

**AGRICULTURE RESEARCH SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN  
FOR  
NATIONAL ANIMAL DISEASE CENTER/NATIONAL SOIL TILTH LAB  
AMES, IOWA  
COMPETITIVE SOURCING STUDIES**

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/initiatives/a-76/>

**Date: 8/11/03**

## **PURPOSE**

This is the Communications Plan for the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) Competitive Sourcing/A-76 activities for the Midwest Area location at Ames, Iowa (including the National Animal Disease Center and National Soil Tilth Laboratory). This plan includes guidelines for the dissemination of both internal and external information regarding the OMB Circular A-76 process and specifically addresses the needs of the impacted parties under A-76 studies.

The REE Competitive Sourcing Program Office (CSPO) will disseminate general information regarding Competitive Sourcing to ensure consistent communication to all interested parties. This communication plan is meant to be a supplement to and not a replacement of any communications plan developed at higher organizational levels.

## **BACKGROUND**

The President and Secretary of Agriculture have tasked the USDA with creating the most efficient and effective organization possible. Their goal is to reduce the size and cost of government, to strengthen accountability, maintain effective oversight, and enhance performance reporting.

One of the ways to accomplish this objective is through a public-private competition conducted via an OMB Circular A-76 Commercial Activities study. A-76 has been in existence for over 35 years but primarily implemented, up until now, at the Department of Defense. The purpose of A-76 is to ensure that only government employees perform inherently governmental functions. All other activities are studied to ascertain if they can efficiently be performed by the In-House MEO, or by the private sector, or by another government agency, at less cost.

When a function is announced for a standard competition study, both the government and private sector have an opportunity to bid for the work. The standard competition involves the development of a Performance Work Statement (PWS), which serves as the cornerstone of the government's solicitations for bids that both the government provider of services and private firms use as the basis for developing their bids. The A-76 standard competition also involves the development of the government's Agency Tender Offer (ATO) consisting of a Most Efficient Organization (MEO) concept of operations; an Agency Cost Estimate, which is the MEO's cost estimate for providing the service; a Quality Control Plan, which is the government's technical proposal; and a Phase-in Plan. The ATO and the bids/offers will be evaluated against the Agency's solicitation requirements. This evaluation process will determine the resultant winner.

ARS has initially identified approximately 112 positions for A-76 studies in the Midwest Area based on the agency's FY-2002 FAIR Act Inventory. These positions are located at ARS' location in Ames, Iowa. During the course of this study, functions may be added or deleted from the study, based on sound business decisions, changes in scope, and other considerations.

## **OVERALL STRATEGY**

Because the A-76 process directly impacts employees, their families and the local community, the communication regarding the areas to be studied and the progress of the study must be carefully planned. It will be the responsibility of the REE CSPO to oversee the timing, content, and implementation of all communications concerning A-76 matters. Typically, the best means of communication for affected employees is through the immediate supervisory channel.

## **OBJECTIVES**

In large part, the success of the A-76 study process will hinge on effective communications to both internal and external audiences. The overall objective of this plan is to provide the ARS Competition Officials and the REE CSPO, as well as others associated with the studies, with a list of topics to use in communicating study information during each A-76 study process. Specifically, the plan will:

- Increase awareness and promote understanding of the A-76 study process
- Serve as a guide for providing consistent communication about A-76
- Describe the messages, target audience, method and timing of communications geared to address employee concerns, provide accurate, timely information, mitigate resistance and obtain support and commitment from affected employees, stakeholders and customers
- Serve as a method for obtaining buy-in and participation during the A-76 process

The plan is created with general guidelines in order to accommodate changing communication needs during the A-76 studies. The success of the communication effort will depend on the ARS Competition Officials and REE CSPO's ability to assess each situation and to adjust the communication product or frequency as dictated by the feedback of the participants.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Key competition officials are appointed by the Competitive Sourcing Official (CSO) for standard competitions and are responsible for its timely and proper planning and execution. These officials are the Agency Tender Official (ATO);

Contracting Officer (CO); PWS (Performance Work Statement) Team Leader; Human Resource Advisor (HRA) and Source Selection Authority (SSA). Descriptions on roles and responsibilities for each competition official can be found in OMB Circular A-76 dated May 29, 2003. See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars/a076/>

The ARS Office of Legislative Affairs will be the point of contact for any necessary Congressional contacts regarding the ARS A-76 program.

