

**Partnership PDT
Washington Meeting Minutes
September 14 - 15, 2004**

Attending:

Jeff Boutwell, SWF, PM
Greg Miller, NWK
Dick Otto, MVP
Mike Hosey, SAW

Cori Brown, NAB
Gene Davis, LRH
Debra Stokes, HQ

Chris Gallagher, SPN by phone
for Handshake Initiative AAR
Heather Burke, SAJ, NRM CoP
observed several sessions

Tuesday September 14

1. Review of Other Agencies Internet Partnership Pages

The team reviewed several pages from other agencies sites that have very good ethics pages. From there, a general discussion started as to whether the structure of Gateway pages could be changed in any way. After reviewing other program pages within the Gateway, it was determined that there was a set format of specific buttons that could not be changed but there could be additional features added if desired. Upon review of several pages from other agencies, it was determined that there was a need for additional ethics information. The more informative pages from the DOI site will be looked at, modified for our use and placed within the Partnership pages after coordination with OC.

The team also will develop scenarios to be placed on “Lessons Learned” to show both successful and unsuccessful partnership projects. These are to be concise vignettes that answer the following questions:

- a. What is it that the field wanted to do?
- b. How were they planning to accomplish it?
- c. What was the outcome?
- d. If unsuccessful, what got in the way?

3. Handshake Seed Money Program AAR

Team members presented an after action report on the seed money program’s initial development and implementation. For being a new program, it went over rather well. There were a few bugs, most notably the realization that most field offices are really not that familiar with the requirements of the Challenge Partnership Program. Other “lessons learned” include:

- a. Definition/difference between “Project Summary” and “Project Description” needs to be explained better.
- b. Are attachments needed and relevant to the evaluation process?
- c. The need to make the information on the application as concise as possible. There was a tremendous amount of superfluous information provided that probably impacted the scoring and outcome of some applications.
- d. Ensure applicants understand not to “shotgun” applications thinking that “quantity” is better than “quality.”
- e. The amount of money to be awarded should be the full amount requested.

f. The weighted evaluation form needs to be reworked. It was heavily weighted to projects that impacted large numbers of people.

g. The evaluation of the project should only be judged by the amount of the partner's money directly related to the seed money proposal, e.g., the Corps \$10,000 is part of a \$25,000 interpretive display, not a \$2.5 million building project. Applicant needs to be specific as to what costs are part of the proposed challenge partnership agreement that will be submitted and what role it plays as part of a larger project. This will level the playing field with smaller projects of the same quality.

h. Applications need to be signed off by district and division NRM CoP.

There was a question as to whether district OC review is necessary on the initial application. After some discussion, it was determined that the application itself does not need to go through local OC for review. However, the PDT will assume that any agreement resulting from this program has been through normal district review and approval.

It was decided that the Gateway would be used as the main communication vehicle for the program. Items to be placed there include:

- a. The introduction of the program.
- b. The application form.
- c. However, the applicants will not be able to apply through the Gateway due to the requirement of having district/division NRM CoP sign-off. Applications will be sent electronically via e-mail to the PM after the above cited coordination.
- d. Include a FAQ section to address the most common questions asked.

The new application will have three questions at the beginning of the form that must be answered to determine eligibility. The first two and either portion of the third must be answered "yes" or the project does not qualify. All applications will be submitted electronically. It will be limited to three pages plus one additional page for maps or drawing. The evaluation form and the lesson's learned "vignettes" for OC concurrence will be looked at in a later session.

It was determined that a lot of work needs to be accomplished so we can get the FY05 program going in the first quarter. The goal is to have the nomination request out to the field ASAP so projects receiving the money will know by the end of January.

4. U.S. Forest Service Partnership Office – Debra Whithall, Sarah Bickel and Robert Joyce

The USFS presented an overview of the development and evolution of their partnership program and where it stands today. Included was a review of their various authorities and the process necessary to reach an agreement. Several handouts were given out and there was a good amount of discussion about the program in general how they involve their grants and agreement specialists. Ms. Whithall agreed to furnish our group an electronic copy of the proposed legislation currently on the Hill, their Partnership Guide and several other items used within their programs. This information will be e-mailed to HQ.

5. Timeline and Responsibilities

- a. Most short-term goals have been addressed.

Wednesday September 15

6. Review of Partnership Demonstration Projects.

Proposals from four of the six partnership demonstration projects were received. It was clear from reviewing these proposals that additional information would be required. After discussing various options, it was determined that the PDT would ask each project the same questions that were asked when developing the “lessons learned” vignettes:

- a. What do you want to accomplish?
- b. How are you going to accomplish it?
- c. Do you foresee anything that might get in the way?
- d. How do you see the Partnership PDT helping your project?

There was also much discussion on what was the extent of thinking “outside the box.” Was the strict application of the existing authorities still in place or was there leeway as to what could be done outside of the Corps authorities? It was reiterated that unlike the Federal Lakes Demonstration Program, we must stay within the confines of our existing authorities (ER/EP 1130-2-500, Challenge Partnerships, Contributions, Volunteers and Cooperating Associations). But that does not mean we cannot go back to the original legislation to see if something new can be looked at.

