

Knowledge Recovery Practices

In spite of careful planning and best efforts, it is inevitable that events will occur that cause the agency to lose some critical knowledge. There are three initiatives that are useful for recovering lost knowledge: 1) bringing back employees who have the required knowledge but have left the agency, 2) contracting to outsource the lost capabilities through commercial contracts or interagency agreements, and 3) recreating or relearning the knowledge that was lost.

Using Retirees Effectively

Waivers of Dual Compensation Limitations

Current SWP strategies allow for the waiver of dual compensation limitations. The agency uses its authority, under certain circumstances, to waive the regulations requiring salary "offsets" for rehired Federal annuitants. The NRC may waive the offset to rehire selected retirees who have scarce skills for limited periods when critical work needs compel. This practice is currently being used and can be expanded to provide additional rehired retirees with ample time to transfer knowledge that would otherwise be lost from the agency.

Under the agency KM program rehiring annuitants expressly for the purpose of recovering lost knowledge will be preceded by determining the knowledge of the remaining staff and analyzing the knowledge gap that is intended to be filled by rehiring the departed expert. The rehired retiree will focus on transferring their unique critical knowledge to the incumbent staff with preference over any other work.

Outsourcing

Contract Support

The agency sometimes meets short-term needs to fill current knowledge gaps by contracting for or hiring expert consultants to provide the needed expertise to accomplish specific tasks. Contractors and expert consultants are usually employed where specialized knowledge and skills are needed by NRC but cannot be obtained through normal recruitment channels. The contractors or consultants fill current knowledge gaps and may also focus on transferring their knowledge to agency staff before the end of the contract. Current uses include technical support, organizational consulting, training, administrative support, and coaching.

As part of the agency KM program, office and regional management will weigh all aspects of the need for the lost knowledge and evaluate whether the best approach is to utilize retirees, contract for the expertise, or recreate the knowledge internally. In cases where contracting is considered the best option then all or portions of the work will be outsourced to an appropriate vendor such as engineering consulting firms or National laboratories. Accessing the expertise of the firms or laboratories when needed relieves the agency from the burden of either recruiting or internally recreating knowledge that has either left or has never been retained within the agency. Consideration will be given to require the contractor or consultant to codify or otherwise transfer the missing knowledge to the staff.

Regenerating Knowledge

Regenerating critical knowledge is almost always viewed as the least-desirable method of filling a lost-knowledge gap because it is usually the slowest and most expensive. It presupposes that experts are not available either internally or externally with the exact level or type of knowledge that is missing.

Under the agency KM program recreating lost knowledge will employ a graded approach determined by the case at hand. The first step will be to measure the knowledge of the staff, including those who may have moved to other duties in the agency, to determine where the true knowledge gaps exist. If there are no former agency experts available to be reemployed, then outside experts may be contracted as either paid or unpaid consultants to help obtain important background or source material. Ideally the staff will be diligent to both document their efforts and share their newly-created knowledge within their community of practice.