The ARS Information Staff will serve as the point of contact for incoming inquiries from the public for copies of documents and information related to this study (i.e., Freedom of Information Act requests) and for media inquiries (i.e., newspapers, television).

The REE CSPO will assist the competition officials and agency management in preparing communications (including informational e-mails, talking points for employee all hands meetings, etc.) that will go out to all affected employees, union officials and stakeholders; or provide this assistance through a program management support consultant.

## **NOTIFICATION TO AFFECTED PARTIES**

Notification to the affected workforce was in a Town Hall Meeting on May 8, 2003, along with employee memorandum notifications issued on that date, in coordination with ARS Headquarters and Midwest Area and Ames location management. The officials in AFGE Union Local # 2315 were notified in accordance with their prevailing Collective Bargaining Agreement.

As a result of the revised OMB Circular A-76, dated 5/29/03, a transition of these studies to this revised circular was publicly announced by the Midwest Area Director on 6/27/03

Throughout the process, Midwest Area management, in conjunction with Ames location management and the REE CSPO, will deliver periodic communications to affected employees, customers, and other stakeholders. This will be done through e-mails, meetings, etc., on an as-needed basis. Information will be posted on the REE Competitive Sourcing website at key points in the process to provide information on status of the studies, etc.

## **FINAL ANNOUNCEMENT DATE**

For standard competition studies, the announcement of the final competition results requires the same careful planning as the initial announcement. Directly affected employees will be informed in a closed meeting with representatives from the agency's Human Resources Division, who are capable of responding to questions/concerns that may arise from the decision.

## **PARTICIPATION OF DIRECTLY AFFECTED EMPLOYEES AND REPRESENTATIVES OF EMPLOYEES**

Directly affected employees and their representatives may participate in the standard competition process. However, there are different levels of participation. When participation goes beyond minor involvement such as collecting data or answering questions about the employees' job this may affect their rights and responsibilities. The most significant right is provided in Federal Acquisition Regulation Clause 52.207-3, which addresses the "Right of First Refusal". The REE competitive sourcing website includes more detailed information on this topic.

### **WHO TO BRIEF, WHAT TO BRIEF**

Identifying the target audience and its information needs is an important first step in the process. The target audience dictates the amount and type of information to be provided to ensure that all participants in the A-76 process remain informed and involved. Table 1 shows common A-76 target audiences and the types of information required.

**TABLE 1: TARGET AUDIENCES AND INFORMATION NEEDS**

<b>TARGET AUDIENCE</b>	<b>INFORMATION</b>
	<i>Internal Audience</i>
Affected Ames Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explanation of the A-76 process</li> <li>• An understanding of the need for the study</li> <li>• Constant communications to allay any undue fears/maintain morale</li> <li>• Conflict of interest &amp; Firewall issues</li> <li>• Reinforcement of importance of employee participation in the A-76 study process</li> <li>• Rights of/benefits to employees during/and as result of the A-76 study process</li> <li>• A-76 study program process</li> <li>• Draft copy of the PWS for review and comment</li> </ul>
MWA Leadership Senior Ames Location Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal training on CS/A-76 (process &amp; regulations)</li> <li>• Information on A-76 Team decisions that may have policy or legal implications</li> <li>• Progress updates from A-76 Team</li> <li>• Information on funding requirements, including contractor support</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information for completing Schedule B, L and M of the solicitation.</li> </ul>
Contracting Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explanation of the A-76 process</li> <li>Schedule of solicitations dates</li> <li>Information for completing Schedules B, L and M of the solicitation</li> </ul>
	<i>External Audience</i>
Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updates on issues from the A-76 study which affect the products and services they receive</li> <li>A-76 study progress</li> </ul>
USDA OCFO/Congress/OMB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Functions and FTE under study</li> <li>Periodic progress reports</li> </ul>

## METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

Identifying the most effective methods of communication for each target audience and a communication schedule that ensures that participants will receive current, timely information is another important step in the implementation of an effective Communication Plan. Table 2 identifies common target audiences and the most effective methods of communication for A-76 studies.

