	27	27	27
#P/PMs	1	1	1	1

Table 5 - Assessment of Previous Year Efforts

Retention rates of those eligible to transfer agencies	FY 09	FY 08	FY 07	3 Yr Avg.
% 1102s	92.90%	93.40%	95.20%	93.83%
Certification Rates	FY 09	FY 08	FY 07	3 Yr Avg.
#COTRs	2570	Insufficient data to report		
#P/PMs	20			
#1102s	144	42	Insufficient data	
#contracting officers	1678	1473	1451	1488

There are various methods which USDA plans to collaboratively explore in effort to build the capacity of the acquisition workforce. As many of the statistics in this report show, bolstering agency capacity is a critical link in effectively managing the growing contract-related workload.

Intern Program

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. Hopefully the intern program would posture USDA to better compete with other agencies in attracting and retaining talented/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. Here are some of the benefits of each component:

- 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.*

Recruit Mid-Level Talent

Furthermore, USDA plans to work with FAI to build acquisition workforce capacity through the upcoming mid-level recruitment/immersion program. This program would assist in the onboarding process of GS-11 and 12 employees through simplified job application procedures which eliminate evaluations via the lengthy Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) document. Instead, a resume and job-specific questionnaire would serve as a more expeditious and informative evaluation tool. In addition, training tailored to mid-level new hires will be offered through FAI to promote ease of assimilation into mid-levels of the acquisition workforce.

Consult External Experts

Finally, leveraging outside organizations with experience in inspiring and transforming workforce structures could be beneficial. Also, utilizing subject matter experts for understanding and applying proven methods could help bolster capacity and revitalize the federal government by encouraging a new generation of talented individuals to serve as federal employees.

1.5 Acquisition Workforce Training and Development –Building Capacity

USDA has at least one acquisition workforce employee in every county in the United States. Provision of mandatory training requires a substantial amount of logistical and training funds. When these employees are insufficiently trained due to a lack of funding, the quality of contract award/management decreases often translating to unnecessary spending. Also, insufficiently trained employees often transfer to other federal agencies out of frustration. Acquiring effective training is critical to the professional development of the acquisition workforce. USDA could benefit from training that is specifically tailored to the specific needs and requirements of USDA contracting versus a generic approach.

In the 2008 Office of Federal Procurement Policy's (OFPP) Acquisition Workforce Competency Survey it was determined that critical proficiency gaps exist in the competencies of negotiation skills, defining requirements, and performance management. The 2007 and 2008 FAI self-

assessment survey for USDA's acquisition workforce revealed the same proficiency gaps. Enhanced training in those areas would be beneficial in reducing the proficiency gaps and translate to contracting cost savings. Also, maximizing mentorship opportunities as a way to share contracting knowledge and insights, particularly in skill gap areas, will prove indispensable. Finally, Knowledge Management tools such as collaborative technologies, and communities of practice can assist workforce members in "bridging the gap" to become increasingly proficient in critical areas.

USDA is diligently working to continuously improve management of acquisition workforce training throughout the organization. We strive to balance a highly effective and efficient training program without reducing the training value to each individual. The Acquisition Career Manager (ACM) recently requested a classroom training wish list with corresponding locations and FY 2011 quarters. Added training opportunities for our Contracting Officers and Specialists will help the agency increase the amount of FAC-C certified employees.

Management of COTRs is decentralized to each USDA contracting activity. As FAC-COTR certifications are fairly new, USDA is aggressively working to certify employees who have completed the COTR-related training requirements. In the coming months, COTR training availability will be expanded with the addition of online COTR-specific courses. USDA also leverages the Department of Homeland Security's low-filled course menu to augment training opportunities for contracting professionals and COTRs.

Training for P/PMs is fairly limited within the agency. USDA has few projects requiring the FAC- P/PM certification. However, USDA enthusiastically awaits updated FAC-P/PM procedural guidance from FAI that will outline the approach to earning a FAC-P/PM certificate.

1.6 Development of the Agency Acquisition Workforce – actions, plans, and strategies

There are various strategies USDA will utilize to address current initiatives, priorities, and challenges facing the acquisition workforce. One critical priority is to reduce overall agency contract spending. To achieve reduced spending, each USDA contracting activity will examine their acquisition processes and internal programs to identify methods that may reduce contract spending and/ or achieve cost avoidances. Various methods are under consideration including acquisition process improvements, enhancements to Information Technology (IT) systems, the elimination and/or consolidation of existing contracts, strategic sourcing, the conversion of high-risk contracts to lower risk contracts, energy and natural resource conservation, and right-sizing the USDA workforce.

USDA is establishing policy which will require review and approval, at various thresholds, for all planned acquisitions with non-competitive acquisition strategies and/or anticipated contract

types that are cost reimbursable, time and materials, or labor hours. Through peer, supervisory, contracting activity, and departmental reviews risk may be mitigated more effectively. As a result, the goal of higher quality procurements and lower spending would be obtained.

