

NOAA Diversity Council Meeting Minutes

April 25, 2003

Silver Spring, MD

Members in Attendance: John Jones, Barbara Marshall-Bailey, Tony Fleming (for Helen Hurcombe), John Oliver, Ralph Conlin (for Kathy Kelly), Steve Smith, Jamie Hawkins, Bob Taylor, Ernest Hildner (for Louisa Koch), Mike Washington, Bernard Cody, Sim Aberson, Julian Wang, Janice Hall, Bob Ebaugh, Rick Jackson, Erik Pytlak, Cheryl Malone, Lolly Shapero, Teresa Havel.

Opening Remarks:

Council Chair John Jones provided welcoming remarks. He shared that he was pleased to be asked by Admiral Lautenbacher to serve as chair for NOAA's Diversity Council.

John Jones opened the meeting and expressed that the main issue to be discussed was the current status of SFA and the next steps involved. He relayed that he had private meetings with the DAA's and the Diversity Liaisons, NFA and Rich Behn on the status of SFA. By summer John would like to be able to say that NOAA has taken SFA as far as we can. He explained that he wants to brief the Admiral this summer on the following:

- Number of action items identified
- Number of action items closed
- Elevated issues not closed
- Issues that have been closed but need to be ongoing

John referenced the minutes from the August 2002, asked for additions/ corrections and motioned that they be approved.

Line Office SFA Update:

John shared that the Admiral previously mentioned at the fall SES retreat that SFA action items should be elevated to him and if he cannot address them he will take them to Deputy Secretary Bodman. He asked the Council members to give an update on where their organization is on SFA and if we do an SFA 04 we will need to work on the steps soon. If something different is to be done, then the Council will have to decide. He wanted status of actions items, elevated issues, on-line focus groups and write-ins. John indicated that he would like any items not closed forwarded to him since his charge is to close out SFA for 03. The line offices reported as follows:

NOS

Jamie Hawkins reported for NOS, reporting that 88 of 133 NOS workgroups submitted 573 action items. 22 out of 79 need approval. Bi-monthly emails go out to managers and as of March 10, one manager has not had a workgroup meeting and NOS is working with the Office of Diversity to assign a facilitator so that the meeting can occur. Action items are currently being reviewed to determine what needs to be elevated to the NOAA level. This process can be completed by July 1. NOS received approximately 600 write in comments. The comments were categorized. NOS

proposed to the NOS Diversity Council that they have focus groups on the bottom 10 issues. They have communicated the status of SFA to employees during all hands meetings and include them in their web page and employee newsletter.

NWS

John announced that Steve Smith will serve as the executive on the Council for NWS. Steve reported that out of 362 workgroups, 265 have had at least one action item; 74% have put their action plans into Action Tracker. Of the remaining 25% some represent workgroups that were rolled up. Of the 2,083 action plans 47% have been completed, requiring no further action. 70% of the "type one actions" (those requiring no further approval) have been completed, and more work needs to be done on elevated issues although a lot of the elevated issues have been completed.

Steve mentioned that the on-line form makes it difficult for workgroups to note when an action has been completed so it is difficult to determine when an action has been closed. NWS has 152 pages of write-ins grouped by various categories. NWS has been going through the comments to extract themes. At a minimum these will be presented to the executives. In '98 there was the perception that nothing happened as a result of SFA. So Steve and Mike Washington have been directly emailing each workgroup member, personally thanking them for holding their feedback sessions. Steve said that they have received nice feedback through this process. NWS feels that this is one way to help ensure that participation rates for future surveys remain high because employees will know that something is being done as a result of their feedback.

Barbara asked what NWS is doing to communicate the status of SFA to all employees. Steve responded that they use internal newsletters including NWS Focus as well as diversity network lists. Steve also replied that NWS is revamping their diversity web page and including information on SFA in emails and newsletter and the NWS list server. He shared that they are also trying to balance communication against feedback that employees get too many emails.