**Table 2: Methods of Communication and the Target Audience**

Target Audience	Methods of Communication	Types of Communication	Responsible Party
All affected employees AFGE Union Reps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E-Mails</li> <li>REE Website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study updates</li> <li>Points of Contact</li> <li>FAQ's</li> <li>Relevant News Reports</li> <li>Discussion of major milestones</li> <li>Q &amp; A Sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MWA Director</li> <li>Ames Location Mgmt</li> <li>Study Managers</li> </ul>
Under Sec'y, REE Administrator, ARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E-Mails</li> <li>Briefings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bi-weekly updates</li> <li>Special Reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>REE CSPO</li> </ul>

## SCHEDULE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE COMMUNICATION PLAN

Implementation of an ongoing Communication Plan requires a plan of action. Table 3 pulls information from Table 2, Methods of Communication and Target Audience, and then assigns a Scheduled Completion Date and the office/individual assigned the task.

**Table 3: Communications Schedule**

<b>Message</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Communication Channel</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Timing</b>
- Announcement of Functions/Affected Positions	All affected employees AFGE union reps	Discussions	MWA Director	5/8/03
- Orientation/Information on Ames CS/A-76 studies - Employee participation is key to successful competition	All affected employees AFGE union reps	Training Workshop	Support Contractor [REE CSPO coordinates]	June-July, 2003
- Orientation of A-76 PWS/MEO process & activities	PWS/MEO Study Teams	Training Workshop	Support Contractors [REE CSPO coordinates]	June-July, 2003
- Critical progress/schedule updates	MWA Director	Briefings	Study Managers	Monthly
- Progress reports/schedule updates	All affected employees	Email	BA Director	Monthly
- Explanation of data collection process	All affected employees	PWS Team Support Contractor	REE CSPO PWS Team	On-going/ As Needed
- Service continuation without interruption	Customers	TBD	Ames Location Managers	As Needed
<i>FOR STANDARD COST COMPARISON STUDIES:</i>				
- Description of PWS & announcement that staff may review document	All affected employees Union reps	E-mail	MWA Director	Nov, 2003
- Announcement that CC will occur within 1 week/discussion of key points - Employee Rights outlined again - Explanation of "Tentative" Decision	All affected employees Union reps	All Hands Meeting E-mail	MWA Director	Nov, 2004
- Announcement of Tentative Decision - Q&A session	All affected employees Union reps	All Hands Meeting E-Mail	MWA Director	Dec, 2004
- Announcement of final decision	All affected employees Union reps	All Hands Meeting E-Mail	MWA Director	Feb, 2005

## **GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES/IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER**

Below are general communication guidelines that must be followed for successfully implementing the CS/A-76 program throughout ARS:

- Due to the sensitivity of the CS/A-76 study process, the REE CSPO needs to be involved in providing guidelines for internal or public communications regarding the study.
- Face-to-face communication is the most effective tool, followed by written material.
- Feedback is essential to the evolution of the communication strategy.
- Communication efforts must be kept in mind that employees often fear the unknown more than the outcome of the CS/A-76 study.
- Open communication between employees and their supervisor is essential.
- Ensure that employees are informed of the Point of Contact (POC) to call for Human Resources related information.
- All audiences will have preconceived ideas about the CS/A-76 process and communications including:
  - Have decisions already been made?
  - Why is ARS doing this study?
  - Is there a pre-determined agenda?
  - Will there be opportunities for federal employees in the new organization?