7. Review with Office of Counsel

The first item that was addressed was the question about spending Challenge Partnership money on out-grants. The answer is cut and dry. It cannot be done due to the specific wording of the authorizing law. With that in mind, the discussion turned to the various authorities that the Corps has available to utilize and the differences in MOUs, MOAs and cooperative agreements. The authorities available to the Corps at this time are very limited in scope and very restrictive as to how they can be applied. A MOU is merely an agreement where the parties agree to work together in a common effort but it cannot be used to commit funds. An MOA goes a little further by spelling out the mechanisms to exchange money, but an additional piece of paperwork (work order, etc.) is required. The Corps has very few cooperative agreements.

OC’s ethics expert was asked whether the Corps Communication Mark (castle) can be used in conjunction with other corporate logos. The answer was no. A corporate name can be used in recognition, but it must be in the same lettering style used throughout the recognition item (brochure, plaque). Corporate logos or their phrases may not be used. However, use of the Corps logo in conjunction with other corporate logos can be used for one-time special events such as t-shirts for health fairs, safety fairs, environmental fairs, National Public Lands Day activities, etc. When asked whether the Corps logo and a sponsor’s logo can be used on opposite corners of a brochure, it was stated that we have to avoid anything that would give the appearance of endorsement of the partner or its activities. Therefore, each proposal will need individual review.

As a side note, it was mentioned that the only person who can give permission for the Communication Mark to be used on items outside of the Corps is the deputy Chief of Engineers.

8. Development of “Vignettes”

A subgroup of the team reviewed partnership projects that could be set up into simple scenarios that introduced a partnership idea, the problem or obstacle that came up and how it was solved, if it was. These would be used as teaching tools on the Gateway. One team member will be spearheading this effort. The scenarios would represent non-traditional challenge partnerships, agreements and partnering tools. They would provide case studies for partnering situations that often require review by others for legal and policy issues. They would address under what circumstances federal dollars can be contributed to a partnership. The scenarios would cover the use of MOUs, MOAs, MIPRs, contracts, volunteer agreements, leases and licenses as partnering tools.

9. Reworking of Handshake Application Evaluation Sheet.

Another subgroup of the team got together to review and to rework the Handshake application evaluation criteria sheet. From lessons learned in 2004, it was determined that projects, which impacted a large number of users, gained an unfair advantage over smaller, but equally important projects.

The *Public Impact*, *Product* and *Planning Value* criterion were deleted. The *Infrastructure* criteria was renamed *Sustainability* and its definition reworked to emphasize the life span of the project. The *Unique Project* criteria was renamed *Innovativeness* and all points from the deleted criteria were redistributed to the remaining criteria.

Partnership Value will be scored in the following manner: if there is a 50/50 split in the total cost of the project, it will receive a 3. If partner’s contribution is greater than 50/50 the score is proportionally higher up to 5. If the partner’s contribution is smaller the score is proportionally lower down to 1.

Environmental Stewardship Value was redefined as it relates to the physical improvement of the natural resource.

Recreation Benefits were redefined to take into account the recreation experience for multiple user types. The more user types involved, the higher the score.

Communication and Education were redefined to emphasize increased public understanding of the Corps and its missions through interpretation, outreach, education and public information. The main mission of this subgroup was to focus evaluation on the quality of the project and remove sheer numbers of users and large total cost of projects from the process. It was agreed that the partner’s contribution as it relates directly to the seed money would be evaluated. Example: the seed money with the partner’s money for the cost of a display in a new interpretive center will be evaluated and not the entire price tag of the interpretive center itself. This again is to level the playing field for smaller, less expensive but just as important projects. The emphasis will be on quality of product, not quantity.

10. Anecdotal Responses to Inquiries. When the team responds to questions from the field about what can and cannot be done under the partnership authorities, they need to quote from the appropriate regulation whenever possible. Anecdotal responses may cause confusion.

11. Tasks.

- a. Review the minutes of the St. Louis meeting so that it will be placed on the Gateway.
- b. Complete the minutes of the August 18th teleconference.
- c. Address fund raising and solicitation questions with the OC ethics POC.
- d. Coordinate with OC to place appropriate ethics information on the Gateway.
- e. Create the ethics page for the Gateway.
- f. Re-edit the Handshake application and lessons learned for posting on Gateway.
- g. Rework the application evaluation criteria.
- h. Summarize FY04 Handshake Program AAR.
- i. Ask the six partnership demonstration projects for more specific information about what they would like to do using the partnership program in FY05.
- j. Send electronic copies of Forest Service proposed legislation, their Assessment and Planning Tool, Communication Strategy and database to the team members as soon as it arrives.
- k. Look at OMBIL to see what we need projects to report for partnership activities.
- l. Write scenarios in the “Three Question” format for placement on the Gateway
- m. Update the FAQ page with updated information that was learned with OC meeting.
- n. Develop timeline for FY 05 Handshake Program. Work on updated MFR and Introduction.
 - o. Print and distribute the Partnership Card.
 - p. Resend the MAI report to all team members.
 - q. Review MAI report and prepare summary/recommendations for team.
 - r. Ask USFS if their chief sent out a directive on partnership to the field.
 - s. Review the APPL Excellence in Interpretation Award criteria NLT December 31 to see whether it should be revised to become a partnership award open to others entities besides cooperating associations.
 - t. Send latest revision of “partnership evaluation tool” to team for final review prior to field-testing with handshake program recipients.