



U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General

"The volunteer workforce has proven to be an important adjunct to the Federal workforce, assisting with hundreds of programs and projects."

– DOI Strategic Plan,
FY 2007-2012



Evaluation of the Department of the Interior's Recruitment, Screening, Selection, and Training of Departmental Volunteers

Cover Photos (*Clockwise from Top to Bottom*):

An FWS volunteer shows children catfish from petting tank
(<http://www.fws.gov/dls/default.cfm?CFID=8380164&CFTOKEN=52797223>);
volunteers help to clean up at the BLM Ash Springs Rock Art Site
(<http://www.nv.blm.gov/ely/education.htm>); and, a volunteer assists with the outdoor
education program at Arches National Park (NPS Photo by Neal Herbert,
<http://www.nps.gov/volunteer/>)



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
Washington, D.C. 20240

March 7, 2008

Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretaries
Heads of Bureaus and Offices

From: Earl E. Devaney
Inspector General

Subject: Evaluation of the Department of the Interior's (Department) Recruitment, Screening, Selection, and Training of Departmental Volunteers (W-EV-MOA-0004-2008)

We identified and evaluated the Department's requirements for recruiting, screening, selecting, and training its volunteers and the Department's success in following these requirements. We also determined whether ethics training and background investigations were routinely required and performed for volunteers. To complete our evaluation, we looked at six of the eight bureaus within the Department with a significant level of volunteerism, namely, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS), and U.S. Geological Service. We interviewed knowledgeable agency officials, who provided us with policies and information regarding the volunteer program.

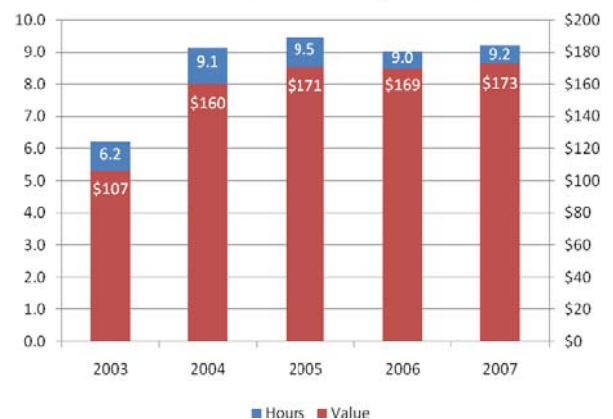
Results of Evaluation

We concluded that additional guidance on recruiting, screening, and selecting volunteers, including background investigations, is not needed. However, we found that training should be expanded to include Departmental ethics requirements during the initial orientation of volunteers to bureau missions and proposed work assignments.

Background

The Department has placed an ever increasing emphasis on the use of volunteers in carrying out its mission. According to its 2007 Performance and Accountability Report, volunteers contributed over 9 million hours of service valued at almost \$173 million

Volunteer Hours and Value to the Department (in Millions)



in supporting the Department's mission activities. NPS has the most volunteers followed by FWS and BLM. Collectively, the three bureaus account for 87 percent of volunteers within the Department.

Volunteer programs are decentralized and managed by individual bureaus, which provide overall guidance on the programs. Actual recruitment, screening, selection, and training of volunteers are done by bureau field offices. The Departmental level Take Pride in America Office, which reports to the Office of the Secretary, acts only as a clearinghouse and facilitates public relations on the benefits of volunteering on public lands. Although volunteer programs are decentralized, there is coordination among bureaus through the Federal Interagency Team on Volunteerism (FITV), a coalition of federal land management agencies.

Summary of Evaluation

Recruitment, Screening, and Selection

Volunteers are recruited primarily by "word of mouth," such as through professional societies, and Internet sites, such as <http://volunteer.gov/gov/>, hosted by FITV. Prior to actual service, volunteers must complete bureau-specific application forms and volunteer agreements. These forms identify those terms that both the volunteer and bureau agree to and clarify that the volunteer is to be treated as a federal employee only for the purposes of federal torts and worker's compensation. Interviews at the field office are used to match the volunteer's area of interest to the bureau's need.

As of August 2004, Departmental volunteer programs are subject to the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12), which requires that federal agencies implement a mandatory, government-wide standard for secure and reliable forms of identification for federal employees and contractors, as well as for volunteers who serve longer than 180 days. To meet this standard, agencies conduct background investigations, adjudicate the results, and issue personal identification verification cards. Investigations are conducted through the Office of Personnel Management. Bureaus bear the costs for background investigations and issuance of personal identification verification cards, which can range from \$185 to \$220.