The agency's Training and Development Model will hinge on three key initiatives: (1) Acquisition Intern Program, (2) Improved workforce development and training, and (3) Knowledge Management. Each initiative will be used to improve competency and employee development, enhance recruitment and retention, and more effectively plan the workforce. For further specifics about the proposed Acquisition Intern Program refer to Section 1.4 where details are explained. Recognizing how critical improving training is to the development of the acquisition workforce, USDA will work diligently to improve proficiency gaps in the areas of negotiations, performance-based acquisitions, and strategic sourcing. The USDA Office of Procurement and Property Management (OPPM) will work with contracting activities to emphasize training registration in courses which emphasize proficiency gap competencies. The agency will target mid-level employees by encouraging participation in FAI's upcoming mid-level management program. OPPM will work with the agency Human Resources office and OPM to improve the recruitment and retention process. More specifically, efforts are underway to share best practices with contracting activities concerning hiring authorities which may allow increased flexibilities and efficiencies. Also, we look to recruit and retain individuals from underserved communities. Generally underserved populations in the Federal government are persons with disabilities, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. We can recruit these populations by networking with affinity groups, Hispanic Serving institutions, Tribal Colleges, Vocational Rehabs, Veteran's Affairs, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), and others. USDA can also learn more about leveraging programs such as the Partnership for Public Service's Fedrecruit program and Presidential Management Fellows for possible partnerships in improving recruitment and retention. Focusing on recruiting the right people in the right quantity is critical in effective workload management. If the workload is ineffectively managed, retention becomes increasingly problematic.

USDA is involved in FAC programs for contracting professionals, COs, COTRs, and P/PMs. The agency goal is to continuously increase the quantity of FAC certified employees by 5 percent each year. USDA also plans to integrate FAC certifications as an integral aspect of the proposed intern program. The Workforce Projection table in Section 1.5 of this plan provides FAC goals for the next few fiscal years.

The competency gaps for the USDA as previously mentioned are negotiation skills, performance based acquisitions, and defining requirements. The agency's action plan for closing the gap involves training for all members (and all functions) of the workforce emphasizing various inherently aligned skills and ensuring the workforce develops a stronger understanding of each. They are as follows:

Negotiations – (1) *Negotiation strategy.* Prepare a negotiation strategy that will permit negotiators to maximize the Government’s ability to obtain best value. (2) *Performing Price and Cost Analysis.* Establish pre-negotiation positions on price and cost factors. (3) *Conducting Discussions/Negotiations.* Conduct a negotiating session and negotiate an agreement on cost/price, terms and conditions. (4) *Determining Responsibility/Capability.* Determine and document the responsibility or capability of a firm to effectively perform the terms and conditions of the contract.

Performance Based Acquisitions – (1) Determine if performance based acquisition is the appropriate acquisition strategy to use; develop a performance work statement or a statement of objectives; conduct market research to determine performance standards or incentives to effectively measure contractor results.

Define Requirements – (1) *Writing Statements of Work.* Create statements of work and other related documents which address the material and non-material approaches (concepts) to provide a required capability. (2) *Conducting Needs Analysis.* Perform analyses based on standard methodology to identify all requirements and obligations. (3) *Assist in Development of Acquisition Strategy.* Develop the appropriate acquisition plan and evaluation strategy based on requirements.

1.7 Acquisition Workforce Management

There are various methods USDA is employing to leverage Government-wide initiatives in effort to improve the acquisition workforce. The agency is represented on several key working groups to ensure USDA concerns, questions, goals, etc. are considered when key acquisition workforce policies, systems, requirements, etc. are being contemplated. For example, USDA is a member of the Interagency Acquisition Training Workforce Group (IATWG) that was established to coordinate, promote, and facilitate the effective training for the federal acquisition workforce pursuant to federal policy. Further, the IATWG goal is to ensure that all Federal agencies involved in purchasing, providing, studying, or regulating acquisition training services are working in a coordinated manner toward the common goal of improving acquisition training quality. The IATWG was established in conjunction with the Interagency Acquisition Career Managers Council (IACMC), of which USDA is also a member. The IACMC comprises ACMS and meets periodically to discuss topics and issues related to developing acquisition professionals, to promote career management programs for the acquisition workforce, and to help FAI identify training and educational needs of the acquisition community. USDA is also represented in the Acquisition Career Management Information System (ACMIS) Change Control Board (CCB) to collaborate in obtaining the best possible updated workforce data management, technology-based tool. When available, USDA representatives attend conferences

and seminars concerning workforce issues hosted by groups like the National Contract Management Association (NCMA) and the Partnership for Public Service.

USDA has taken steps to strengthen the role of the ACM in order to meet its acquisition workforce objectives. First, USDA filled the ACM position which was previously vacant. The new ACM has worked to enhance communication and collaboration by implementing routine meetings with contracting activity ACM Designees. The ACM has worked to provide ACM Designees with the information and resources needed so that delegated actions remain part of a streamlined approach. Furthermore, delegated actions allow all workforce members to receive more efficient and comprehensive support. Routine Procurement Council meetings involving key USDA contracting activity leaders are an integral segment of the SPEs strategic planning. The SPE is adamant about involving the ACM as a critical contributor to these meetings and in department strategic planning activities. Going forward, the SPE intends to facilitate stronger, more integrated, relationships with HR and budgeting offices and continue to address concerns impacting the acquisition workforce.

