

NPS Museum Professionals and Competitive Sourcing

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Executive Summary

From 2002-2005, employees in the National Park Service have participated in competitive sourcing studies. Increased public/private competition was one of the major goals in the President's Management Agenda, a sweeping strategy designed to enhance the performance and management of government agencies. Far from placing only traditionally outsourced jobs such as maintenance and office work up for competition, the NPS has from the beginning, also included scientists, museum curators, and historians on their list of jobs that are not "inherently governmental" and thus, subject to bid.

The inclusion of museum professionals in public/private competitions has prompted some to accuse the government of selling off the management of our national treasures to the lowest bidder. The federal museum community, through letters, congressional statements, and grass-roots education, aims to convince the government and the public that their jobs are inherently governmental.

To an extent, museum professionals are winning. In a study of the Southeastern Archeological Center, for example, the in-house team proved they could be more efficient than contractors. A study at the Midwest Archeological Center was cancelled after it was decided that the study would no longer be feasible. However, these "victories" have often come with reduced morale, cuts in staff, and increases in backlogged projects.

In order for public/private competitions involving NPS museum professionals to be successful, careful attention needs to be paid to the cost of the studies, actual savings, and the proper definition of "museum operations" within the Park Service.

Importance/Description of Topic

The National Park Service manages 388 individual park units, covering more than 83 million acres—almost 4% of the land in America. These large and diverse landscapes contain an astonishing array of prehistoric archeological sites, historic buildings, archives, plants, animals, and land formations. It is the job of the curators and museum professionals in the NPS to protect, record, and make available the cultural artifacts, natural history specimens, and archives from these protected areas. NPS museum collections contain more than 180 million items, making the NPS museum staff responsible for one of the largest, if not the largest museum collection in the United States.¹ Recently, however, NPS curators, archivists, and museum technicians have been identified as targets of recent public/private competition studies in the federal government. Many believe that this competitive sourcing initiative threatens much more than just the jobs of these museum professionals.

Competitive Sourcing

The privatization of once public duties in the federal government has greatly expanded in recent years. Due to federal downsizing trends and large savings reported by the Department of Defense as a result of competitive sourcing, other federal agencies such as the Forest Service, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the National Park Service, among others, have

¹ Biegler, Brian, personal communication 11/28/2005. This number is the FY2004 amount, and includes both 3-D objects and archives collections.

begun to implement public/private competitions for jobs that are not “inherently governmental” in nature.²

Different from outsourcing and full privatization, competitive sourcing compares costs to see if the private or public sector offers the better value. If the private sector wins the competition, the duties, while still a federal responsibility, are carried out by non-federal workers. Proponents of competitive sourcing see it as a way to improve efficiency, eliminate redundancy, save money, and re-focus on agency missions. Those opposed see it as a top-heavy, quota driven process that focuses only on the short term, disregards issues other than the bottom line, and often ends up costing much more than projected.

Presidential Management Agenda

After his inauguration, George W. Bush released the President’s Management Agenda (PMA), which outlined five initiatives for governmental agencies: personnel reform, increased public/private competition, improved financial management, expanded electronic government efforts, and the linking of budget decisions to program performance.³ As part of the PMA, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released a competitive sourcing initiative, which set a goal of 425,000 federal jobs to be subjected to public/private competition using the OMB’s Circular A-76. This figure represented half of all the government jobs considered “commercial in nature,” or not

² The definition of “inherently governmental” will be discussed later in the paper, but essentially, it is a job that requires a federal government worker, and not one from the private sector.

³ Gruber, “Bush Management Agenda Still a Work in Progress”

“inherently governmental” as of Fiscal Year (FY) 2000.⁴ Before that time, use of the Circular was confined mostly to the Department of Defense. Circular A-76 provides a mechanism for both the public and private sectors to compete—that is, prove they are the most efficient and effective provider—for services that are not inherently governmental.

