

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

**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
FOR
BELTSVILLE AREA & NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY
COMPETITIVE SOURCING/A-76 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 Beltsville Area (including the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, U.S. National Arboretum) and the National Agricultural Library. 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.

In addition to the standard cost comparison study process, ARS will also utilize the streamlined cost comparison in pursuing a study for certain functions in the Beltsville Area competitive sourcing program.

ARS has initially identified an estimated 290 positions for A-76 studies based on the agency's FY-2002 FAIR Act Inventory. These positions are located in Beltsville, Maryland and Washington, D.C. 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 Beltsville Area/NAL management. The officials in AFGE Union Local # 3147 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 the revised Circular was publicly announced by the Beltsville Area Director on 6/27/03.

Throughout the process, the Beltsville Area Director and Director, NAL 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 BA/NAL intranet and 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 formal A-76 cost comparison 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 will include 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

TARGET AUDIENCE	INFORMATION
	<i>Internal Audience</i>
Affected BA/NAL ARS Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explanation of the A-76 process• An understanding of the need for the study• Constant communications to allay any undue fears/maintain morale• Conflict of interest & Firewall issues• Reinforcement of importance of employee participation in the A-76 study process• Rights of/benefits to employees during/and as result of the A-76 study process• A-76 study program process• Draft copy of the PWS for review and comment

Senior BA/NAL ARS Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal training on CS/A-76 (process & regulations) • Information on A-76 Team decisions that may have policy or legal implications • Progress updates from A-76 Team • Information on funding requirements, including contractor support • Information for completing Schedule B, L and M of the solicitation.
Contracting Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of the A-76 process • Schedule of solicitations dates • Information for completing Schedules B, L and M of the solicitation
	<i>External Audience</i>
Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates on issues from the A-76 study which affect the products and services they receive • A-76 study progress
USDA OCFO/Congress/OMB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functions and FTE under study • Periodic progress reports

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"> • E-Mails • BA/NAL Intranet • REE Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study updates • Points of Contact • FAQ's • Relevant News Reports • Discussion of major milestones • Q & A Sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BA Director • NAL Director • Study Managers
Under Sec'y, REE Administrator, ARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-Mails • Briefings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-weekly updates • Special Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REE CSPO

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

Message	Target Audience	Communication Channel	Responsible Party	Timing
- Announcement of Functions/Affected Positions	All affected employees AFGE union reps	Discussions	BA Director NAL Director	5/8/03
- Orientation/Information on BA/NAL CS/A-76 studies - Employee participation is key to successful competition	All affected employees AFGE union reps	Training Workshop	Support Contractor [REE CSPO coordinates]	May-June, 2003
- Orientation of A-76 PWS/MEO process & activities	PWS/MEO Study Teams	Training Workshop	Support Contractors [REE CSPO coordinates]	May-June, 2003
- Critical progress/schedule updates	BA Director NAL Director	Briefings	Study Managers	Monthly
- Progress reports/schedule updates	All affected employees	BA Intranet NAL by BA Intranet	BA Director NAL 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	Director, FMOD/BA NAL Director	As Needed
<i>FOR PREFERENTIAL PROCUREMENT PROGRAM STUDY:</i>				
- Progress reports on conversion activities	Affected employees Union reps.	BA Intranet E-Mail Meetings	BA Director	On-going thru 1 st Qtr-FY04
<i>FOR FORMAL A-76 COST COMPARISON STUDIES:</i>				
- Description of PWS & announcement that staff may review document	All affected employees Union reps	BA/NAL Intranet E-mail	BA Director NAL Director	Oct, 2003
- Announcement that CC will occur within 1 week/discussion of key points	All affected employees Union reps	All Hands Meeting E-mail	BA Director NAL Director	Oct, 2004

- Employee Rights outlined again - Explanation of Tentative” Decision				
- Announcement of Tentative Decision - Q&A session	All affected employees Union reps	All Hands Meeting E-Mail	BA Director NAL Director	Nov, 2004
- Announcement of final decision	All affected employees Union reps	All Hands Meeting E-Mail	BA Director NAL Director	Jan, 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 BA/NAL STUDIES

Title/Position	Name	Phone Number	Fax Number	Email Address
PWS Team Ldr-FO&MS	D. Prevar	301-504-5557	301-504-5857	prevard@ars.usda.gov
MEO Team Ldr-FO&MS	J. VandeVaerst	301-504-5664	301-504-5474	vandevaj@ba.ars.usda.gov
HR Advisor FO&MS	L. Schauer	301-504-1337	301-504-1373	lschauer@ars.usda.gov
Contracting Officer FO&MS	L. Countee	301-504-1700	301-504-1717	lcountee@ars.usda.gov
Source Selection Authority FO&MS	R. Rouse	202-720-7891	202-720-7032	rrouse@ars.usda.gov
PWS Team Ldr-RFS	D. Granstrom	301-504-8310	301-504-8553	dgranstrom@anri.barc.usda.gov
MEO Team Ldr-RFS	J. Anderson	301-504-6591	301-504-5521	andersoj@ba.ars.usda.gov
HR Advisor - RFS	S. Thomas	301-504-1337	301-504-1373	sthomas@ars.usda.gov
Contracting - Officer RFS	K. Pitts	301-504-1713	301-504-1717	kpitts@ars.usda.gov
Source Selection Authority – RFS	R. Rouse	202-720-7891	202-720-7032	rrouse@ars.usda.gov
PWS Team Ldr-SS	D. Thessen	301-504-7030	301-504-6007	thessend@ba.ars.usda.gov
Contracting Officer - SS	P. Reilly	301-504-1715	301-504-1717	preilly@ars.usda.gov
HR Advisor - SS	S. Thomas	301-504-1336	301-504-1373	sthomas@ars.usda.gov
REE CSPO Coordinator	A. Riordan	202-720-9305	202-720-9312	ariordan@ars.usda.gov
REE CSPO Member	C. Violet	202-690-8629	202-720-9312	cviolet@ars.usda.gov
Human Resources	D. Love	301-504-1400	301-504-1373	dlove@ars.usda.gov
Employee/Labor Relations	V. Hanbury	301-504-1355	301-504-1375	vhanbury@ars.usda.gov
EEO/Civil Rights	K. Prince	202-720-4621	202-690-0088	kprince@ars.usda.gov

Key for Studies:

- FO&MS = BARC/USNA and NAL Facilities Operations & Maintenance Services Study
- RFS = BA Research Farming Services Study
- SS = BA Security Services Study

MAJOR MILESTONES FOR BA/NAL STANDARD COMPETITIONS

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

MAJOR MILESTONES FOR BA SECURITY SERVICES STREAMLINED COMPETITION

Task Name	Start Date	Finish Date
Public Announcement of Streamlined Competition	June 27, 2003	June 27, 2003
Conduct Market Survey	July, 2003	October, 2003
Complete Streamlined Cost Comparison/Announce Decision	November 7, 2003	November 7, 2003