

HOLD FOR RELEASE
UNTIL PRESENTED
BY WITNESS
August 5, 2009

**Statement of
William P. McNally
Assistant Administrator for Procurement
National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

before the

**Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the
District of Columbia
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

United States Senate

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia regarding NASA efforts to staff, train, and retain its acquisition workforce.

NASA missions and projects are generally at the cutting edge of science and technology and typically involve the development of first of a kind flight hardware, which presents many challenges that are unique to the Agency. Recruiting, developing, and retaining a qualified talent pool is critical to meeting NASA's robust agenda. NASA has a systematic approach and programs in place to provide the acquisition workforce required to meet the challenges associated with supporting the Agency's broad portfolio of human spaceflight, exploration, science and aeronautics activities.

Succession Planning

Succession planning is an integral part of the Agency's ongoing, continual workforce planning processes. NASA's strategic workforce goal is to assure a high-performing and flexible, mission-aligned workforce. NASA's corporate strategy is to maintain a pipeline of skilled personnel that can be used to fill current and future vacancies. An overarching goal of the NASA Office of Procurement is ensuring that the mission is successfully executed by effectively and efficiently managing the acquisition process. Recruiting, developing, and retaining qualified and capable acquisition personnel, including new leaders, as necessary, is critical for mission success. Senior leaders at NASA Headquarters and at the NASA Centers are personally involved in succession planning. The NASA Headquarters Office of Procurement partners with the NASA Headquarters Office of Human Capital Management on workforce planning issues, including succession planning and workforce development.

NASA succession planning strategies for acquisition personnel fall under three categories: 1) recruitment/hiring; 2) training and development; and, 3) retention initiatives. As NASA recruits and hires personnel to maintain its current staffing levels, much of its focus is on hiring contract specialists with strong cost/pricing and negotiation skills and program and project managers

capable of achieving the highest possible level of mission success. My statement will briefly discuss each category.

Recruitment and Hiring Practices

Much of NASA's recruiting has been focused on entry- and mid-level personnel through its cooperative education and intern programs. NASA has a well established "brand" and name recognition. Individuals are drawn to NASA's overall mission, including its scientific, exploration, and aeronautics programs. NASA centers have used cooperative education programs to bring college students on board at the entry level. The NASA Contracting Intern Program (NCIP) has been highly successful in bringing entry-level personnel on board. The NASA Headquarters Office of Procurement administers the NCIP which is targeted towards recent college graduates in business-related fields. The NCIP provides structured training through formal coursework in contracting, diverse rotational assignments, and extensive on-the-job training. Participants work under the guidance of qualified procurement personnel performing duties directly related to the field of procurement. The NCIP was developed to serve as a training ground for future professionals within the NASA procurement community with a goal of developing a valuable resource pool of candidates for employment at one of the NASA Centers nationwide.

NASA also has numerous program management hiring programs at the Agency level and at the individual field Centers that seek to bring in the best and brightest for needed research and development, engineering, and science-related positions.

Training and Development

Acquisition personnel at NASA have access to comprehensive training programs and participate in all the core acquisition training that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requires for civilian agency acquisition workforce. Early on, NASA recognized the value of training. For example, in 1995, NASA established mandatory training requirements and a certification program for the procurement workforce that was modeled on the Department of Defense's (DOD) training and certification requirements. NASA's current training and certification program is based on the requirements for the Federal Acquisition Certification in Contracting (FAC-C) Program. Few changes were needed to fully implement the FAC-C Program.

Additionally, NASA has established a career path for procurement personnel at each level: Entry, GS-5 through GS-7; Intermediate, GS-9 through GS-12; and Advanced, GS-13 and above. These paths provide a framework for career development that procurement personnel and their supervisors use to identify suitable training classes and developmental opportunities. Personnel create individual development plans (IDPs) which set forth the training (formal and informal), developmental opportunities (i.e. rotational assignments), mentoring relationships, and professional association involvement to be pursued as they progress during their careers at NASA. IDPs are reviewed and updated as necessary to reflect completed training, work assignments, and changing individual needs.

Per the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) Letter 05-01, NASA has developed a robust procurement training program that follows the curriculum established by the DOD. NASA procurement personnel also participate in a variety of developmental activities that include: rotational assignments with increased responsibilities; complex work assignments, such as serving on source evaluation boards for competitive procurements; and, mentoring relationships to learn coaching skills and to provide advice and guidance to more junior level personnel.

