AGENCY LEADERS FOCUS ON BETTER IMPLEMENTING GOALS

Agency leaders discussed lessons learned from their experiences in implementing their agencies’ goals and spoke about several ways to better steer their agencies towards those objectives during a discussion at an Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation’s Leadership Forum meeting on January 11, 2005.

“Without reflection, there is no learning. It is only when we take the time, energy, and effort to think about what has happened and create an explanation that we have learning. We need to take some time to reflect on the President’s Management Agenda and provide an explanation for what has occurred in terms of achieving organizational goals and objectives,” said ISPPI Director Robert M. Tobias.

Dr. Linda M. Combs, Assistant Secretary for Budget and Programs and CFO of the Department of Transportation, gave a presentation on how to successfully reach an agency’s goals and objectives by focusing on having the right people, changing the processes as necessary, and utilizing up-to-date tools.

Mr. Jesus Delgado-Jenkins, Acting Assistant Secretary for Management and CFO of the Department of Treasury, spoke on the importance of leadership in effectively reaching an agency’s goals. Mr. Delgado-Jenkins also emphasized the importance of communication and being able to prioritize objectives.
Introduction and Discussion by ISPPI Director Robert M. Tobias

“Knowing what I know now, what would I have done differently then to achieve the Department’s goals and objectives?”

Introduction:
Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implement (ISPPI) Director Robert M. Tobias opened the meeting with a brief overview of the mission and goals of ISPPI, followed by a discussion by agency leaders of their experiences in implementing their agencies’ goals.

Leadership Forum participants discussed ways to better lead their agencies towards its objectives. Several of the lessons learned include the importance of:

- Frequent communication
- Goals being clearly defined and measurable
- A clear idea of what the end result should be
- Allowing individuals to see what they can do to meet goals
- Making realistic goals
- Melding political and organizational goals with day-to-day work experiences
- Fostering trust with political appointees
- Partnering with stakeholders
- Getting total involvement
- Embedding changes in the culture of the organization

“Without reflection, there is no learning. It is only when we take the time, energy, and effort to think about what has happened and create an explanation that we have learning. We need to take some time to reflect on the President’s Management Agenda and provide an explanation for what has occurred in terms of achieving organizational goals and objectives,” said Robert Tobias, director, ISSPI.

So what can be done by agency leaders to lead their agencies towards achieving its goals and objectives?
Based upon her childhood tennis lessons, Dr. Combs shared an important rule in tennis that also applies to leadership and planning: “Look at where the ball is going, not where the ball is.”

According to Dr. Combs, there are three words that are key to success: people, process, and tools.

Dr. Combs emphasized the need to have the right people for the right job at the right time to have success. Without the right people, it is difficult to fulfill the agency’s goals. Training and retraining the right people is essential, and communication between the leader and the employees is also very important.

The process in which the agency works towards its goals and mission is very significant. In accordance to this, changes to the process, and changing the process, are necessary and important. These should be changes that help the agency reach its goals in a more efficient way. For instance, the processes in the public and private sectors should be the same when dealing with finances. According to Dr. Combs, organizations that are the most successful have worked hard at changing those processes.

Another main component in actualizing an agency’s success is its use of tools. Agencies need to take a look at the tools that they are using and making sure these tools are not antiquated or need to be refined. It is important for agencies to be using current tools in order to reach its goals.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) established its primary strategic goals and objectives and its primary customers, products, and services in order to be able to tailor its goals and objectives based upon its customers, products, and services.

Implementation of the DOT strategic plan led to the Performance-Based Budget, which operationalizes the strategic plan and provides strong links to the budget request by defining performance goals and measures used to manage progress toward the strategic objectives.

The DOT Performance Planning is based upon the employee performance plan, executive performance agreements, organizational accountability contracts, management projects, supplementary operating administration performance goals, DOT performance goals and measures, and DOT strategic goals. This performance planning details how DOT plans, measures, manages, and reports on performance. Each level of performance planning builds upon the one below it, and brings the organization into a synchronized strategic process.

According to Dr. Combs, DOT Performance Measures are: tailored to how they get their work done for each performance goal; focus on core transportation missions; reflect the Secretary’s transportation priorities of safety, mobility, global connectivity, environmental stewardship, security, and organizational excellence; and give valuable insights into the performance of DOT programs to broadly illustrate how DOT adds value to the nation.

Dr. Combs’ presentation can be found on the ISPPPI web site, www.american.edu/spa/isppi, at the Leadership Forum, January 11, 2005 prior meetings tab.
In the military, there are similar battalions, but differences in performance. The difference between these battalions is leadership.

There is a three-part approach to good leadership: 1. Get the facts; 2. Establish unifying themes; and 3. Have a reality check.

It is necessary to get the facts and decide the processes that are necessary to be undertaken with the organization leaders by building bridges, trust, and confidence. It is important to have leaders who will be able to tell you if you’re incorrect or mistaken about anything. The problem must be defined correctly, and so it is necessary to be patient in gathering all the facts.

Establishing unifying themes from the set of issues and bodies of facts collected helps to build the organization’s identity in setting up its mission and vision. Having unifying themes will help build momentum when implementing the mission and will help prevent energy burnout. When the going gets tough, the people will come together because they’re already unified. It is important to include people in part of the feedback because this will lead to better results.

It is also important to have a reality check. It is not possible to get everything done. Leaders must prioritize and use the 80/20 principle. This is the idea of spending 80 percent of the time on the top 20 percent of issues that need to get done. It is necessary to be inclusive when making decisions with the people that are being worked with. If it is not possible to get a consensus on priorities, then steps 1 or 2 may need to be revisited in the process.

One of the main lessons learned is that individuals involved in this process must also be a part of the implementation team. Otherwise, the implementation team doesn’t have a relationship with the information binder. This causes a lower possibility of successes, and the implementation team will probably spend part of their time just redoing the redo the binder.

Transparency is important if a leader must make a decision that might be unpopular. This way, even if some do not agree with the decision, at least they will understand the reasoning behind the decision. When part of the organization is unhappy with an outcome, it is important to look at how much they were included in the process.