Bob Ebaugh inquired about the status of a workgroup in Miami that had not met. He was assured that this group is being handled. John referenced the SFA update report regarding the statistics for total meetings held. He told the lines to review the chart and address changes that need to be made to the Office of Diversity. The last thing that he wants to do is to brief the Admiral that SFA actions have been completed then have an employee email the Admiral stating that their group has not even met yet.

NFA

Tony Fleming, sitting in for Helen Hurcombe, reported that out of 115 workgroups, 76 have held meetings and 43 have entered their action plans into Action Tracker for a total of 187 actions. He indicated that five groups were rolled up/combined into one workgroup. Barbara reminded Tony that all workgroup managers are responsible for entering action plans even if they participated in a combined workgroup meeting. Tony did not have a report for elevated issues and he will check the status with Helen. Barbara stated that Helen had presented a process for dealing with elevated issues but that to her knowledge no action had been taken. John asked Tony how NFA is addressing write-in comments. Tony did not have a report on how NFA would be addressing the write in comments and did not have a report for the NFA communication plan for updating employees on the SFA status. John Jones informed Tony that Helen needs to get back on what actions have been taken on the write-ins and how this information will be communicated to

employees.

NMFS

John Oliver reported that NMFS sent an email to all managers months ago requesting that all action plans be entered into Action Tracker and elevated issues submitted. He has a meeting in June and will discuss SFA and where they stand, the actions that need to be elevated and how to deal with them. NMFS was striving for a July 15 deadline but can work with the July 1 deadline. John said that occasionally they would send out comments on SFA on employee emails but they have not communicated in a while but will do so after the June meeting. He also expressed interest in the NWS approach of emailing workgroup members directly and will have his people follow up with Steve on this. NMFS also likes NWS approach of using the web to post SFA updates. NMFS has not done a lot with the write-ins and John indicated that the problem is that there are some that you can't do anything with. The biggest NMFS SFA challenge was organizational structure/verification. Barbara reminded the Council that the next go around we will use the Table of Organization (TO) as our organizational verification tool.

NESDIS

Ralph Conlin, sitting in for Kathy Kelly reported that 100% of their workgroup meetings have been completed and 100% of the workgroups have entered action plans. NESDIS is managing the SFA process via their Diversity Council, chaired by the DAA. The DAA provides oversight on elevated issues and the issues are posted. Office Directors address elevated issues within their span of control. NESDIS feels that they have a good tracking system for elevated issues at the higher (NESDIS) level but that processes can be improved for tracking at the lower levels. The DAA reports during staff meetings on SFA. Office directors are given primary responsibility to review issues and do a cut - reporting back to workgroups on items at their level. They have meetings once a month. They are doing a good job on elevated issues. There are 48 issues at the NESDIS level and 34 or 71% have been completed, others need further follow-up.

Write in themes focus on training at the management level and career development for administrative positions. A subgroup of the NESDIS Council has reviewed the write-ins, there is a lot of interest at the employee level. NESDIS will be on target for a July 1 report of where they are with SFA.

NMAO

Bob Taylor reported that NMAO has 43 workgroups and 109 actions have been input into action tracker. 61 elevated issues were elevated to NMAO and 4 issues were elevated to the NOAA level. NMAO planned to host web chat focus groups but has not followed up on that action. Communication on issues has been handled via Admiral Fields' weekly newsletters. NMAO is following up with workgroups that did not submit action plans and will take care of issues elevated to the NMAO level. Some SFA issues have been folded into the NMAO business plan. NMAO has 23 pages of write-ins which were grouped into categories and a briefing was provided to Admiral Fields but nothing much has been done since then. NMAO will be able to meet the July 1 deadline.

OAR

Ernie Hildner, who sat in for Louisa Koch, reported that 80 plans have been entered into Action Tracker. OAR has a mechanism in place to address elevated issues; they are handled first by the

labs and then addressed at the HQ level. The SFA process is being managed by their Diversity Council. The Council is running the process focusing on major issues. OAR received 558 write in comments. They were reviewed and will be sent to the OAR Diversity Council. OAR will look at their web page as a tool to communicate about SFA. The OAR Diversity Council is looking at the bottom 10. The OAR Council has a place holder in Action Tracker to track their own action plans for the bottom 10.

