

SMARTER STATE CASE STUDIES

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY: ONE EPA SKILLS MARKETPLACE

This Program Helps Civil Servants Break Out of Silos and
Create Project Teams across the Agency.



PROJECTS

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We would like to thank Dr.Noha Gaber, Director, Office of Internal Communications, Administrator's Office, USEPA, for her assistance.



SMART CITIZENS SMARTER STATE



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BASIC INFORMATION

Owner

The Environmental Protection Agency,
Administrator's Office

Project Contact

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Project summary

A project marketplace to encourage
cross-agency staffing

Sector

Environmental

Audience

All civil servants in the department

Problem that it is trying to solve

Overcoming programmatic and
geographical silos and furthering employee
development in a more nimble way.

Platform

Microsoft SharePoint

Design basics

Managers post projects. Employees create
profiles and then apply to work on projects
with permission from their supervisor. The
selection process is decided by the project
owner based on the project requirements.
Communication between project owners
and selected applicants for discussions,
maintaining project documents, plans etc is
encouraged through the use of collaboration
sites on the SharePoint platform.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What's new?

Previously people worked on projects
in their own offices and divisions. The
Skills Marketplace encourages cross-
agency interaction and the creation of
teams focused on outcomes rather than
affiliation.

Incentives for participation

Project participation can count towards
annual performance measures.
Employees get to know other parts of the
agency and build skills.

Challenges

For Skills Marketplace program managers,
the need to invest in marketing and
building the program not just the platform.
For employees, the lack of time to work
on new projects and the difficulty in
getting permission. For supervisors, the
risk of working with unknown colleagues.
For researchers, no basis for comparative
evaluation because of the absence of a/b
testing.

Anticipated impact/Metrics

Of 400 posted projects, 70% have
received applications.

Why is this project interesting?

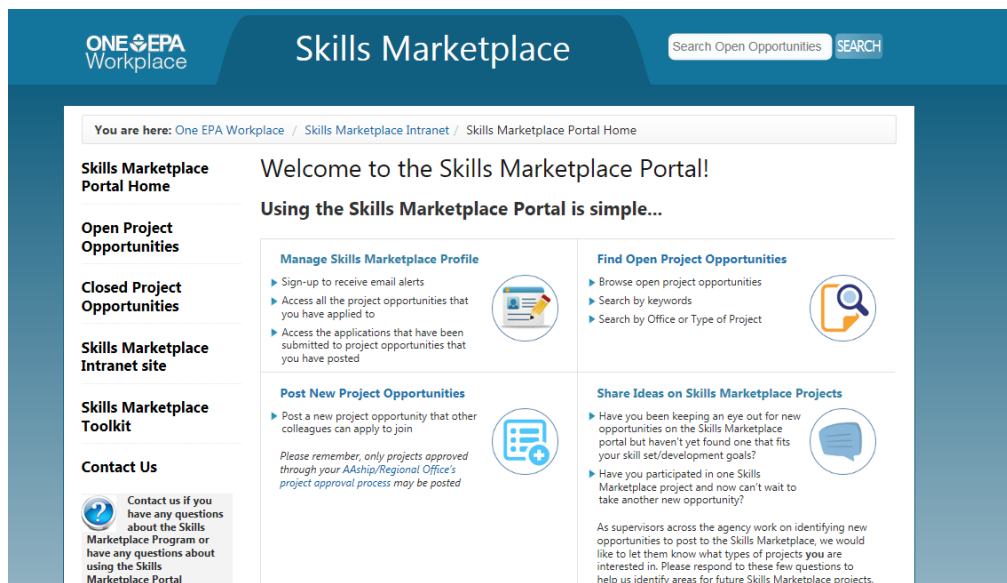
Skills Marketplace relies on an open
call to employees to participate and
the incentive of self-selecting for
professional development. Hence it is an
interesting counterpoint to projects that
focus on managers searching for new
collaborators.

WHY SKILLS MARKETPLACE?