## POINTS OF CONTACT (POC) FOR AMES STUDIES

Title/Position	Name	Phone Number	Fax Number	Email Address
<b>PWS Team Ldr-FO&amp;MS</b>	J. Stasko	515-663-7445	515-663-7428	<a href="mailto:jstasko@nadc.ars.usda.gov">jstasko@nadc.ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>Agency Tender Official FO&amp;MS</b>	M. Bulechek	(515) 663-7769	515-663-7776	<a href="mailto:mbuleche@nadc.ars.usda.gov">mbuleche@nadc.ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>HR Advisor FO&amp;MS</b>	M. Stetka	301-504-1408	301-504-1587	<a href="mailto:mstetka@ars.usda.gov">mstetka@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>Contracting Officer FO&amp;MS</b>	C. Coxen	202-720-7479	202-720-3987	<a href="mailto:ccoxen@ars.usda.gov">ccoxen@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>Source Selection Authority FO&amp;MS</b>	R. Rouse	202-720-7891	202-720-7032	<a href="mailto:rrouse@ars.usda.gov">rrouse@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>PWS Team Ldr – RSS</b>	H. Lehmkuhl	515-663-7534	515-663-7428	<a href="mailto:hlehmkuh@nadc.ars.usda.gov">hlehmkuh@nadc.ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>Agency Tender Official - RSS</b>	J. Ridpath	515-663-7586	515-663-7428	<a href="mailto:jridpath@nadc.ars.usda.gov">jridpath@nadc.ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>HR Advisor RSS</b>	M. Stetka	301-504-1408	301-504-1587	<a href="mailto:mstetka@ars.usda.gov">mstetka@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>Contracting Officer - RSS</b>	M. Ryan	301-504-1744	301-504-1751	<a href="mailto:mryan@ars.usda.gov">mryan@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>Source Selection Authority - RSS</b>	R. Rouse	202-720-7891	202-720-7032	<a href="mailto:rrouse@ars.usda.gov">rrouse@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>REE CSPO Coordinator</b>	A. Riordan	202-720-9305	202-720-9312	<a href="mailto:ariordan@ars.usda.gov">ariordan@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>REE CSPO Member</b>	C. Violett	202-690-8629	202-720-9312	<a href="mailto:cviolett@ars.usda.gov">cviolett@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>Employee/Labor Relations</b>	V. Hanbury	301-504-1355	301-504-1375	<a href="mailto:vhanbury@ars.usda.gov">vhanbury@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>Human Resources</b>	C. Gramlich	301-504-1561	301-504-1587	<a href="mailto:cgramlich@ars.usda.gov">cgramlich@ars.usda.gov</a>
<b>EEO/Civil Rights</b>	K. Prince	202-720-4621	202-690-0088	<a href="mailto:kprince@ars.usda.gov">kprince@ars.usda.gov</a>

### Key for Studies:

- FO&MS Study = NADC/NSTL Facilities Operations & Maintenance Services Study
- RSS Study = NADC Research Support Services Study

## MAJOR MILESTONES FOR AMES STANDARD COMPETITION

Task Name	Start	Finish
<b>Contractor Support</b> [Program management support & PWS/MEO support]	May, 2003	February, 2005
<b>Develop/Issue Solicitation</b>		
- Develop RFP Package	June, 2003	January, 2004
- Prepare/Publicize/Release RFP	January, 2004	May, 2004
<b>Prepare Management Study Plan</b>		
- Conduct Management Study - Develop Management Plan [including MEO transition plan, TPP and Bid]	August, 2003	June, 2004
- Independent Review/ Revision/Approval of Management Plan	June, 2004	July, 2004
<b>Request for Proposals Closing Date</b>	August, 2004	August, 2004
<b>Evaluation/Initial Decision</b>		
- Receive/Evaluate Offerors Proposals	August, 2004	November, 2004
- Open Government's Bid & Conduct Cost Comparison	December, 2004	December, 2004
- Announce Tentative Award Decision	December, 2004	December, 2004
<b>Appeals Process</b>	December, 2004	January, 2005
<b>Announce Final Award Decision</b>	February, 2005	February, 2005
<b>Implement MEO or Convert to Contract</b>	March, 2005	March, 2005