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# **SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT**



## **Audit of District's Outreach Program**

**Audit #02- 23**

**Prepared By  
Office of Inspector General**

**Allen Vann, Inspector General  
Christian Flierl, Lead Consulting Auditor**



# **SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT**

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3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, Florida 33406 • (561) 686-8800 • FL WATS 1-800-432-2045 • TDD (561) 697-2574  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 24680, West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680 • www.sfwmd.gov

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May 2, 2003

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RE: Final Report –  
Audit of the District’s  
Outreach Program  
Audit # 02-23

This audit was performed pursuant to the Inspector General’s authority set forth in Chapter 20.055, F.S. This audit evaluated the process that the District has in place to communicate with the public and become actively involved with them. We reviewed the District’s current communication process and compared it with industry best practices. We benchmarked outreach expenditures with comparable organizations and reviewed outreach contracts. This report was prepared by Chris Flierl.

Sincerely,

Allen Vann  
Inspector General

AV/cf  
Enclosure

c: Henry Dean  
Alvin Jackson

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## INTRODUCTION

The Department of Public Information (the “DPI”), working closely with the Service Centers, administers the District’s outreach program (District Program L). Outreach is defined by the District as the “active communication and productive involvement with the public to best meet the water resource needs of South Florida.” The stated mission of the outreach program is “To effectively inform the public about water resources by providing products and services to communicate the mission of the District and to develop partnerships to target all members of the public.” The goals of the program are to:

- continually build public trust
- inform citizens of programs, projects, emergency management, business and employment opportunities, and
- engage public and private organizations through collaborative programs and partnerships.

The outreach program comprises many varied activities that can all be classified as pertaining to one of the following outreach categories:

- Public Information
- Community Relations
- Media Relations
- Education
- Business Outreach
- Ecosystem Restoration Outreach
- Special Events
- Internal Communications

The specific activities that are engaged in to inform the public and build good relationships with the communities it serves and the media are varied and consist of such things as producing and placing television, radio, and billboard advertisements; writing and distributing news releases, op-ed and guest articles; coordinating press conferences; producing public service announcements; and writing advertorials.<sup>1</sup> The District also participates in

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<sup>1</sup> An advertorial is a paid article that highlights District staff or supports District positions.

community events such as festivals, parades, and fairs, and attends and participates in municipal and service organization meetings and events.

Educational activities conducted and supported by the outreach program include teacher training workshops, water resource classroom education and field trips, student water conservation contests, academic competitions such as science fairs and envirothons, and provides tours and briefings for students and educators. In addition, the outreach program also encompasses the Environmental Studies and Community Outreach Program (ESCO) that supports District outreach goals by providing seed money to educational institutions to establish environmental studies programs and performs campus and community outreach activities.

The DPI also works with the Procurement Department and attends and sponsors events and meetings designed to inform the business community (minority businesses in particular) about opportunities at the District.

Outreach is an essential element of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program (CERP). As such, the DPI has assigned several staff exclusively to CERP outreach.

Supporting these initiatives requires that the DPI produce and distribute various print, audio-visual and electronic products such as brochures, newsletters, fact sheets, posters and other print material as well as developing slide, video and PowerPoint presentations, and updating District web pages.

## **Budget Analysis**

Public information and outreach activities are budgeted in Program "L". For FY02, Program "L" had a budget of \$8,339,835 funded entirely through ad valorem sources. The following table shows how the FY02 budget was distributed between two major object groups.

<b>PROGRAM "L"</b> <b>Object Groups</b>	<b>FY02 Budgeted Amount</b>	<b>Percent of Total Program</b>
Personal Services	\$ 2,440,711	29.3%
Operating Expenditures	5,899,124	70.7%
Total	\$ 8,339,835	100%

Personnel costs of \$2.4 million cover the salaries and benefits of 36 staff. The most significant budgeted operating expenditures are for consulting fees (\$1.9 million) and

interagency expenses (\$3.2 million). Together, these expenditures represent 90% of the total budgeted operating expenditures.

Another way to view the program is by program element. Program “L” is divided into five program elements. The following table details the Program “L” budget by program element and also shows how consulting fees and interagency expenditures (the most significant operating expenditures) were allocated between the various program elements.