A-76 points federal agencies to the 1998 Federal Activities Inventory Reform (FAIR) Act for guidance on identifying commercial jobs that could be performed by contractors.⁵ From the Act’s list of commercial functions, individual agencies select positions for review under public/private competitions. The winner of the competition does not have to be the lowest bidder, but can be the “best value,” which takes into account technical qualification as well as price. Different types of reviews are available depending on how many government workers (full-time equivalents or FTEs) are in a contest. Smaller contests use a “streamlined” competition, and larger contests use a “full competition.”⁶

NPS Museum Professionals and A-76

Despite a deep sense of commitment and a dedicated and professional staff, the NPS Museum Management Program—as a result of budget cuts and other challenges—sometimes struggles in its mission to protect the natural and cultural resources found in

⁴ Ibid. This goal, considered to be an arbitrary quota by some, was abandoned in July, 2004. Agencies are now able to make their own targets.

⁵ Gruber, “Agencies Lack Staff, Resources to Run Job Competitions”. Many agencies are having difficulties choosing what is commercial and what is not, due in some part to the fact that the guidelines from OMB regulating these inventories is based on the Department of Defense procedures. According to a GAO report, some jobs are considered commercial in one agency, but not commercial in another.

⁶ Peckenpaugh, “Tall Order”. Many agencies along with Congress have criticized this process. In May of 2003, as a result of complaints, the A-76 Circular was revised by OMB, but controversy remains. Most agencies had no experience with A-76, and to this day have yet to secure enough staff and funding to even run the competitions. Many agencies, OMB included, significantly delayed the process of starting public/private competitions (for source see supra note 3).

the parks. Massive accessioning and cataloging backlogs persist. Positions are sometimes left vacant, eliminated, combined with other positions, or given to staff with no previous museum experience.⁷ Some individual parks have no funding for museum professionals, so archeologists, historians, and other collateral duty employees must take over the care of museum collections.

Before the PMA was announced, the NPS, like many other museums, governmental and non-governmental, awarded contracts to many workers in the museum field. Individual parks, regional offices, and service centers hired museum professionals to catalog, inventory, move collections, build exhibits, and a variety of other activities. This type of contracting remains popular in the Museum Management Program.

Prior to the release of the revised A-76 in the spring of 2003, agencies were allowed to directly convert jobs to the private sector, without performing competition studies. In FY 2003, the NPS directly converted 859 positions to contractors. While mostly maintenance workers, these direct conversions also included curators, museum technicians, archivists, and archeologists, who often perform museum functions.⁸ According to Fran Mainella, director of the NPS, all of these positions were vacant or new, and no NPS employees lost their jobs as a result.⁹

While direct conversions are no longer allowed under A-76, archeologists, historians, biologists, and curators are officially not considered to be inherently governmental to the NPS, and are therefore subject to streamlined and full A-76 studies.¹⁰ Many believe that these positions should be considered inherently governmental, as they

⁷ Bush, "Professionalism and Training".

⁸ Mainella, "Statement to the US Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources" and Craig, "Outsourcing Update, April 23, 2003".

⁹ Mainella, "Statement to the US Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources"

¹⁰ McElveen, Scot, "Statement to the US Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources".

are the direct protectors of the cultural and natural resources from our national parks. The duty of the NPS to protect natural and cultural resource objects is clearly stated in the 1916 Organic Act, the statute that created the NPS.¹¹

Interestingly, on the section of the NPS website devoted to FAQ's about Competitive Sourcing, the moderator, in response to a question about the loss of institutional memory that may result from competitive sourcing, states: "The NPS will always keep certain functions within our organization. These functions are core to the mission of the NPS. Curatorial work is one of those areas".¹² Although they sound as if they would be very similar, the phrase "core to the mission" does not mean "inherently governmental." Even though the NPS states that curatorial work is core to its mission, it still sees the position as commercial in nature.¹³

NPS Public/Private Studies

Apart from the 859 workers mentioned above, several full and streamlined studies have occurred that directly affect museum professionals in the NPS. The Southeast Archaeological Center (SEAC) in Tallahassee, FL, the Western Archeological and Conservation Center (WACC) in Tucson, AZ and the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC) in Lincoln, NE have all been the subject of competitive sourcing studies. These centers, mostly made up of curators and archeologists, were targeted because of their

¹¹ <http://www.nps.gov/legacy/mission.html>. "The National park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations." National Park Service Organic Act, 16 U.S.C.1.