Table 6a - Resource Requirements – Funding needed to support initiatives

	FY 11	FY 12	FY 13	FY14
1102 salaries & associated costs	\$53,918,391	\$56,245,667	\$58,572,676	\$61,082,803
Incentives (bonuses, student loan repayment, tuition assistance, relocation, etc)	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000
Training & Development	\$1,341,389	\$1,357,485	\$1,373,775	\$1,390,260
Workforce Management salaries for govt positions	\$4,814,271	\$5,006,853	\$5,198,614	\$5,405,824
Workforce Management- other costs (contractor employees)	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000

Table 6b - Resource Requirements – Funding needed to support initiatives

	FY12	FY13	FY14
Salaries			
COTRs	\$72,286,443	\$75,054,969	\$78,046,332
P/PMs	\$3,352,803	\$3,481,213	\$3,619,960
Incentives			
COTRs	\$130,000	\$130,000	\$130,000
P/PMs	\$0	\$0	\$0
Training & Development			

COTRs	\$210,000	\$210,000	\$210,000
P/PMs	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
1102s	\$1,357,485	\$1,373,775	\$1,390,260
Internships	\$1,750,000	\$1,750,000	\$1,750,000
Workforce Management-salaries	Please see table 6a where this data is captured.		
Workforce Management other costs			

USDA currently uses various talent management strategies to bolster agency retention rates. These, and potential new, strategies are routinely re-assessed in effort to continuously improve the ability to retain talent. The agency considers factors such as employee workloads which should be balanced so that acquisition professionals sense challenge and engagement without feeling overwhelmed. The onboarding process is under examination to ease assimilation of new employees and decrease learning curve time so that new employees can maximize time spent working at optimal talent levels. Focusing on understanding competency gaps as well as seeking to improve training, both formal and informal, in gap areas is another key aspect of talent management. Furthermore, ensuring that USDA identifies and hires talented individuals, from diverse sources, who possess the intellect and drive to compliment the existing workforce is critical. Effective knowledge management programs will assist in preserving and sharing ideas, methods, and practices from some of our brightest talent. Finally, as Tables 6a and 6b display, providing the appropriate resources for compensation and training are inherent in maintaining high performing acquisition professionals.

Methods of managing acquisition workforce data vary depending upon the type of data collected. For instance, FAC-C certification data is maintained at the ACM level since the ACM must recommend certification packets for approval. Conversely, FAC-COTR data is maintained at the contracting activity level since each contracting activity manages their respective COTR programs. The USDA HR office maintains individual and aggregate personnel data for each acquisition-related job series. Currently the ACM collaborates with contracting activities and HR to manage acquisition workforce data. USDA eagerly anticipates an updated technology-based acquisition workforce career management tool that may assist in data management.

1.8 Challenges – Acquisition Human Capital

The primary cause for the widening of the human capital gap is the mass retirement of an aging workforce and the high turnover of employees within the federal government, and even higher rate within USDA. Acquisition workforce employees frequently transfer from one federal agency to another. Many are lost to private industry, who may offer better salaries and benefits. Also, socio-economic conditions have an impact. For instance, during the 1990's federal agencies sustained a significant loss of GS-1102's due to encouragement to downsize the use of federal employees, meanwhile workloads remained steady and, in some cases, surged. These unsettling trends have continued at USDA in recent years. For instance, during FY 05 there were

636 Contracting Officers in the 1102 series who awarded 36,882 procurement actions worth \$4 billion. During FY 09 there were 612 Contracting Officers who awarded 69,778 actions worth over \$5.2 billion. That is 24 less Contracting Officers awarding almost twice as many actions and at a higher dollar value. In many instances, to combat these trends workload management was accomplished by back-filling lost positions with private industry contractors. These losses were never fully recouped. The lack of committed out-year funding routinely discouraged or prohibited managers from making long term commitments to hire entry level employees or establish training programs. Furthermore, as more employees leave the agency valuable knowledge is lost as well as time/funds to facilitate outprocessing for outgoing employees.

1.9 Conclusion

In planning for USDA's acquisition workforce, success hinges upon sustaining the right people with the best skill mix to effectively support the mission and objectives of the agency. It is also critical to ensure that human capital policies and procedures in the acquisition function are aligned with the department's strategic plans. Maintaining the appropriate resources and support will provide the foundation to facilitate the strategies discussed herein to improve the capacity and capability of USDA's acquisition workforce. USDA is dedicated to ensuring that the department's mission and goals are carried out to the best of our abilities. USDA's vision is "to be recognized as a dynamic organization that is able to efficiently provide the integrated program delivery needed to lead a rapidly evolving food and agriculture system". As a result of implementation of initiatives like the Acquisition Intern Program, improved training for current employees, and improved knowledge management, USDA hopes to acquire and retain a highly skilled workforce dedicated to accomplishing this vision.