It was accepted wisdom that organizational “silos” help to mitigate risk. But a recent study by the Institute for Government confirms what most have come to believe: that in the Internet era silos hamper the effective delivery of policies and services and lower employee morale.¹ As President Obama declared in the Memorandum on Open Government,² “Executive departments and agencies should use innovative tools, methods, and systems to cooperate among themselves, across all levels of Government.”

To remedy the problem of silos, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Skills Marketplace³ program encourages managers to post projects and recruit volunteer participants to the end of fostering collaboration across the 12 headquarters offices and 10 regional offices of the agency. Employees have an incentive to sign up for projects, to learn about other parts of the organization; to find work assignments that match with their skills and professional development goals; and to increase the organization’s productivity.

Begun in 2011, two years before President Obama published his second-term management agenda⁴ that called for “unlocking the full potential of today’s Federal workforce and building the workforce we need for tomorrow,” this “help wanted ads” for employee projects launched in 2014 and has already inspired a number of federal agencies to replicate the practice in an effort to boost employee engagement and productivity.



The Skills Marketplace Home

1 <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Performance%20art.pdf>

2 https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment

3 <http://www.fedmanager.com/news/9-e-report/featured/general-news/2063-epa-professional-development>

4 https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2015/assets/fact_sheets/creating-a-21st-century-government.pdf

HOW IT WORKS

Supervisors post project descriptions together with requests for help with specific assignments. These projects do not exceed one year in duration and can be completed without the need to travel or relocate from the employee's home office. All employees can see all listings and those who are interested, regardless of agency or division, can apply to any of these projects with prior permission from their home office supervisor. Borrowing a page from Google's 20% time initiative, designed to encourage employees to spend up to 20% of their time on innovative projects other than their home office assignments, the platform enables employees to find opportunities to work in new areas of the agency without the cumbersome transaction costs of a formal re-assignment. Although work is performed for managers other than one's usual supervisor, work on a project can count toward one's annual performance evaluation.

Designed through consultations with agency leaders, executives, supervisors, and its several employee unions⁵ between 2011 and 2014, the program was piloted across seven EPA program and regional offices with 95% of the participants in the pilot saying they would recommend it to others and 100% of home office supervisors saying they would support their staff participating again.⁶ In just over a year of agency-wide operation, managers have posted close to 400 projects with more than 70% of projects receiving applications from 627 employees, 388 of whom were selected to work on the projects.

ONE EPA
Workplace

Skills Marketplace

You are here: [One EPA Workplace](#) / [Skills Marketplace Intranet](#) / [Skills Marketplace Portal Home](#) / [Open Project Opportunities](#)

Open Project Opportunities

To search for projects, please enter a keyword in the search box (this searches the entire announcement) or select the AAShip/ Regional Office or Type of Work that you are interested in. The filters for AAShip/ Regional Office and Type of Work allow for selecting multiple options within each category. For example, selecting two offices and two type of work categories returns projects that are within those offices that include the type of work categories selected. To start a new search click "Reset Filters".

Reset Filters

Show 10 entries

Search:

Select Type of Work

☐ Administrative
☐ Communications
☐ Contracts/ Grants
☐ Financial
☐ Generalist
☐ Human Resources
☐ Information management
☐ Legal
☐ Policy
☐ Science / Engineering
☐ Other

Select an AA-ship /
Regional Office

☐ AO
☐ OAR
☐ OARM
☐ OCFO
☐ OCSP

| Project Opportunity Title ↕ | Project Supervisor ↕ | Office ↕ | Type of Work ↕ | Date Project Posted ↕ | Start Date ↕ | Application Deadline ↕ |
|--|----------------------|----------|--|-----------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Agricultural Worker Safety Policy Analysis, Office of Pesticide Programs | Kiely, Timothy | OCSP | Policy/Other | | 4/20/2015 | 4/10/2015 |
| Attorney-Examiner | Lane, Frank | OARM | Legal | 2/26/2015 | 3/23/2015 | 3/12/2015 |
| Co-Lead in Conducting Federal Advisory Committee Oversight Visits | Carrillo, Oscar | OARM | Administrative, Communications, Generalist (e.g. Environmental Protection Specialist or Program Analyst or Project Management), Information Management / Information Technology, Legal, Policy | 2/9/2015 | 3/16/2015 | 3/12/2015 |
| Continuous Diagnostic Monitoring | Anouilh, Jeffrey | OEI | Communications, Information Management / Information Technology | 3/26/2015 | 4/30/2015 | 4/17/2015 |