¹² "NPS Competitive Review Frequently Asked Questions"

¹³ Wilson, Ron. Personal communication, November 28, 2005.

centralized locations.¹⁴ Like other federal agencies, the NPS is required to perform A-76 public/private studies despite the absence of dedicated funding to cover costs associated with the studies. Individual parks and centers must pay for the competition studies out of their own budgets. Many have criticized this practice because many, if not all National Parks are already severely under-funded.

According to a memo from Fran Mainella dated April 15, 2005, employees affected by a reduction in force as a result of the study were given voluntary early retirement and “buy-outs.” The same memo also announced that, in FY 2005, unlike in past years, entire parks—as opposed to organizational components within parks—would be reviewed for competitive sourcing. NPS officials conducting these reviews, which covered three parks, will use “Preliminary Planning Efforts” to determine if an A-76 review would be feasible.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid. The NPS is extremely decentralized, and locations like the National Capital Region, the Denver Service Center, and these Archeological Centers were chosen because of the concentration of workers performing similar activities.

¹⁵ Mainella, Fran. “Memorandum: Competitive Sourcing Update” April 15, 2005. This is in no doubt response to criticism that the NPS is wasting precious money reviewing jobs that would never be able to be performed more efficiently by the private sector.

Overview of Research Process

Research for this project was conducted using primarily on-line resources. Because of its relative novelty, few published sources specifically examine the NPS and the A-76 outsourcing process. The articles that deal with this subject were available mostly on the web through Westlaw, Pro Quest, and other databases as well as agency websites. The NPS website devotes an entire section to competitive sourcing. GovExec.com offered a wealth of information for all things A-76, and included many intriguing sidebar stories. The George Wright Society's website featured balanced commentary on the NPS' competitive sourcing issue. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) included on their websites many articles, press releases, studies, charts, and the all important leaked memos.

Interviews of NPS personnel that were directly involved in the studies or have strong feelings on the studies helped a great deal as well. Although the results of many of these studies are not completed or available to the public, individuals such as Ann Hitchcock, Robert Wilson, Tef Rodeffer, Jan Dial-Jones and Brian Biegler were extremely helpful and willing to talk about their experiences to the extent that they could.

Findings

Inherently Governmental & the Definition of ‘Museum Operations’

The NPS deems museum operations commercial in nature—and thus not inherently governmental.¹⁶ This policy has invited fierce debate over two issues: (1) What is inherently governmental? and (2) What are museum operations? Circular A-76 defines an inherently governmental activity as:

“...an activity that is so intimately related to the public interest as to mandate performance by government personnel. These activities require the exercise of substantial discretion in applying government authority and/or in making decisions for the government. Inherently governmental activities normally fall into two categories: the exercise of sovereign government authority or the establishment of procedures and processes related to the oversight of monetary transactions or entitlements.”¹⁷

Confusingly, inherently governmental is also defined in other documents. The definitions of inherently governmental in Section 5 of the FAIR Act and the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) Policy Letter 92-1 differ little from that in A-76.¹⁸ One significant difference, however, is the inclusion of “administration of public trusts” as an inherently governmental function in the OFPP 92-1, which is discussed below.

Although becoming more standardized, each agency has the discretion to define what ‘museum operations’ means to their own agency. The bulk of museum functions are located under codes S750 and Y730 in the FAIR Act.

