2013-2014 Science and Technology Policy Fellows Orientation

Guide to Functioning Effectively within the Executive Branch
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The executive functions...which are the basis for much functional specialization in organizations have no separate concrete existence. They are parts or aspects of a process of organization as a whole...The means utilized are...concrete acts logically determined; but the essential aspect of the process...transcends the capacity of merely intellectual methods...The terms pertinent to it are "feeling," "judgment," "sense," "proportion," "balance," "appropriateness." It is a matter of art rather than science and is aesthetic rather than logical.

Chester Bernard, Functions of the Executive (p. 235)
Take Away Lessons

• process matters at least as much as content
• content is more than facts. It encompasses political, economic, emotional dimensions as well as evidence based on observation.
• Content can also be ambiguous, based on incomplete information, and requires both judgment and tradeoffs.
TOPICS

- Defining A SUCCESSFUL Fellowship
- General Context
- Your Agency’s Context
- Your Assignment/Your Project
- Decision making
- “Staff Work”
- Some Cautions
- Making the most of your Fellowship
What is the “National Interest?”
“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”
Who decides the national interest?
Two Important Distinctions:

WHAT the national interest is

vs.

HOW to achieve it?
Which leads to the distinctions among

Government
and
Private or Market Functions
and
the Role of the Individual
*What is the proper role of government?*

*What is the proper role of the federal government as compared to the role of state and local government?*  
(See the 10th Amendment to the Constitution)

*What is the responsibility of the individual?
FACT to ponder:

Today, states depend on federal funds for 30% of their revenue.

In the 1970’s only 6% of state revenue came from the federal government.
What is a “Successful Fellowship?”

- What do you want to learn?
- What do you want to achieve?
- How does the Fellowship fit into your longer term plans?

A Fellowship is to be of MUTUAL BENEFIT to you and your agency!*

*Sometimes Agency Managers forget!
Set personal and professional goals for your Fellowship

Write them down

Discuss them with your mentor and office’s manager
General Context of Your Work

• Timing - midway through President’s second term:
  - “Legacy;”
  - People positioning for the future - next election or a move deeper into or outside of government.
  - Budget constraints, sequestration = uncertainty for programs
  - No/few appropriations enacted, even at lower levels
• Decision makers polarized; even further divisions within the political parties
• Deep disagreements in Congress and the population about the proper role of government.
• Concerns about another war, the state of national defense as well as the economy
• Issues and work increasingly multidisciplinary, crossing the jurisdictions of a number of agencies and Congressional committees.
• Legislation - Fundamental Truths

- Internally inconsistent
- Ambiguous
- More than one way to implement it
- More than one agency involved
- Agency roles unclear or in conflict
- May not come with funding
• Characteristics of the Federal Work Force Composition differs from the general workforce.
  -better educated - higher proportion in professional (33%), and management, business and financial (34%) occupations.
  -largest number of professionals - healthcare fields, technical occupations, life, physical and social sciences, architecture and engineering.
  -fewer in office and admin support (14%)
  -older (avg. age ~ 48) - graying (25% over 55; 2/3 of senior executives eligible to retire)
  -increasing retirements reduce number of experienced, available mentors
Workforce under stress: morale can be low
No single personnel system
A single agency may have more than one personnel system with differing pay, promotion and incentive rules. Result: Questions of fairness/rivalries.

Important and relevant distinctions:
-career and political appointees – have different time horizons, different sources of power and constituencies leading to different perspectives on issues.
-domestic and foreign service staff, though both are career services, also have different time horizons and sometimes different motivations for service.

Understanding these differences is important to working effectively in your agency.
Take Away Lessons

• Stay informed on economic and political issues
• Read newspapers/news magazines; look for in depth news reporting
• Check out C-Span on radio 90.1, or TV; hear Committee hearings, policy maker interviews
• Friday news roundups ch. 26 & 22? Sunday talk shows?
• Read the Washington Post, Section A, Federal Page and the Metro Section Federal Worker page
• Sign up on line and attend briefings at area think tanks most of which are open to the general public.
Your Agency’s Situation

Become familiar with the following common agency level issues:

1) Funding situation
2) Current policies and programs
3) New initiatives
4) Current controversies and issues/public or Congressional concerns
5) Status of senior executive positions, especially political leadership – are they appointed and confirmed? Are they leaving?
Good sources of info on your agency (usually available on line):

- The agency’s budget request to Congress
- Policy statements/Congressional testimony by agency leadership; fact sheets, program reports prepared by your agency’s public affairs office
- Reports of hearings and Committee reports on issues related to the agency’s work.
- Congressional Research Service, Government Accountability Office and think tank reports and studies - more analytical and in depth.
Decisionmaking

• **No one has the whole truth.** Most decisions must take account of a variety of points of view.

• Get to know stakeholder views, their influence.

• The tendency is to **seek consensus/agreement**.

• This is a negotiation that leads to “clearance,” i.e., agreement on a course of action.

• If there is no consensus, the relative power and influence of various stakeholders becomes especially important.

• **Different decisions are made at different levels**.
Decision Making

• Decisions are “escalated” to a higher level for several reasons:
  - Relative importance/impact/controversial nature of the decision
  - Inability of lower level staff to reach consensus

• Any agency can decide to escalate; it is easier for some than for others. Escalation is common when agencies disagree.