Program Element	Total FY02 Budget	Consulting Fees	Interagency Expenditures	Other	% of Budget
La – Planning and Coordination	\$ 586,209	\$250,000	-0-	\$ 336,209	7.0%
Lb- Public Information	\$ 3,570,213	\$ 888,763	\$879,042	1,802,408	42.8%
Lc - Public Outreach	\$ 4,004,178	\$759,029	\$2,351,354	893,795	48.0%
Ld – Community Events	\$ 179,235	-0-	-0-	179,235	2.2%
Totals	\$ 8,339,835	\$1,897,792	\$3,230,396	\$3,211,647	100%

The public information and public outreach program elements (Lb and Lc, respectively) represent over 90% of the total Program “L” budget. Further note that substantially all of the consulting and interagency amounts (\$4.9 million of \$5.1 million) were budgeted in those two elements. These fees represent a significant percentage (~78%) of the Public Outreach element. The remainder, \$250,000 of consulting fees, was budgeted in the planning and coordination element representing a significant percentage (42.6%) of that element’s budget.

The interagency fees budgeted in the Lc program element (approximately \$2.4 million) are for the Environmental Studies and Community Outreach Program (ESCO). The ESCO Program is a regional public partnership that promotes collaboration among post-secondary educational institutions and community based organizations. This program was established to support District outreach goals, maximize the efficient use of limited resources, and expand venues for public information messages throughout the region particularly, within under served communities. In addition, the Program supports Federal and State programs, such as the One Florida Initiative and the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

In December 2000, the Governing Board approved a one-year ESCO pilot with Florida Memorial College (FMC), an accredited, four-year private Historically Black College located in Miami-Dade County. Under the agreement, FMC established a new environmental studies degree, opened the Center for Urban Environmental Studies, engaged students faculty and local communities in forums/workshops on District issues, programs and projects.

In April 2002, the Governing Board authorized the regional expansion of ESCO and approved five cooperative agreements with six institutions: Indian River Community College, Broward Community College; Florida Gulf Coast University/Edison Community College; Palm Beach Community College; Miami-Dade Community College. Under the agreements, partnering institutions must develop detailed work plans to implement strategies supporting ESCO Program goals, which are to:

- expand environmental studies curricula with emphasis on increasing minority involvement in environmental sciences;
- expand community outreach and environmental awareness with emphasis on increasing District presence in local communities;
- facilitate workforce preparation for District programs and projects;
- maximize the use of limited resources, existing community-based networks and programs;
- support the goals of State and Federal policy initiatives such as One Florida, Front Porch Florida, Governor's Just Read, Florida!, Opportunity Alliance, and Mentoring Initiatives, as well as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan; monitor, evaluate and report on local program outcomesThe ESCO program represents the single largest budgeted outreach program that the District currently has.

**OBJECTIVES,  
SCOPE,  
AND  
METHODOLOGY**

The objectives of our audit were to determine whether the District has an adequate process in place to plan, monitor and evaluate the outreach and public information function. We reviewed the District's public outreach plan and compared it to public relations industry best practices. We also reviewed and tested internal controls that have been established and the process used to evaluate and assess outreach activities. Our audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government audit practices.



## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Results in Brief**

While the District's Outreach program is well organized, it may not be adequately funded. The District spends a considerable amount on its public outreach program, but other benchmarked institutions spend relatively more. CERP outreach in particular, has been first rate on individual projects but is behind schedule and sufficient resources have not been devoted to getting out the higher-level message about the program.

One of the major obstacles which needs to be overcome before any decisions on funding are made is to develop a clear understanding of what the District's outreach needs are. This is difficult to do without a public survey. It is also important that the outreach program is provided with sufficient resources to complete a tracking system for its projects. Lacking a good system, management currently cannot quantitatively track and measure where resources have been expended and which projects have been successful in reaching targeted communities.

In FY02 the District budgeted \$2.4 million in one time "seed" money to various educational institutions to promote the establishment of environmental study programs. DPI staff needs to work with the institutions to ensure the continuity of the programs that have been established as well as to measure the success of the program. Finally we recommended strengthening controls over the administration of outreach grants and contracts.

Management concurs with our recommendations and has already taken steps to implement them.

**District Outreach  
Commitment  
Less than Similar  
Entities**

We compared the District’s outreach budget as a percent of the total budget to the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the St. Johns River Water Management District, and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and found that the District’s outreach budget was less. The following table summarizes our findings:

<b>Outreach Budget/Total Budget</b>	<b>FY02</b>	<b>FY03</b>
South Florida WMD	<b>1.0%*</b>	<b>.7%</b>
Metropolitan Water District of So. CA	<b>.9%</b>	<b>.9%</b>
St. Johns River WMD	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
Southwest Florida WMD	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

Source: Agency budget information

\* High due to \$2.4 million one time funding of ESCO program. Otherwise it would have been .7%

The Southwest Florida and the St. John’s River Water Management Districts have committed almost two to three times as much of their budgets, proportionately, to outreach than the District. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California also contributed more to outreach. By itself this isn’t conclusive evidence that the District has under-funded outreach, however, when considered with other variables, it does suggest that the outreach commitment of the District is less than what it could be.

