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April 12, 1995

To: USDA AmeriCorps Working Group
From: Joel Berg *JB*
Subject: Tasks Forces Following-Up On Our Retreat

As you will recall, during our retreat on March 10 and March 13, we democratically agreed that the below-listed nine issues --- ranked in order of importance --- were the most critical short and long-term issues facing the USDA AmeriCorps program.

Also listed below are the names of our working group Members who volunteered to head-up task forces on these issues. I believe it would be helpful to the entire group if each task force would report their progress at our meeting next Tuesday.

The nine top priorities:

- (1) Obtaining and Reacting to Feed-Back in Order to Solve Problems at Sites --- Larry, Paula
- (2) Preparing the Department's Application for the 1995-1996 Program year --- Dee, Joel
- (3) Improving Recruitment --- Jim, Katherine
- (4) Planning our Next National Staff Training Conference --- Charles, Donna, Elizabeth
- (5) Improving the Department's Quarterly Reports --- Lou
- (6) Refining the Ways We Report Account for Our Budgets --- Ron
- (7) Planning National or regional Trainings for AmeriCorps Members --- Dave, Paula
- (8) Wrap-up of Program Year --- Paula
- (9) Launch of Next Year's Program --- Katherine

11) Operations manual

12) ~~Public Relations~~ / Intergovernmental
Affairs
Con

13)

Annual
Application
Process

Possible Long-Term Issues For Agency/Field Staff Task Forces

- 1) Objectives for overall USDA program
- 2) Staff training
- 3) Member training
- 4) Rural Development Team national identity issues
- 5) Guidelines for project sponsors
- 6) Ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement
- 7) Long-term evaluation
- 8) Graduation ceremonies

9) Departmental Awards
Public Employees Recognition
Week

AmeriCorps Awards

10) Recruitment

Retiree

(File)
reheat

1. Improved internal comm. (IC)
2. Improved external comm. (EC)
Build constituency; macro level
3. Institutionalized team USDA (TEAM)
steering committee
4. Enhanced local support (LOC)
Of local operations
5. Developed feedback structures (FEED)
and improvement process; at policy level
6. Quality training (TRA)
provided at all levels
7. Developed client based support (CLI)
community needs, objectives
8. Became proactive organization (PRO)
Roadmap
9. Increased sources of funding (FUND)
10. Secured funds (SEC)
to support program, enough dollars to support, project dollars
11. Improved recruitment (REC)
12. Improved customer satisfaction (SAT)
Includes members
13. Bolstered relations with CNS (CNS)

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The Mission of the USDA AmeriCorps program is to:

Involve a diverse group of Americans in partnerships with communities to provide real and accountable service to meet environmental and human needs -- who develop an ethic of service, responsibility, and citizenship while earning educational benefits.

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The vision for the USDA AmeriCorps program is within five years, to have created a model for the Federal government of a program with: a measurable impact upon quality-of-life, a clear national identity respected for its focus on successful results, a set of measurable accomplishments in meeting environmental and human needs, and a long-term plan for continuing to be expanded, replicated and sustained until service Opportunities are available to all Americans.

USDA's vision for the AmeriCorps has: institutionalized an innovative, respected, and sustainable program that has enhanced the quality-of-life for Americans. As it has been expanded and replicated nationwide, the accomplishments of the program have established its identity as an integral part of mainstream of USDA operations.

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EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