¹⁶ Department of Defense Function Code Definitions, page 8. Updated 3/11/2003. Also Hitchcock, Ann, personal communication December 1, 2005.

¹⁷ OMB “Circular No. A-76 (Revised)”

¹⁸ Nash & Cibinic, “Contracting Out Procurement Functions: The ‘Inherently Governmental Function’ Exception” and OFPP “Policy 92-1” Appendix A.

Effort to Make Curators and Other Museum Positions Inherently Governmental

As mentioned above, OFPP Policy Letter 92-1 includes “administration of public trusts” on its list of inherently governmental functions. This holds significance for museum professionals because a museum arguably meets the definition of a public trust. Marie Malero defines a trust as a party that holds property, using it for the benefit of others. A high degree of responsibility is placed on the party, and the party must follow the terms of the trust.¹⁹ Advocates in the federal museum community point out that every item housed in federal museums contributes to a “national cultural patrimony,”²⁰ and is preserved for the benefit and use of the public. Most museums in federal agencies were established by law to protect collections, and must follow specific rules when acquiring objects and managing museum property.

All definitions of inherently governmental agree that non-commercial positions use discretion in applying government authority and exercise value judgments when making decisions for the government. Museum professionals also argue that museum functions such as accepting gifts, deciding which items to exhibit, and applying basic museum care demands considerable discretion. By accepting gifts, they accept the care of objects in perpetuity. When choosing what items to display, many factors must be weighed, and when caring for collections a host of proper conditions must be met.²¹

Museum professionals and others also point to the NPS mission statement as well as the 1916 Organic Act that created the Park Service (both of which clearly define the protection of natural and cultural resources), as further proof that museum functions are

¹⁹ Malero, Marie. A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections, 6.

²⁰ Letter from Debra E. Sonderman to Angela Styles, Sept. 17, 2001.

²¹ Malero, Marie. A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections, 406-409.

inherently governmental. Although it is not the same as inherently governmental, the NPS website even mentions that curatorial work is core to the agency's mission.²²

In 2001, the Interagency Federal Collections Working Group, an organization of approximately 30 agencies with federal museum collections semi-successfully petitioned the OMB to change the formal definition of "museum operations" in the FAIR Act Guide to Inventory Submission. The group's letter to the former administrator of OFPP requested that the new definition distinguish between federal trust museum responsibilities, such as managing and protecting collections, and commercial museum activities, such as housekeeping, the construction of museum cases and visitor services.²³ The OFPP did change the definition to reflect this, but federal museum workers continue to struggle to define their positions as non-commercial in nature, as each agency is ultimately responsible for its own definition of museum operations.

In 2003, the NPS requested an even clearer definition of "Museum Operations" in the A-76 list of position definitions. While still considered commercial in nature, the definition was changed from "Commercial In-House B" (meaning commercial and subject to A-76 competitive review) to "Commercial In-House A" (meaning commercial, but core to the mission).²⁴

Results from NPS Sourcing Studies Involving Museum Professionals

²² "NPS Competitive Review Frequently Asked Questions". Some have a hard time believing that something that is "core to the mission" can also be seen as commercial in nature.

²³ Letter from Debra E. Sonderman to Angela Styles, Sept. 17, 2001.

²⁴ Wilson, Robert, personal communication November 28, 2005.

While museum workers across the nation have been targeted in many of the NPS' public/private competitions, the three major studies involving NPS museum operations were held at the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC) in Lincoln, NE, the Western Archeological and Conservation Center (WACC) in Tucson, AZ, and the Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC) in Tallahassee, FL. As mentioned, the NPS states that these centers were chosen as a result of their centralized location.²⁵ Many have questioned the choice to outsource these centers, and have protested what they see as the NPS targeting white collar jobs. As Rep. Doug Bereuter from Nebraska explained:

“On a job-by-job basis there are firms that could do this work, but you’re not going to have the institutional history, archives and resources. This will destroy centers of expertise that can never be reassembled.”²⁶