Outreach requirements can vary significantly from organization to organization and from year to year within the same organization. Variables that affect the outreach budget include the size, diversity, and the geographical disbursement of the target audience. For example, additional resources are required when the organization’s message needs to be translated into different languages. Currently the DPI is translating their products into Spanish and Creole. Further, the outreach requirements of an organization can change as the organization reacts to crises and other infrequently occurring events. During periods of drought the District has to put more outreach resources into getting out the water conservation message.

The District is engaged in many projects, some of which have mandated outreach such as CERP and the Everglades Stormwater Program. Other variables affecting outreach needs are the goals and objectives of an outreach program. For example, outreach objectives such as message exposure and accurate dissemination of the message require fewer

resources than getting the intended audience to change their behavior, which is the goal of water conservation outreach.

**A Performance Based  
Strategic Outreach Plan  
Is Needed**

It is up to each organization to assess their outreach needs and determine how to address them. However, the DPI has not yet performed the type of assessment that would allow them to make a determination as to the adequacy of the outreach funding. The need for conducting a public survey is discussed in further detail.

The DPI has taken steps to improve the District's communications function. In fact, the District's Outreach Program exhibits many of the characteristics of an excellent public relations function. However, a baseline survey needs to be conducted so that outreach resources are strategically focused based upon specific performance outcomes. In order to adequately plan, track, and evaluate its projects, DPI needs to complete its development of their Job Tracking and Reporting System (JTRS).

A baseline survey is performed to determine current attitudes and perceptions about the organization, which will aid in properly allocating resources and allow for the ongoing evaluation and assessment of outreach efforts. Characteristics of a world class public relations function<sup>2</sup> that the Department has adopted include:

- empowerment of the communications function,
- well defined communicator roles,
- centralized organization of the communication function and its relationship to other management functions, and
- two-way symmetrical model of communications.

We found that the communications function is currently well placed within the District. It is adequately empowered: the Director of DPI reports directly to the Deputy Executive Director, Corporate Resources. The Director acts as a strategic manager, with sufficient technical staff under her direct supervision. Organizationally, virtually all public information activities are conducted through DPI. Finally, the District's communications function is based on the two-way symmetrical model of communications. Under this model

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<sup>2</sup> Walter K. Lindenmann, Ph.D., *Public Relations Research For Planning and Evaluation* (Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation: University of Florida)

communications is balanced between the organization and its target audiences.

In order to improve the District's communications function, DPI successively contracted with two consultants who reviewed the outreach program. A third consultant provided assessment and evaluation strategies for CERP outreach. We reviewed the reports issued by each of the respective consultants and evaluated the extent that DPI implemented their recommendations.

*ADG Business and Governmental Consultants (ADG)*, was hired to assess the District's public information and outreach program and to make recommendations for improvement. Their August 2001 report recommended that "the District must formally define outreach as mission critical and establish specific organization wide goals and objectives relative to outreach. The communication strategy must be clear and unambiguous and be supported throughout the District. This will create an internal baseline." In response to this recommendation, we noted that DPI has established general goals and objectives, and have standardized outreach products. Outreach staff is in the process of developing customized outreach plans for specific District projects. The goal is to conduct a complete outreach assessment of all District projects and to determine the outreach needs for more effective allocation of funds and staff for outreach activities. The general goals and objectives that have been established for District-wide public information and outreach are:

- continually build public trust,
- informing citizens of programs, projects, emergency management, and business and employment opportunities, and
- engaging public and private organizations through collaborative programs and partnerships.

Under the current Executive Director, all outreach activities have been consolidated under DPI and are either directly supervised or coordinated by DPI. These activities include public information, community and media relations, education, business outreach, ecosystem restoration outreach, special events, and internal communications. Some outreach staff work out of the District's Service Centers and report directly to Service Center Directors. The outreach

activities performed by outreach staff at the Service Centers are coordinated through the DPI. Additional activities are performed as a direct response to the needs of the communities they serve.

We found that DPI has standardized the District's information products by:

- establishing high visibility,
- ensuring messages are firmly rooted in the District's mission elements,
- providing standard communications categories, and
- targeting production methods to reduce time expenditure and increase cost-effectiveness.