Further SFA Discussion--Full Council Dialogue

John indicated his belief that employees' perception of the success of SFA depends on the success that they experienced in their own workgroup. John expressed concern that it has been 15 months since we began the SFA process yet some groups have not met and not entered action plans. He indicated the need for a tighter time line for the next go around between survey administration and feedback meeting completion.

Barbara shared a report capturing the phases of SFA and indicated areas that we have a window of opportunity for improvement. We made a commitment to employees and we have not followed through on everything that we can. Barbara stated that we still have a window of time to demonstrate to employees that we will do what we say.

Bob Taylor pointed out that the overall NOAA success with SFA is impressive-90% of meeting completed. Bob Taylor mentioned that 11,000 of 12,000 people were touched through the feedback process.

Tony Fleming asked whether we could correlate to show improvements over time. Barbara replied that this was done and is reflected on the survey.

Ralph expressed that doing SFA again is good but we need to focus efforts so that we don't get the same results. Ralph Conlin indicated that the first survey was a learning experience and that the second was more effective. There was an impact of SFA from the 1st to 2nd survey and the 3rd survey should focus on institutional issues that we've identified. It was suggested to take the benefits and focus on them to see how effective we were.

Jamie shared his belief that the most important outcome may not have been the issues themselves but the process through which communication was opened up in the workgroup meeting process. Jamie said that the most effective response was that the managers came face to face with issues. SFA opened communications and we need to put emphasis in training support at the mid-level where the need is greatest - coaching, mentoring and communication. Jamie emphasized the need to focus on training but that we need to find the right training and not just do something so that we can check the box.

Ernie Hildner indicated that OAR employees don't see that much has been done at the NOAA level as a result of SFA. People want to see visible change before we roll out another SFA again. He indicated that skepticism is quite high and suggested that we defer SFA for a year to give NOAA a chance to respond to employees.

It was mentioned that in order to get employee buy-in, people in the Field need to see something happen. Elevated issues don't go beyond the line office. Barbara mentioned that they should have

come to the Office of Diversity and then forwarded to the Council. Only NESDIS and NMAO have sent elevated issues beyond the line office. Copies go to the Office of Diversity so that they can be shared with the Council. Addressing these issues speaks to accountability. She asked whether other offices have sent issues beyond their line office to the responsible Council representative from that office for action. A cc: can be sent to Barbara so that she is able to track themes and similar issues coming from multiple lines.

Bernard Cody voiced his opinion that accountability is key to the entire process. Accountability is always discussed as essential and it shouldn't be an option if changes are to be made and top driven down in the organization. There has to be a real and definite commitment to employees to hold managers accountable for issues. We need to convey to employees that we are holding managers accountable.

Mike Washington shared his view based on his experience as a facilitator. He reminded the Council that elevated issues represent serious concerns of employees. He has facilitated over 30 meetings and has heard the same issues over and over again across all line offices. If just some of these were addressed it would represent monumental change in the eyes of employees. When we talk about accountability people get afraid. We need to make change and accountability for change part of our organizational culture and link it to performance. When new managers join the system they will come on board and accept the way business is done and the responsibility for accountability. While '02 was better than '98 many folks still have a wait and see attitude. Mike suggested that a process be developed where accountability becomes part of the process. A lot of employees have a wait and see attitude.

Sim Aberson said that he didn't receive any information on SFA and suggested that it would be worthwhile to send all employee emails once every three months. Employees need to see their issues as well as NOAA-wide issues.

Barbara shared that she would be working on a NOAA wide transmission at the conclusion of this meeting.

Steve shared that when he first came to NOAA as a scientist it was always his intention to make an impact in his field. He realized that the Council has an opportunity to make a lasting impact and legacy for NOAA. We just need to communicate the work that we're doing, market the changes, etc. Accountability doesn't always mean to give employees what they want but it means communicating to them what you are doing, that you're listening to their concerns and why you can or cannot make a change. Steve said that managers have indicated that it's better to have this than nothing - it brings about meaningful change. Steve added that a lot of managers are not buying in to the process because they think it will go away. He said that we need to continue to emphasize the diversity basis and that the linkage study was beneficial. Steve then went over his handout on the NWS SFA experience, perspective and recommendations. Steve mentioned that the Council has a chance to make a legacy for the organization if we proceed forward and stay the course. Without it we don't have anything. He said to complete the actions and let employees know they are completed.

