



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

RECOVERY OVERSIGHT ADVISORY

A Critical Point Evaluation Product

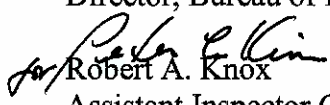


**RECOVERY OVERSIGHT OFFICE**

Washington, DC 20240

FEB 04 2010

To: Jerry Gidner
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)

From:  Robert A. Knox
Assistant Inspector General for Recovery Oversight

Subject: Recovery Oversight Advisory – Bureau of Indian Affairs Construction Workforce
On-the-Job Training in Maintenance Program (ROO-ROA-BIA-2005-2010)

To safeguard taxpayer dollars, Congress provided us with funding to oversee and ensure accountability of the \$3 billion appropriated to the Department of the Interior (the Department) in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). We are focused on: preventing fraud, waste, and mismanagement; reducing misuse of dollars through early detection; and ensuring transparency in our oversight efforts. In our effort to collaborate with the Department, this memorandum highlights our observations on implementation of the Construction Workforce On-the-Job Training in Maintenance Program (OJT) by BIA and the Office of Facilities Management and Construction (OFMC). We found issues that could impact OFMC's ability to successfully obligate funds for the program in accordance with the Recovery Act.

Please provide a written response to this advisory within 30 days of receipt detailing the corrective actions the Bureau of Indian Affairs will implement to meet our recommendations, as well as targeted completion dates and title(s) of the official(s) responsible for implementation.

We will post this advisory on our website (www.doioig.gov/recovery) and Recovery.gov. Information contained in this advisory may also be included in our semi-annual reports to Congress. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Background

According to the BIA Recovery Act Implementation Plan,¹ \$13.3 million is dedicated to the creation of a new OJT program as follows:

“Indian Affairs will provide on-the-job training for unemployed or underemployed Indian individuals while accomplishing annual maintenance on Federal Government facilities. The facilities include Bureau buildings, detention centers, employee quarters, and other support facilities. Because this work is labor intensive, it is estimated that 75 percent of the funds will go towards salary

¹ Indian Affairs, Office of the Secretary, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), Implementation Plan, June 15, 2009, page 2.

expenses with the balance being used to procure the necessary materials within the community thus turning those dollars over to the local communities.”

Maintenance of BIA Federal facilities (e.g., agency buildings, employee quarters, and detention centers) has long been neglected due to underfunding. The maintenance backlog for BIA Federal buildings is estimated to be billions of dollars. OFMC’s Operations & Maintenance (O&M) budget is 50 percent funded now.

In addition, throughout Indian Country, unemployment rates in and around reservations range from 25 to 90 percent according to the OJT program description.² OFMC used Recovery Act funding to develop the OJT program in an effort to reduce the maintenance backlog on Federal facilities and employ local American Indians.

We interviewed OFMC management at the OFMC Central (West) office and staff at the Navajo and Eastern regional offices. We also spoke with personnel from four OJT program locations: Chinle Agency, Hopi Agency (Keams Canyon), Pine Ridge Agency, and Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (Pearl River), as well as security and human resources staff at OFMC Central (West) and in Anadarko, OK.

Lagging Obligations

As of November 6, 2009, only 94 of 217 available OJT laborer positions have been filled. According to the OJT Implementation Plan, 75 percent of program funds are designated for labor. Labor, however, is not considered obligated until employee hours are worked. OFMC has obligated approximately 14 percent of the program funds (labor and materials) to date.

The O&M Stimulus Plan states that 50 percent of the program funds must be spent within 120 days of funding receipt. OFMC received funding on May 1, 2009; therefore 50 percent of program funds should have been obligated by August 29, 2009. If this trend continues, OFMC risks not meeting the September 30, 2010 obligation deadline.

Hiring Delays

The Albuquerque Recruitment Center and its satellite office for the Navajo Region in Gallup, NM, will process an estimated 75 percent of all OJT personnel actions. Several factors have led to significant delays in OJT applicants receiving start dates and obligations of funds:

1. The Individual Information System (IIS) is designed to automatically alert Human Resources staff by email when security office background checks are approved. We found that automatic emails were either not sent to Human Resources or were unrecognizable as such, and several prospective employees waited until October to receive start dates despite the completion of their background checks some months earlier.

² FY2009 Economic Stimulus Plan, Office of Facilities Management, Division of Operations and Maintenance, Description of Deferred Maintenance Work, January 29, 2009.

2. Both the Director and Acting Director of the Albuquerque Recruitment Center retired during the height of the OJT hiring phase. A new director of the Albuquerque Security Office was hired in August of this year. These changes in personnel may have resulted in failure to follow up on the status of background checks and failure to recognize the mishandling of the automatic email notification system.
3. When a worker leaves the OJT program, the hiring process begins again. Available positions must be advertised, candidates must be selected, and background checks must be completed. If this process starts too late in FY2010, candidates cannot be hired and wages cannot be paid prior to the Recovery Act obligation deadline.
4. Many background investigation applications received by the Security Office were incomplete, which caused significant processing delays. Personnel from the Rocky Mountain Region visited job locations to assist applicants in filling out their security forms, but the Southwest and Navajo Regions did not.

Authority

OJT personnel experience frequent communication lapses. Many offices have expressed confusion regarding reporting requirements and frustration resulting from insufficient Recovery Act training specific to facilities personnel. While OJT policies and procedures are developed by O&M, it has no line authority over regional facility managers to implement these procedures. The regional facility managers and the Chief of O&M report directly to the OFMC Deputy Director. Without clear and consistent direction from the Deputy Director, regional facility managers are not implementing OJT policies and procedures.

Recommendations

We recommend the Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs:

1. Implement strategies to accelerate hiring of OJT candidates. Approaches to consider could include, but are not limited to:
 - Start new OJT workers after (1) favorable fingerprint checks are received from Office of Personnel Management, (2) complete security forms have passed review by the Security Office, and (3) contingent upon successful completion of remaining background check requirements;
 - Issue “Open and Continuous until Filled” vacancy announcements for OJT positions to ensure rapid replacement of the workforce as needed;
 - Transfer program funding to locations with proven programmatic success and high unemployment rates;
 - Add temporary Human Resources personnel at Central Office (West) to proactively administer OJT hiring procedures;
 - Address communication lapses between Human Resources and the Security Office to ensure swift application processing and timely start date determinations;
 - Increase assistance to applicants to ensure applications are complete.

2. Clarify and strengthen O&M line authority regarding implementation of OJT policies and procedures.

cc: Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior
Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Economic Recovery and Stimulus
Assistant Secretary – Policy, Management, and Budget
Director, Office of Acquisition and Property Management
Director, Office of Financial Management
Recovery Coordinator, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Director, OEFCR
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Chief, Division of Operations & Management, OFMC
Departmental GAO/OIG Audit Liaison
Audit Liaison, Office of the Secretary
Audit Liaison, Bureau of Indian Affairs

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