In an effort to create an organization-wide strategic communications plan the DPI has identified all District programs and projects and are meeting with program managers to determine their outreach needs and design an outreach strategy. In addition the DPI regularly meets with outreach staff throughout the District to coordinate and share their particular concerns.

ADG reported that the District needed to align its resource areas and budget to support the communication strategy in a sustainable fashion and perform an external assessment of its outreach activities to establish an external baseline. While we believe that the alignment of resources has occurred, the level and adequacy of funding cannot be determined until DPI performs an external assessment.

A consultant, The Boardwalk Group, in their July 2002 *Outreach Recommendations Report*, also recommended that the District survey the public to find perceptions of the District. In their opinion, a survey would create a baseline so that goals and objectives can be established and success towards meeting those goals can be evaluated.

The *CERP Public Outreach Program Management Plan*, authored by the District and the Army Corp Of Engineers stressed that the continuous assessment of outreach programs is essential. While essential, outreach assessment is not routinely performed. *Pandion Systems, Inc.* (Pandion), retained to provide the District with assessment and evaluation strategies specifically for CERP outreach performed a literature search to identify existing public

opinion research pertaining to CERP. In their August 2002 report, Pandion found that “a glaring gap in the literature<sup>3</sup> is a lack of coordinated and consistent evaluation of public outreach programs and the lack of assessment being incorporated at all levels of the process of program performance.”

Instead of doing a separate CERP assessment as recommended by Pandion, the Boardwalk Group suggested that the CERP survey be incorporated into a broader survey instrument developed to determine general attitudes and perceptions about the District. Boardwalk also provided a blue print for how such a survey should be designed and conducted.

A survey is a form of public relations research. According to experts in the field of communications, research is an essential ingredient of successful public relations, communications, and/or marketing program both in the private and public sectors. It is the first step in the public relations process and it has been shown that when research is performed during all phases of a communications program the performance of the program is enhanced. When public outreach research is conducted on an ongoing basis it allows the public information manager to:

- obtain baseline data regarding the views of key target audience groups,
- plan, develop, and refine an outreach program or activity,
- track or monitor programs, activities or events that are or can be important to the organization,
- evaluate the overall effectiveness of a particular public information or outreach program or activity, by measuring outputs and outcomes against a predetermined set of objectives,
- put crises into proper perspective through emergency monitor or polling, and
- provide appropriate support in publicizing or promoting a specific program, activity or event.

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<sup>3</sup> The literature search performed by Pandion was conducted through web and library searches and telephone and electronic contacts.

DPI management states that they have received anecdotal evidence that the District's message is getting out. This includes feedback from community leaders and members of the public as well as observations made at public meetings. However, because an external assessment has not been performed we could not gauge the effectiveness of the District's outreach program. For example, the District has identified minority communities as an audience that outreach efforts are targeted towards. Significant efforts are devoted to minority outreach. However, we were unable to quantify to what extent these efforts have reached the minority community or have educated or changed the attitudes, perceptions or behavior of the targeted audiences. Further, we could not determine whether the specific activities that are targeted towards minority communities, education programs, attendance at festivals and memorial celebrations, media buys, etc, are relatively effective strategies.

One consultant estimated that creating a survey instrument, conducting the survey, and analyzing the results would cost the District \$125,000. This is less than one tenth of the total FY02 outreach consulting fee budget of \$1.9 million and about the equivalent of what was spent on Hispanic outreach consultants. Outreach staff has suggested that the cost of conducting a public survey could be curtailed by leveraging the relationship that the District already has with various educational institutions in the Environmental Studies and Community Outreach program. This is an idea that is worthy of consideration. Given that the consensus of opinion that the need for performing some sort of external assessment prior to engaging in specific outreach tasks is universal, we recommend that the consultant's recommendations for performing a public survey, to include CERP, be performed immediately.

Finally, ADG recommended creation of a performance based and budgeted communications program. The District's communications program is not yet performance based and budgeted. Once a public survey is performed, establishing a baseline, and DPI has the capability of adequately tracking its activities, we believe that DPI will be in a position to realign resources and monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of outreach activities.

Prior to moving all outreach under the DPI, there was no centralized record of District outreach activities. In the absence of a system capable of cataloging these activities the extent and success of the program could not be determined. There was no database of outreach activities and no reporting requirements. The Boardwalk Group, recommended creating a mechanism to track and measure strategy.