Bernard added that we need to do a better job of marketing and give employees an indication that we've looked at them - do what we can.

Barbara reminded the Council that when she first introduced SFA to the Council there was skepticism. Most organizations tie SFA to strategic planning and performance and not to diversity. At IRS SFA is tied to performance and business lines. She added that the survey is a tool that can be used effectively in strategic planning and leadership. She realized through her IRS experience that there was a great opportunity to link diversity to an SFA process. She felt that the workgroup experience provided an experiential learning opportunity to model everything that we strive for in managing diversity. She felt that the SFA results should and could be used everywhere to make improvements in our business. Our approach to diversity is a systems approach to change and that takes time---10-20 years. Systems change and SFA touches every aspect of our business. She cautioned the Council members that training does not replace experiential learning and that we should not rate our effectiveness based on the status of the action items alone. She added that the survey can't be looked at narrowly – it's bigger than that.

Barbara shared an example of what she means... recently the LCDP group requested her to address their group on leadership and what it means to be a leader. She questioned her participation in such a role as other panelists were executives. It was her voice that they wanted to hear and when she looked out at the audience she saw SFA facilitators, change agents and others who have been a part of our diversity strategy and have gone through our experiential learning models. These were some of NOAA's new leaders, managers and future executives. She received an email from them thanking her for her presentation. They call themselves the "New Wave of Leadership" in NOAA.

Discussion of Where We Go From Here...

John recognized that while it may appear that he is pointing the finger, he includes himself in the group that is being looked at. He referenced the recommendations in the NOAA Program Review and he stated that NOAA looks to the Diversity Council to bring about change. He reminded the body that the Council is responsible for taking action. He encouraged the Council to bring closure to SFA--ensuring all groups have met, closing out as many actions as possible and noting others as on-going as appropriate. If actions can't be closed then there needs to be a good reason why. John said that no one has gone to the Admiral saying these are the issues- these are what need to be addressed- this is what has to happen. He asked what can we do to eliminate skepticism from employees - he said that we need to make sure we have all the issues.

John indicated that from the reports it appears that the bar has been set for July 1 for the lines to have their status in. John and Barbara will put a package together and late July/August Barbara and John will meet with the Admiral asking for his help. Until then we can't hold the Admiral accountable.

ACTION: John and Barbara will put a package together in preparation for a meeting with the Vice Admiral in late July/August.

John suggested that SFA should be brought to the NEP and NEC - the Diversity Council needs to get into the new flow of business. John Oliver agreed with John that NOAA's business is done at the NEP and NEC level. Cheryl Malone indicated that she thought that this was why the Council was structured the way that it is – to be closer to the powers that be. She also indicated that we

could use the TV's at HQ to share updates.

Janice echoed the need for the Council to be accountable. It was suggested that a message from the Admiral to employees for out so that employees know what's going on.

Bernard commended John for his impassioned address to the Council Members because it is good for us to be reminded of our role. Ernie also shared appreciation for John's comments.

Jamie requested an endorsement that the lines will have the status of their SFA actions in by July 1.

ACTION: The Council agreed that all line offices would complete their SFA status reports by July 1 and submit them to John Jones. This includes updates/closure on the following: on-line focus groups, SFA bottom 10, write ins, workgroup meetings and elevated issues.

Ernie said that the July 1 deadline will put pressure on line offices to have actions in to be elevated.

Barbara said that there were three things to be done that were committed to employees. The status of the online focus groups/SFA bottom 10; the write-ins and the workgroup elevated issues. Jamie said that issues that can't be resolved must go forward to the Admiral. It was suggested that Council members come to the next meeting with recommendations for write-ins.

Barbara suggested that the two focus groups with the most dialogue-Culture, Politics & Communication and Promotion and Opportunities for Advancement-have cross-functional teams work on the recommendations. She recommended that task groups be formed, representative of all lines, to look at recommendations emanating from the focus groups and to come up with joint recommendations.