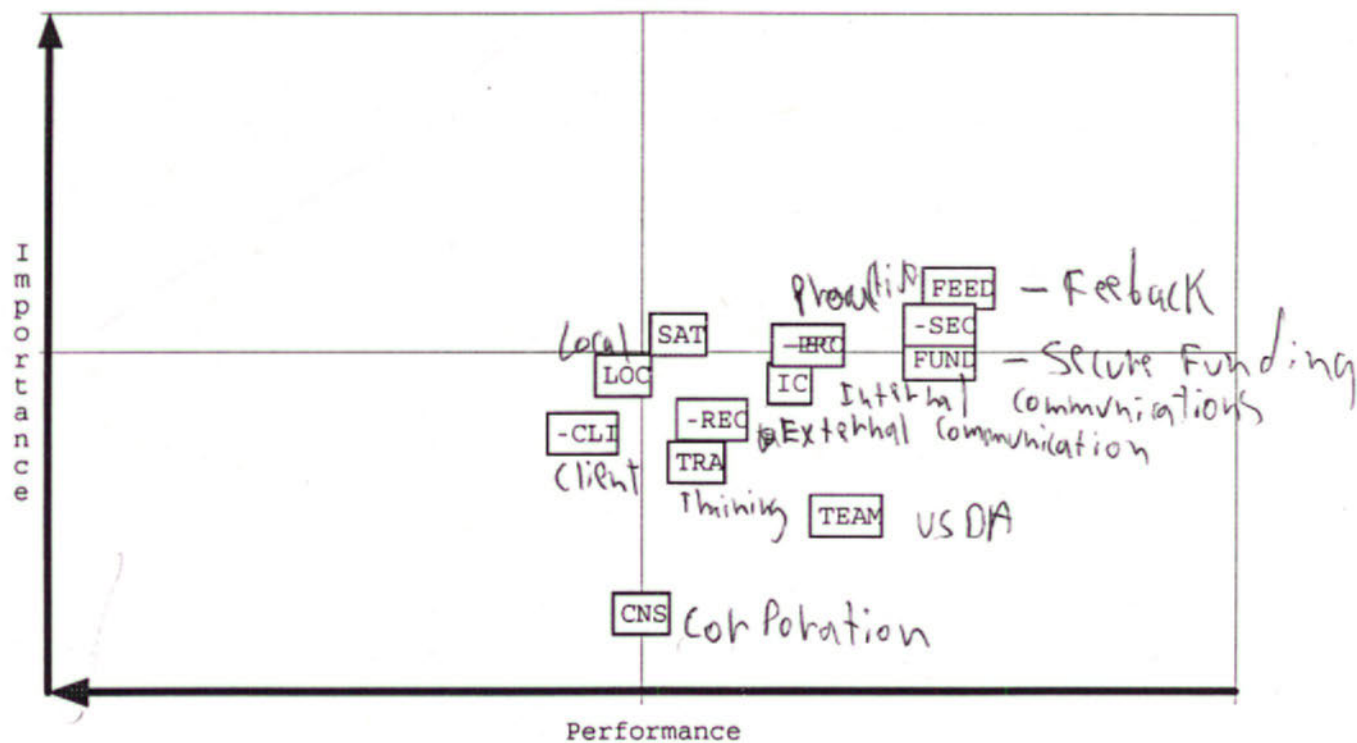
1. Inc. appropriations by Congress.
2. Program has it's own appropriations.
3. Known throughout the Country.
4. Community groups validate its value.
5. A published GAO report on accomplishments.
6. A marked reduction in unmet needs.
7. Reduced crime rate and unemployment through enhanced opportunities.
8. Higher college enrollment.
9. Higher educational attainment.
10. Raised status for vocational education.
11. 46,500 people will have participated in the program.
12. 79 million hours of service performed.
13. Million hours ceremony.
14. Will have served in every state in the country.
15. Lower food stamp roles.
16. _____ community projects completed.
17. We've proven diverse programs work in all communities.
18. Private and non-profits support and fund projects.
19. Program expands volunteer efforts.
20. Proved that government programs can work.
21. Programs that operate independent of corporation funds.

ISSUES & CONCERNS

1. Changes in the rural development model.
2. Confusion between DC and the field and the field and DC.
3. Lack of understanding of AmeriCorps - overall (agencies).
4. Bring in the experts early-on.
5. Develop a strategic plan up front.
6. Identify legislation or key items that impacts program - authorities, codes, etc.
7. Establish uniform procedure for USDA agencies to develop state plans.
8. Deadlines for written material not being met and massive editing task.
9. Format not followed.
10. Duplication of effort.
11. Lack of clerical support.
12. Lack of guidelines.
13. Incredible commitment of employees.
14. Not enough sharing of draft documents and letters before distributing and directives to the field.
15. Conflicting priorities, changing people.
16. Sensitize agency leadership to Department objectives/goals and gain commitment and needed resources.
17. Need to develop an AmeriCorps training package for new staff.
18. Need to involve FAC's at the state level.
19. Short turn arounds.
20. Not enough of the right people brought together to communicate early enough.
21. Unnecessary work.

22. Not enough electronic compatibility.
23. Not the right technical skills (spreadsheets)
24. Consider a retreat for the team.
25. Develop a training video for training - Joel & Katherine.
26. Good humor and "Esprit d' Corps"
27. Remarkable project effort.
28. Not enough buy in early and follow-up with agency heads and Assistant Secretary(s).
29. Key personnel had too many non National Service duties.
30. Too many conflicting directions.
31. Too little time planning.
32. We're creating something important, nationwide, and beneficial to society.
33. Great support from the field.
34. Some didn't take the application seriously enough.
35. Confusion on the level of detail needed.
36. Important to recognize the growing pains and start up dynamics so that we don't invalidate our work.
37. Completed the largest and most complex program in the Federal Government.
38. We met our goals.
39. We need a plan and time frames so the people needed can be identified.
40. 1996 Budget.
41. Plan of work by July 1.
42. Implementation of 1995 program.
43. Agencies not involved.

Opportunity Definition



Interpretation Profile