Since outreach has been placed under the DPI some strides have been made in this direction. For FY02 the DPI created an *Activity Report* listing outreach activities that occurred during FY02. The *Activity Report* was compiled based on the recollections of District staff involved in outreach and may not be complete. The *Activity Report* provided the DPI with a list of what outreach activities occurred, where they occurred, what the occasion was, and who the target audience was.

The usefulness of the *Activity Report* is of limited value for performance management (it contained no cost or outcome data). However, it provided DPI staff with the first comprehensive glimpse of the scope of public outreach activities that occurred during any given year. It also, insightfully highlighted how outreach resources were allocated throughout the District. For example, a review of the *Activity Report* revealed that of the 102 identified outreach activities that took place in Miami-Dade County in FY02 only two were designated as specifically targeting the Hispanic community. However, because of the inherent limitations of the *Activity Report*, we couldn't determine the cost and effectiveness of FY02 outreach efforts.

Recognizing the need for a more sophisticated performance management system the DPI began development on their Job Tracking and Reporting System (JTRS). According to DPI the purpose of the JTRS is to:

“Provide a consistent method and centralized location for data management reporting and analysis of status, history, life cycles, product performance, resource allocation and associated costs. To integrate work schedules, production status, product identification and storage while ensuring accountability and quality for planning and budgeting resources for SFWMD and CERP outreach activities. For



streamlined production, increased accountability, performance measures, out source comparisons, increased communications, effective time management and improved resource utilization, accurate tracking of costs and distribution of expenditures for supported District outreach programs including CERP.”

At the current stage of development the JTRS is used as a means of communication between outreach staff for planning and coordinating outreach activities. Data management objectives of the JTRS such as comparing actual cost to budgeted costs and performing outsource comparisons can't be made. In addition, the report generation aspects of the system will require further enhancements and the addition of components like inventory, distribution, calendar planning, and performance measures will make the system a better management tool.

It is not known when the JTRS system will be fully functional. Currently there is one staff member who devotes the majority of her time to its development but has other duties as well. We recommend that the DPI set a target date for completion of this system and be provided with the resources to achieve their goal.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. DPI should implement the consultants' recommendation and conduct a public survey.**

**Management Response:** Management concurs with the recommendation. The recommendations made by consultants have been evaluated and the need for a baseline survey has been established. The department is presently developing the scope of work to initiate the RFP process for the selection of a qualified firm to conduct the baseline survey. Staff has been in discussion with the colleges under contract with the ESCO program in an effort to engage them in this effort and help to reduce cost.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** April 2004

**2. Once the survey has been completed and the baseline as been established the DPI should do the following:**

- **identify where communication problems exist,**
- **reassess priorities and realign resources if required,**
- **develop strategies to address communications problems**
- **establish specific measurable goals, and**
- **evaluate success towards achieving those goals.**

**Management Response:** Management concurs with the recommendation and intends to comply upon completion of the baseline survey. All five recommendations mentioned above are generally incorporated into the work plan for the 03-04 budget year. Specific measures will be developed once the survey data is available.

The five recommendations are presently part of the project level outreach strategies. Assessment, resource allocation, communication strategies, goals and evaluation are steps in the process of the development and implementation of the project level outreach plans currently being developed by the outreach staff.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** October 2004

**3. The DPI should be provided the resources necessary to complete their Job Tracking and Reporting System.**

**Management Response:** Management concurs with the recommendation and offers the following clarification.

The Job Tracking and Reporting System (JTRS) is a phased program. Phase one has been fully implemented. Phases two and three are presently under development. It has been agreed that the

District will share this tool with the Corps' outreach team. This partnership has resulted in the commitment of Corps' IT staff to assist in the completion and implementation of all phases of the JTRS. With the partnership of the Corps IT staff, it is now anticipated that all five phases of the program will be fully implemented by the second quarter of '04.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** March 2004

**CERP Outreach Plan  
First-rate, But Behind  
Schedule**

There are two levels of outreach activities associated with the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), project specific activities and program-level activities. Project-specific activities address specific CERP projects, for example the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoirs or the North Palm Beach County Project. Program-level activities transcend individual projects and address the restoration effort in a broader sense. Both project and program outreach are mandated. A draft program-level outreach plan has been developed for CERP, however, its implementation is estimated to be approximately two years behind schedule. This occurred due to staffing adjustments and the more urgent demands of project specific outreach. In order to comply with the CERP requirements, the District needs to move ahead more expeditiously on the program outreach tasks.