List of Project Opportunities

5 <http://www.fedmanager.com/news/9-e-report/featured/general-news/2063-epa-professional-development>

6 <http://www.fedmanager.com/news/9-e-report/featured/general-news/2063-epa-professional-development>

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The greatest evidence of success of the Skills Marketplace is that other federal agencies have now followed suit under the auspices of an initiative that is co-lead by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and EPA. The broader umbrella initiative called GovConnect⁷ is a suite of projects designed to break down silos, including EPA's Skills Marketplace and State Department's FLEX Connect.⁸ The aspiration is eventually to go beyond single agency programs to foster government-wide collaboration.

The EPA is assessing the program outcomes by conducting an internal survey among participating employees and supervisors for a qualitative analysis to understand what worked and what didn't and a quantitative analysis of the number of projects posted and employee participation statistics. They also surveyed the employees who did not participate to find the reasons for non-participation – the majority cited a paucity of time after their regular projects as the main reason. But these assessments provide little insight into the downstream impact of the program on project outcomes.

While the program managers continuously collect “success stories” and “testimonials” to better understand the results and impact that participating in the program has on agency work and employee development, additional ways of tracking the progress and outcomes of projects staffed using the Skills Marketplace would provide the agency and independent researchers more information about the effectiveness of the program in actually solving the problem of breaking down silos in the organization. The EPA is neither conducting any randomized controlled trials whereby projects are staffed using the program and without it, nor are they allowing managers to search for and reach out to employees to staff projects. The program leadership believes it is better to invest in incentives for employees to self-select.

Janet Weiner, an attorney advisor with the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention had been looking for an opportunity to refresh her litigation skills, so she negotiated a one-year agreement to work on a project as a debarment counsellor in an office that needed to fill a gap.

Janet learned the differences in how the offices handled even seemingly mundane tasks and that perspective opened the door to new thinking and ideas.

Wing Yeung, a program analyst with the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, said she was looking for a challenging project different from her daily routine. She signed up to use her statistical and analytical skills on a social media project. The experience she gained from the project led to an offer to work on a new project. As a result, her resume now showcases diverse applications of a core skill set.

7 <https://pages.18f.gov/govconnect/history.html>

8 <http://www.fedmanager.com/news/9-e-report/featured/general-news/2047-inside-state-flex-connect-program>

Bryan Bloomer, director, Applied Science Division in the National Center for Environmental Research within the Office of Research and Development, supervised two employees through the Skills Marketplace. The Marketplace attracted people with strong writing skills to help his more scientifically focused group. It also allowed him to bring people from a regional office to headquarters, which afforded the project new insights. He said that as managers shift to more project and output based work, the appeal of the Skills Marketplace will become greater. At the same time many managers out there who still needed to start thinking differently about how work gets done.

Source: FEDmanager.com, *Skills Marketplace: Building One EPA Through Professional Development*, 17 February 2015.

EPA officials hope that the Skills Marketplace becomes so “institutionalized” that the experience of having worked on a project adds to someone’s resume and to the organization’s success.

ABOUT THE GOVLAB

The GovLab’s mission is to improve people’s lives by changing how we govern. Our goal is to strengthen the ability of institutions – including but not limited to governments – and people to work more openly, collaboratively, effectively and legitimately to make better decisions and solve public problems. For more information, please visit: www.thegovlab.org.

ABOUT SMARTER STATE

New tools—what GovLab calls technologies of expertise— are making it possible to match the supply of citizen expertise to the demand for it in government. Smarter State is a GovLab initiative to design and test how public decision-making could improve if institutions knew how to use the technologies of expertise to tap the wisdom of citizens’ and civil servants.