Critics of the study also argue that if the contractors win, jobs at archaeological and curatorial centers will be difficult to manage through contracts, and if the in-house team wins, those left after the ‘fat trimming’ will be forced to pick up the extra work left by those employees who are no longer around, putting strain on workers already worn thin. John Ehrenhard, the superintendent at SEAC noted that the centers “have been so underfunded and so understaffed for so long, that we’ve had to learn to be efficient.” Susan Wells, the acting chief of the archeological division at WACC stated: “Out of my staff of 25, three of us have permanent jobs.” Wells said she hopes the government appreciates the value of the NPS archeological collections, and added that: “the human

²⁵ “NPS Competitive Review Frequently Asked Questions”. It is more cost effective to study centers, where many workers do few things in one location than it is to study rural parks, where few workers do many things in a large area.

²⁶ Gugliotta, “Archaeologists on the Block?”

adaptation to harsh conditions is a wonderful story.”²⁷ The results of two of these studies will be examined.

Southeastern Archeological Center

The SEAC study of mostly archeologists and museum curators, began in FY2003. The SEAC provides archeological and curatorial support for the National Park units in the Southeast region of the US. The center houses, processes, and catalogs thousands of artifacts, archives, and historic resources each year. It also provides technical support, helps with research and public education and partners with local universities. Originally, the study was a full cost comparison study, but after the re-write of the A-76 definition of “museum operations” in the spring of 2003, it was decided that the less costly streamlined competition, where the in-house team of 45 archeologists and museum curators would be allowed to “re-organize” and submit a “most efficient organization” (MEO), would be used instead. The MEO allows the current workforce to “trim the fat” in order to better compete with the private sector. Unlike the longer full study, streamlined studies have a deadline of only 90 days.

After comparing the cost of supplies, salaries, benefits, and overhead costs as well as reviewing prior contracting efforts by the SEAC, the in-house federal team won the competition by proving to the private consultants that they could provide services for less than half of what it would cost the private sector.²⁸ As part of the MEO, 17 FTEs were

²⁷ Ibid and Feeney, Shelia. “The Big Brawl Over Bush Administration Plans for ‘Competitive Sourcing’”.

²⁸ Wright, “National Park Service Archeological Center Employees Determined to be More Cost Effective than Private Contractors”.

eliminated, although no permanent employees lost their jobs. This reduction in force is predicted to save the SEAC \$850,000 according to the OMB.²⁹

Midwest Archeological Center

Also in FY2003, the MWAC was chosen for a competitive sourcing study. Established in 1969, the MWAC serves 45 NPS units in the Midwest Region, and 11 in the Intermountain Region. They curate almost three million objects, and, like the SEAC, run archeological surveys, lead research, resource management and interpretation projects, and consult with tribes, colleges, states, and local governments. Also like the SEAC, the full study of the MWAC was converted to a streamlined study after the revision of the A-76 Circular. The staff worked with the outside contractors for nearly a year to put together detailed position descriptions, which many employees described as tedious and harmful to morale.³⁰ In September 2003, this streamlined study of 46 FTEs was canceled. According to this cancellation notice: “the study is being revised to include a broader scope of services.”³¹

Although these were streamlined competitions lasting less than a year, the NPS spent \$412,766 on just the consultant team, Star Mountain/CH2Mhill.³² A-76 comparisons often require several employees to delay their normal duties to help with the competitive sourcing process. Studies at the MWAC and SEAC were no different.

²⁹ OMB, “Report on Competitive Sourcing Results Fiscal Year 2003”.

³⁰ Gugliotta, “Archaeologists on the Block?” and Dial-Jones, personal communication, Nov. 29, 2005. Doug Scott, one of the Center’s archeologists said “You could call it a bitter pill”. Scott, a respected battlefield archeologist won the Distinguished Service Award, the Interior Department’s highest honor, only to be told two weeks later that they wanted to replace him with a contractor.

