



# U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

## Outreach Experiences of a First Year Cost Estimating Team

Presentation to the DC Chapter of SCEA  
June 2011

The logo for SCEA, consisting of the letters "SCEA" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a pattern of vertical red lines of varying thickness, creating a textured effect.

*The Society of Cost Estimating and Analysis*



# Presentation Outline

- **The Federal Government Cost Estimating Environment**
- **The USCIS Business Environment**
- **The Office of Information Technology Environment**
- **Challenges of cost estimating outreach**
- **Responding to the challenges: the roles of expert, teacher, business partner, and diplomat**



# Federal Cost Estimating Environment

- **Cost Estimating is a long term, well documented weakness in Federal projects**
- **GAO Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide (GAO-09-3SP) was issued in March 2009**
- **OMB collects and publishes project cost performance for the Federal IT dashboard**
- **Federal agencies issue guidance on cost estimating in the form of management directives and data templates**
- **Federal agencies establish certification qualifications for project managers and for cost estimators**



# USCIS Business Environment

- **One of the components of the Department of Homeland Security**
- **Execute the very complex Immigration and Nationality Act**
- **On a “typical day”:**
  - **Process 135,000 security checks**
  - **Handle 41,000 calls to our 800 number**
  - **Adjudicate 30,000 applications**
  - **Speak to 12,000 walk-in customers**
  - **Issue 7,000 green cards**
  - **Welcome 3,200 new citizens**







- **Have a mixture of administrative and business process support investments each year**
- **Have development efforts for new capabilities on-going with operations and maintenance of legacy systems**
- **At USCIS we are currently also executing a business process transformation and its accompanying infrastructure upgrade, a project estimated to cost approximately \$2 billion over several years**
- **Work in a project rich environment with much of the work outsourced to contractors**
- **Don't have historical data bases of past cost estimates and actual costs**

**When it comes to estimating costs  
document everything!**



## A New Team is Formed

- **New hires to Federal service in late 2009**
- **Recruiting involved a number of rounds of job postings and attendance at job fairs**
- **Great success using Military career conferences**
- **Skill sets targeted and hired included math and operations research**

**When it comes to hiring people  
Go for the GOLD!**



# Challenges of Cost Estimating Outreach

- **Project managers are overbooked and overscheduled**
- **Business owner managers and OIT project managers may have differing perceptions of the costs and benefits of their project**
- **OIT and business relationships require nourishing**
- **Cost estimating is new within the Federal space**
- **The math of cost estimating is not intuitive to many (distribution functions, cost estimating relationships, simulations)**
- **Cost estimating is only now becoming a focus of leadership**



# Responding to the Challenges

- **Think and act like the expert: make sure you know what you are doing**
  - **Learn the business: know what is going on and why; go visit the field**
  - **Learn the discipline: take courses, get certified**
  - **Learn the math: know what is valid and what is not (flaw of averages) and why**
  - **Learn project management**

**You will be expected to be the expert!**



# Responding to the Challenges

- **Think and act like a teacher**
  - Start with the basics (i.e. range estimates before distributions)
  - Always be able to explain why:
    - Why we do it this way
    - Why this works
    - Why this will help the project succeed in:
      - Getting its budget request approved
      - Meeting its cost baseline
      - Passing a GAO audit
  - Prepare education modules and checklists, such as:
    - Distributions
    - Risk adjusted costs
    - Regression analysis
    - Flaw of Averages
    - Certainty Levels
    - SME Estimates

**You will learn a lot by teaching others!**



# Responding to the Challenges

- **Think and act like a business partner**
  - **Go to your business partner: initiate the contact and work in their space when you can (note: they are **NOT** your *customer!*)**
  - **Help them brief their boss**
  - **Help them prepare for reviews**
  - **If not already in progress, start documenting the process**

## Be Proactive!



- **Think and act like a diplomat**
  - Expect frustration – it’s a normal human reaction - and be prepared to deal with it.
  - Expect some business owners to be more ready to fix blame than to fix problems; address the issue with dialogue and not diatribe.
  - Expect some new to the process to think they should drop the requirement in your lap. This is their estimate - you will guide them through the process but they own the result!
  - Explain it is a process and not a “black box” whose handle is cranked to spit out a number

**Cooperation and collegiality are key!**



# Suggestions?