Ernie Hildner expressed opposition to Barbara's approach, indicating that it would require duplicative effort and would be time consuming. Barbara responded by sharing why it is important for the Council to model the behavior of inclusion and walk the talk.

John suggested that the Council meet as scheduled for May 9th and at that time the focus groups would present an analysis of themes offered in the on-line focus groups-not recommendations. Further discussion of where we go from there would be handled at the May 9th meeting.

ACTION: The Diversity Council agreed to meet on May 9th and that the Office of Diversity would send out focus group emails to the Culture, Politics & Communication and the Performance & Opportunities for Advancement groups by April 30.

Bob Taylor recommended that John tailor his presentation to the Admiral, being mindful of his preferences for metrics. He suggested John to look at cost, schedule and performance. He also suggested that a team be convened to offer critique of the presentation prior to delivery to the Admiral.

Discussion: Use of '03 Funding

The Council held a discussion on whether to begin funding SFA '04 now (as part of a multi-year contract), using available '03 funds, or to use that money to hold a network conference. John stressed the need for a tight process the next go around. The Council needs to consider when they will realistically be ready for SFA---'04 or '05.

Tony Fleming asked whether or not we could justify SFA again. He asked whether we can articulate that we've made improvements based on SFA.

Barbara went back to the issue of accountability. She reminded the Council that the decision had previously been made to do SFA in '04 and the Council made a commitment to hold managers accountable. She said that she did not support having SFA unless the Council is committed to ensuring accountability in the process. She shared that she gets many emails from employees. While some offices are doing nothing many others are doing a lot.

Jamie stressed that he is passionate about SFA but we won't be hurt if it is not done in 04. SFA has to continue and become part of the culture. He would like to see more mid-level management training to learn the lessons beyond the actions and work on them. A three-year clip is more appropriate.

Barbara reminded the group that if we decide to dedicate funding now that doesn't mean that we have to have SFA right away. It takes a lot of planning time. Ralph summarized that the Council seemed to be suggesting that the focus for '04 be on follow-up with survey administration in '05.

Barbara reminded the Council that their responsibility is more than SFA, it is also education for NOAA employees. We always have to be out front. Initiatives such as the Change Agent class, etc. should be on going. She also reminded the Council that they need training. She proposed that a meeting be held with the Diversity Liaisons and representatives from the line offices to discuss the Network Conference. John indicated that he would also attend. It was also suggested to devote a couple of hours of the conference to managing diversity and what it means to organizational change. John Jones mentioned that a portion of the conference should be set-aside for the Diversity Council.

John proposed that the Council use the allotted '03 funding for a Network Conference to be held at the end of '03 or early '04 and plan for the next SFA in '05. Bob made a motion that this plan be approved, the Council voted and the motion was approved.

Sim Aberson, Lolly Shapero, Ralph Conlin, Cheryl Malone and Michelle Crockett volunteered to be on the Network Conference sub committee. It was recommended that this group look at diversity training and organizational development.

ACTION: A Diversity Network Conference will be held at the end of '03 or early '04. Subcommittee members were appointed.

Necolle Mayhew-Eimas gave an update on the status of the Employee Worklife Center contract. Proposals were received, the panel ranked the proposals and questions from the panel were forwarded to Acquisitions so that a decision can be made soon.

Ralph mentioned that Mary Glackin is interested in continuing her leadership role with the Norfolk 10.

Welcome to New Members

John welcomed new Council Member Erik Pytlak (representing GLOBE). John indicated that Council terms have ended for the following members: Cheryl Malone, John Wright, Sim Aberson and Lynne Phipps. He thanked them for their work on the Council and indicated that we would have an official send off at an upcoming meeting. Barbara requested the continued involvement on the Council from these members until their positions have been filled.

Open Forum

John opened the floor to additional comments/inquiries. Diversity Council Liaison, Michelle Crocket (NOS), mentioned that the July 11 Council meeting conflicted with the FEW National Conference.

Meeting Adjourned

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS:

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