The Department plans to complete implementation of HSPD-12 by December 2008. While the Department has reported that it has completed the majority of background checks for its employees and contractors, work is still needed to complete background checks for volunteers. As of December 2007, almost 3,000 background checks were required for persons categorized as "other individuals," which includes, but is not limited to, volunteers serving for over 180 days. NPS and BLM reported to us a combined 214 background checks completed on volunteers within fiscal years 2005 and 2006. As the Office of Management and Budget did not issue guidance on HSPD-12 until August 2005, we encourage bureaus to continue completing implementing HSPD-12 with respect to volunteers.

Training

While no bureau provides specific training programs, generally, bureaus provide basic safety instruction during the volunteer's general introductory orientation. Any further training is most likely to be "on-the-job." Additionally, special certification or training may be needed depending on the volunteer's duties, such as collecting fees or using hazardous equipment.

We concluded, however, that additional training is needed for all volunteers in the areas of ethics and appropriate behavior. This training would inform volunteers about their basic obligation of public service as well as the appropriate use of government property and information. With almost three times as many volunteers as there are Departmental employees working on public lands, this training is especially needed as all volunteers, regardless of the amount of time served, are considered to be federal employees in the matter of federal tort claims. Ethics training is also essential in emphasizing the conduct and behavior expected of volunteers representing the federal government. In a November 2006 letter to new Departmental employees, Secretary Kempthorne emphasized the need for "an ethics culture that is beyond reproach." To help facilitate this culture, employees are directed to two sources to help familiarize themselves with ethics laws and regulations: (1) an ethics guide entitled "Making Ethics a Part of the Workplace" and (2) the Department's or bureau's key ethics officials. We believe that including this basic ethics information in the volunteers' general introductory orientation would help manage the risk inherent in the use of volunteers to perform Departmental work and meet Departmental goals and objectives.

Suggested Actions

1. Continue completion of background checks for eligible volunteers to meet the December 2008 implementation of HSPD-12.
2. Include basic ethics information, including the ethics guide "Making Ethics a Part of the Workplace," to volunteers during their general introductory orientation and provide volunteers with the contact information for key Departmental ethics officials.

The legislation, as amended, that created the Office of Inspector General requires that we report to Congress semiannually on all reports issued. As part of our effort to fulfill this obligation, we will track the status of suggestions made to the Department in this report and will report this information to Congress. Therefore, please provide us with documentation on actions taken to implement the suggestions so we may close them when no further action is required. If we do not receive information, we will contact you on a periodic basis for updates on the implementation status of the suggestions.

We appreciate the cooperation shown by the Department during our evaluation. If you have any questions about our work or report, please do not hesitate to call me at (202) 208-5745.

cc: Audit Liaison Officer, Office of the Secretary, Nancy Thomas, MS 2557
 Audit Liaison Officer, National Park Service, Vera Washington (1201 I St., NW)
 Audit Liaison Officer, Bureau of Land Management, Andrea Nygren (MS 1000 L St.)
 Audit Liaison Officer, Bureau of Reclamation, Elaine Ferrari, Denver, CO
 Audit Liaison Officer, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Michael Olivia, Reston, VA
 Audit Liaison Officer, U.S. Geological Survey, Rebecca Bageant, Reston, VA
 Audit Liaison Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Jacob Lee (MS 222 ArlSq)
 Audit Liaison Officer, Minerals Management Service, Acting Shelley Wills, MS 4212
 Audit Liaison Officer, Office of Surface Mining, Towanna Thompson, MS 244 SIB

Report Fraud, Waste, Abuse And Mismanagement



Fraud, waste, and abuse in government concerns everyone: Office of Inspector General staff, Departmental employees, and the general public. We actively solicit allegations of any inefficient and wasteful practices, fraud, and abuse related to Departmental or Insular area programs and operations. You can report allegations to us in several ways.



By Mail:

U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Inspector General
Mail Stop 5341 MIB
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

By Phone:

24-Hour Toll Free 800-424-5081
Washington Metro Area 703-487-5435

By Fax:

703-487-5402

By Internet:

www.doioig.gov

Revised 07/07