³¹ Fed Biz Ops website

³² Obey, Testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Energy and Natural Resources. This figure was contained in a letter from Deputy Assistant Interior Secretary Scott Cameron to Congressman Doug Bereuter on May 30, 2003.

According to Jan Dial-Jones, a few workers at MWAC lost almost an entire year of work due to the study.³³ Only after factoring in personnel costs, benefits, lost production, and other resources used, can the true cost of these studies be estimated. Since no funding has been allocated for the A-76 comparisons, the individual parks and centers under review must foot the bill—stretching already thin dollars even thinner.³⁴

Opinions

Few would argue that competition is good for business in a general sense. Reviewing organizational activities, trimming budgets, streamlining and re-assigning employees, and contracting out work that can be done cheaper and better by contractors makes economic sense, and has been happening in the government as well as the private sector for a number of years. Competition can produce inefficiencies, however, when it is poorly planned and implemented and does not fit the agency it is supposed to be helping.

Since the revision of Circular A-76 in the spring of 2003, three things have happened that have helped the competitive process: the elimination of direct conversions, the ability for in-house staff under 65 FTEs to create an MEO, and the option to plan ahead with the Preliminary Planning Efforts.³⁵ To fully benefit the National Park Service, however, A-76 public/private competition must change in a number of ways.

Currently, the NPS defines museum operations as commercial in nature, despite acknowledging on its website that museum curators are “core to the mission of the NPS.”

³³ Dial-Jones. Personal communication, December 1, 2005.

³⁴ Memo from Fran Mainella to Lynn Scarlett, April 4, 2003. This leaked memo stated that as a way to keep consultant fees down, the NPS agreed to put full time and part time staff to work on each of the studies. This memo also mentioned that unless a funding source is identified, critical visitor services and seasonal operations in parks would be cut.

³⁵ The NPS has been using Preliminary Planning Efforts since FY2004 in its studies. These planning efforts, as described before, examine an operation to determine if a streamlined or full study is feasible.

To be sure, not every museum related NPS position is inherently governmental. Certain aspects have been contracted out for years, and should continue that way. Archeological positions, another position frequently targeted for outsourcing, should also be carefully reviewed in the A-76 process. Many parks do not have adequate staff to take care of the collections. In these situations, more often than not, museum duties are taken on by collateral duty workers such as archeologists. The leaders of the NPS and the DOI must realize how things work on the ground, in the parks, and examine how to best protect the cultural and natural items that are stored in collections rooms and exhibits across the nation. Core functions should continue to serve the agency's mission, not the interests of shareholders and contractors.

Further problems associated with the current review process are the cost of the projects and the estimation of savings. Budget numbers provided by contractors and agencies have proven less than reliable. The NPS estimates that it costs around \$3,000 per FTE for the studies.³⁶ However, in a memo to heads of agencies, the OMB instructs the agencies to exclude the costs of in-house staff who worked on the competition during regular working hours.³⁷ Since so many NPS workers contributed time to these studies, the actual costs may be severely underestimated considering that no funds have been allocated for the reviews, and the individual NPS units must absorb them from other activities.

³⁶ Memorandum from Fran Mainella to Lynn Scarlet, April 4, 2003. The NPS website declares that it only costs \$1,000 per FTE.

³⁷ Memo from OMB to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, Feb. 26, 2004. This memo informs agencies to report only the cost of the contractors and others who were hired for the A-76 process. It also allows overtime of in-house staff to be included, but only overtime related to the competition, not catch-up work on the normal duties they were not able to perform as a result of the competitions.