• Staff level analysis and recommendations inform higher level decision makers.
Your Project/Program Assignment…

- May be defined or undefined.

If it is undefined, your first task is to define it. Do your homework on your agency and office, look for needs you can fill/contributions you can make, consider your own goals for the fellowship and…. Write your own job description

It is better for you and easier for your supervisor if you present a specific proposal.
“Staff Work”

Projects/assignments are “staff work” done in support of and on behalf of others, For example:
1) Briefing others and keeping them informed
2) Researching, analyzing, reporting on issues
3) Recommending actions
4) Implementing decisions
5) Representing your managers and their views
6) Responding to public or Congressional inquiries or recommendations from outside such as the GAO.
“Staff Work” and Creativity

• You are joining an existing system

You are expected to think and have ideas

• BUT creativity is threatening and destabilizing

• To make your ideas a reality

  - relate your ideas to your office/agency’s mission - What’s the authority? rationale? benefit? cost? Who must approve?

  - identify sources of support in and outside your office – Who would benefit? Who would fund?

  - identify the skeptics and address their concerns.

• Put your proposal in writing for your boss
Take Away Lesson

Guidelines for good staff work:

• Take the initiative – do your homework; look for new opportunities, emerging issues

• Keep “principals” informed - no surprises

• Provide your best, most candid analysis, judgment, and recommendations

• Constructively engage other interested parties

• Be creative, diligent and timely in your work and in follow up – Both process and content matter

• ALWAYS sign your work and give others credit where it is due
Take Away Lesson

Challenges of Staff Work
How much independence you will have
How much initiative you may take
Accessibility of higher ups
Visibility and exposure
Credit and recognition
Disagreements and conflicting goals and ambitions among the staff
(Rare) Personal disagreement with policy or conflict of values
Take Away Lesson

If something makes no sense to you:
1) Ask why?
2) Ask what has been tried and what worked/didn’t work and why?
3) If it still makes no sense to you….

It probably doesn’t make sense.

Trust your judgment!
Take Away Lesson

Possible roles with new and ongoing projects:

- research, analysis and design
- building support/identifying stakeholders
- monitoring,
- analyzing results?
- responding to inquiries?
- designing a “mid-course evaluation, correction or a way around obstacles?”
Key sources of info about your project:
1. Policy framework for the project (look for public statements, Congressional testimony)
2. The project document itself
3. The budget request/justification
4. Monitoring and evaluation reports, internal and external, including regular evaluations, Inspector General reports, GAO and CRS reports.
5. Stakeholders and opponents/skeptics
Take Away Lesson

Some Cautions

- Respect the President’s prerogatives – HIS budget and policies are what you support!
- Know your agency’s process for communicating with Congress and the media
- DO NOT initiate contact without clearance
- Report contacts you receive
- Meet Congressional deadlines with responsive answers
- Protect proprietary, financial and budget information
Take Away Lesson

Three Notes on Ethics

1) Pay for your own coffee. Avoid the appearance of impropriety. When in doubt, ask.

2) Protect the privacy of your personal political views.

3) The Hatch Act limits political activity by career employees.
SO WHAT’S A FELLOW TO DO?
- Set personal and professional goals (written)
- Review assignments frequently
- Take initiative – look for what needs to be done
- Trust your judgment (but ask WHY?)
- Take risks to make recommendations
- Don’t expect things to be too organized
SO WHAT’S A FELLOW TO DO?

- Do your share of “grunt” work
- Understand political vs. career time horizons
- Know limits to speak or commit for the US
- Keep record of assignments
RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Attend:
   - the AAAS Annual Meeting
     Chicago, February 2014

2) Seek training in multilateral negotiations for ALL USG employees
   Call: State/FSI 703-302-7186
3) Read the Federal Page - A Section and Federal Worker - Metro Section of the Washington Post regularly, and anything by Paul Light.

4) Check out the Partnership for Public Service Website: www.ourpublicservice.org for analysis of federal employment issues and links to the latest studies, e.g. best places to work in the U.S. Government.
5) For USAID and State Fellows - attend SID/W meetings in your field: See SIDW.org for topics, date, place. Career Fair Oct. 2, 2013

6) Read the newspaper, watch the news and analysis. PBS News Hour (90.9 FM) and C-Span (90.1 FM) are both on the radio. PBS – WETA Channel 26 Friday nights 7-9 pm Liberal and conservative views without the yelling!
7) Sign up for notification of various think tank programs in your field. They are free. For example:

- Brookings Institution
- Center for Strategic and Intl. Studies
- Center for Global Development
- International Food Policy Research Institute

8) Washington’s theaters offer many opportunities to consider science, policy and politics.
9) Visit the Smithsonian’s Nat’l. Museum of American Art and National Portrait Gallery, 8th and F streets, N.W. open to 7:00 pm, the exhibits on:

*US Presidents

*The Struggle for Justice

10) Visit the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial. It is a park with something for every scientist and engineer. It will remind you why you are here.
Enjoy your Fellowship
and
ALL that Washington has to offer!

Thank you.

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