For program and project managers, NASA developed the Academy of Program/Project and Engineering Leadership (APPEL). APPEL contributes to NASA's mission by promoting individual and team excellence in program/project management and engineering through the application of learning strategies, methods, models, and tools. It supports individual practitioners as well as NASA project and program teams at every level of development through its four primary activities: Curriculum, Knowledge Sharing, Performance Enhancement, and Research and Advanced Concepts. APPEL uses a blended learning approach, recognizing the necessity of creating many opportunities for learning in order to address the full range of learning styles and modes. The APPEL curriculum employs state-of-the art methodologies based on the best empirical research and the latest developments in industry. More recently, NASA has established a new Program Manager Certification Process that is being applied across the Agency for its major projects and programs. This process has been endorsed by OMB and has been called a model example for Federal agencies. APPEL lessons-learned are also infused back into NASA technical workforce development through the application of interactive case studies; leveraging of experienced Agency, Industry, and Academic practitioners; use of multiple learning formats to promulgate learning across the Agency; and, the collection of data from learning metrics that capture improvements at all levels of individual and team performance.

Ensuring leadership continuity is a key aspect of succession planning and NASA uses several programs to develop leaders. To this end, NASA has established many career rotation assignments for its most senior leadership at the various Centers to ensure the continuation of highly competent leadership at these key institutions. NASA also has several key leadership development programs to help develop future generations of senior Agency leaders, including:

- The Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) is used to prepare personnel to become members of the Senior Executive Service Candidates. I was proud to have one procurement employee recently assigned to the Office of Federal Procurement Policy for a three-month rotational assignment.
- The Mid Level Leadership Program (MLLP) will launch in December 2009. High potential GS-13 to GS-14 personnel will be competitively selected for the opportunity to develop critical leadership skills through practical application and developmental rotations.
- The NASA Foundations of Influence, Relationships, Success and Teamwork (FIRST) Program is a pilot program for GS-11 to GS-12 personnel as an entry level to leadership within the Agency.

The NASA Centers have additional local leadership development programs as well as leadership training to meet their center and mission unique requirements, which leverage the Agency-level activities described above.

Retention Strategies

NASA uses several retention strategies to maintain its acquisition workforce. Key strategies include new employee orientation, mentoring programs, awards, work and family programs, and education assistance.

Recent hires attend new employee orientation programs both at Headquarters and at the field Centers. Most NASA Centers assign mentors to new hires. Mentoring programs are not limited to new employees, but are available to others who seek career growth or improved job performance.

Mentors gain a sense of satisfaction from helping less experienced personnel in their career development, which aids in the retention of more senior level employees.

Work and family life initiatives include flexible and alternative work schedules, telecommuting, part time employment and job sharing. Education benefits are used by acquisition personnel to pursue 4-year or more advanced degrees. NASA may also make payments on student loans for eligible employees.

NASA Views of S. 736, the Federal Hiring Process Improvement Act

Consistent with testimony provided by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), NASA concurs with the intent of S. 736, the Federal Hiring Process Improvement Act, as introduced on March 30, 2009, and, in fact, the Agency is already doing much of what the bill would require. For example, the S. 736 would require the head of each executive Agency to develop a strategic workforce plan as part of the Agency performance plan. The NASA Office of Human Capital Management has an entire division focused on providing planning support for the Agency along with submitting detailed functional gap analysis to OPM. These proposed plans assist individual NASA centers in identifying critical skills shortages and recruitment strategies in attracting qualified candidates.

The bill would also direct the Agency head to develop processes that allow the applicants to submit a résumé and answers to brief questions to complete an application and that do not require lengthy writing requirements such as knowledge, skills and ability (KSA) essays as part of the initial application; and employ mechanisms whereby each applicant shall receive timely notification. NASA's hiring program operates through a customized automated staffing system (NASA STARS) that is fully integrated with OPM USAJOBS. Consequently, the Agency is responsive to its managers' and applicants' unique requirements, while at the same time, ensuring conformity with government wide vacancy announcement requirements. Under NASA STARS, applicants do not complete KSA narratives. Evaluations are made directly from information provided in the resume. Furthermore, applicants receive an initial email acknowledging receipt of their resume, and are provided a link to log onto USAJOBS to check the status of their applications. NASA STARS includes an actual "Vacancy Builder" tool which consists of pre-populated plain language templates. In combination with this tool and in an effort to capitalize on recently developed USAJOBS vacancy announcement templates, we are reviewing common occupations across the Agency and are in the process of developing NASA specific vacancy announcement templates.

In addition, NASA has been heavily engaged in responding to the recent OMB and OPM mandate to establish an Agency Hiring Reform SWAT Team. The team meets weekly and is currently assessing all major components of the hiring process against the government-wide 80 day standard, reviewing management engagement and satisfaction data, and as mentioned, developing plain language vacancy announcement templates. Finally, NASA has recently published a comprehensive report on its on-boarding process, which consists of detailed recommendations in reducing the length of time it takes for employees to be fully oriented and productive after accepting a job offer as well as their overall orientation process into the Agency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, NASA will continue to pursue its missions that push state-of-the-art technology, while also maintaining American leadership in space. The programs and initiatives that we have in place for our acquisition personnel will provide a qualified and capable acquisition workforce to meet the current and future challenges and complexities of NASA's new missions.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Subcommittee today. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have.