Depending on where you look, competitive sourcing studies can save an agency anywhere from 10-50%. Fran Mainella stated in a memo dated April 15, 2005 that the competitive sourcing program has saved \$3.1 million in the NPS.³⁸ While final savings will take years to determine, it is hoped that the NPS looks at the work lost when re-organizing under the MEO's in the case of an in-house win, as well as the amount of time spent reviewing complicated contracts in the case of a contractor win. According to a recent study done by Deloitte Consulting, the benefits of outsourcing in the government may not be as rosy as predicted. Negative feelings, cost over-runs, the loss of institutional memory, poor work quality, and more time spent managing contracts were some of the unforeseen problems the study highlighted as associated with outsourcing core operations.³⁹

The NPS is quick to point out that no permanent employee has been involuntarily let go as a result of A-76 competitions. However, they are silent about how many non-permanent staff have been eliminated. According to Susan Wells, the archaeologist at WACC, only three of her 25 staff members have permanent jobs. This situation is not unique—many NPS units rely heavily on non-permanent employees. These non-permanent employees are not just students and part-time help. A majority of them are most likely full-time workers, almost none of whom have benefits. Because of decreased funding, many employees are hired on so-called 'soft' money. When positions like this are eliminated, the remaining employees must pick up the work, with no raise in pay or reduction of other duties.

³⁸ Memo from Fran Mainella to All Employees, April 15, 2005.

³⁹ Williams, Jesse. "New Research Calls Into Question Efficacy of Outsourcing," 206. This study also predicts that outsourcing positions that require institutional memory will eventually fall out of favor.

Although NPS has yet to target them for public/private competition, rural parks are under threat of competitive sourcing. Staff in such parks tend to “wear many hats.” Maintenance workers aid in counting migrations of caribou, archeologists work on search and rescue projects when they come up, and curators give site tours and help with administration. It would be extremely difficult to write a contract defining all the duties of rural curators or collections managers, since each day’s duties have the potential to change dramatically. Even if this were not the case, finding qualified outside contractors in rural areas would be difficult.

Reccomendations

The use of preliminary planning by the NPS starting in FY 2004 is a step in the right direction. Determining if a group of employees is able to be efficiently put up to a streamlined or full public/private competition makes a great deal more sense than diving head-first into a full-blown study that needlessly wastes money, saps morale, and diverts time away from regular duties.

Revising the definition of museum operations not only in the NPS but across agencies to reflect true duties and varied responsibilities would also be helpful. Creating a universal definition of museum operations across federal agencies would be extremely beneficial in implementing the A-76 process and would strengthen the case for making the job descriptions “inherently governmental”.

Education of managers, contractors, congressmen, and the public on what government (and non-government) curators, archivists, and collections managers actually do is necessary. In a newspaper article, when talking of museum outsourcing, the

president of the Competitive Enterprise Institute was quoted as saying: “The private museum system has been using docents for years, it’s about time the government caught up.”⁴⁰ From misinformed statements like these, it is clear that many outside the NPS museum management program have little understanding of what Park Service museum workers do. Education is clearly needed to change people’s perceptions—museum work is more than just guided tours of fancy artifacts.

Finally, third party reviews or audits of the competitive sourcing studies, perhaps by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) or agency inspectors general, may be helpful. In December of 2005, the Department of Defense (DOD) inspector general released a report stating that the DOD had failed to effectively keep track of costs during its own competitive sourcing projects. The report states that different people used different methodologies to calculate costs, and that only 44% of competitions won by the private sector and none of those won by in-house workers were tracked after the fact to examine costs.⁴¹ Recall—that the DOD is the only agency that had been using competitive sourcing before the PMA was issued. If they cannot effectively keep track of costs and savings, how is an agency like the NPS, which has a mere three years of experience with the A-76 process, going to fair? The answer remains to be seen.

⁴⁰ “Park Jobs on the Block”, Salt Lake Tribune Jan. 27, 2003.

⁴¹ DOD, “Defense Infrastructure: DOD Reporting System for the Competitive Sourcing Program”, Nov. 22, 2005. The report also stated that legislators and government officials were not receiving reliable figures.

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