Project-specific outreach is legally mandated and required for each of the individual CERP projects. Individual project outreach goals, objectives, messages, and target audiences will differ from project to project, however, the tasks involved are generally the same:

- meeting with CERP project managers to determine the specific outreach needs of the project,
- coordinating with Corps outreach staff,
- developing project outreach plans, schedules and budgets,
- coordinating and participating in project public workshops, stakeholder and community meetings,
- developing printed materials, displays, presentations and kiosks,
- conducting stakeholder and small group meetings,
- resolving issues that arise privately, publicly and in the media, and
- assisting project managers with contractor relations.

Conversely, program level outreach addresses system-wide issues and is detailed in the *Public Outreach Program Management Plan*, dated August 2001. The District and the US Army Corp Of Engineers co-authored the management plan and like project level outreach, program-level outreach is mandated by the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration

Plan (CERP).<sup>4</sup> The Management Plan has the following stated goals:

- increase general public awareness and support for CERP with effective outreach activities, including environmental awareness,
- involve stakeholders, agencies, tribes and other interested communities in the CERP decision making process to incorporate public values into the program,
- develop and implement outreach strategies to better serve minority communities, persons with limited English proficiency, and socio-economically disadvantaged individuals,
- provide focused outreach activities for traditional under-served communities, especially those that may be affected by the project,
- improve the substantive quality of decisions as a result of public participation,
- increase trust of public institutions,
- reduce conflict among interested and affected parties by building agreement on solutions to emerging issues, and
- provide effective internal communications and support for individual project teams to increase efficiency and provide support and guidance for project-level public participation activities.

The goals of the Management Plan for program level outreach are not yet fully achieved. One reason for this is that CERP outreach has had a series of acting and full-time directors in the past several years, and it has been housed in different locations within the District. In the summer of 2002 the program was fully integrated into the DPI and the current CERP outreach manager has been in that position for approximately six months. The CERP outreach manager is finding that project outreach has taken precedence due to its more urgent demands.

The CERP outreach manager, three other DPI employees and one contract worker, who are dedicated exclusively to CERP outreach, currently spend the bulk of their time on project-level rather than program level outreach because many of the CERP projects have already commenced or will

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<sup>4</sup> Title VI of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 section (k) *Outreach and Assistance*.

commence soon. CERP project outreach is not only mandated but it is also necessary in project decision making. Public meetings and focus groups bring the stakeholders and affected parties together so that their concerns can be aired and potential problems can be identified and resolved.

While the delay in providing program-level CERP outreach, now estimated to be two years, has not resulted in a delay of any CERP projects, it does mean that the goals established by the plan such as, increased public awareness of CERP, reaching under-served communities, and providing effective two-way communications, may be unfulfilled. Also, the lack of program outreach reduces the efficiency of project outreach. Ideally, the public should have a general knowledge of CERP before receiving project specific information. However, because program level outreach hasn't occurred, project managers and outreach specialists have had to educate the public on general CERP topics in addition to their specific project. This results in project level resources being used to provide a general understanding of CERP.

CERP implementation success will determine the sustainability of South Florida as a community. Therefore program outreach has to be a top priority within the District and DPI, in addition to an adequate level of project level support. Project outreach still should be maintained at a consistent and high level of support, but program level activities need to be performed as well. Because program outreach has fallen so far behind additional resources are needed for both. The DPI believes that dedicating one additional FTE to CERP outreach would allow program outreach to get underway and keep project outreach at a consistent level.

Funding resources also are needed to develop and implement the legally mandated program level outreach plan. The DPI believes that a consultant should be hired to facilitate and further develop the public involvement element of the Management Plan. This includes conducting public and community meetings and workshops, planning stakeholder activities, and coordinating with various task forces, working groups, and advisory committees. They believe that this would allow DPI to reallocate more resources from project level outreach to program level outreach and accomplish the program level outreach goals.

## Recommendation

4. **The CERP outreach team should be provided with additional resources to bring CERP program and project level outreach activities to current, adequate, and consistent levels.**

**Management Response:** Management concurs with the recommendation. Some progress has been made as indicated in the detailed response below:

- Two new contract employee positions have been requested from the Jacobs/MWH Joint Venture contract. One of the positions would be assigned mid-level program level activities. A second position has also been requested for a mid-level project outreach person who would work closely with the CERP project managers, service centers' outreach staff, and the CERP outreach manager to more closely coordinate and monitor District project outreach efforts.

The CERP outreach unit cannot proceed at maximum efficiency on fulfilling the program outreach goals until these positions are filled.

- A web support position was recently transferred from the District's Water Resource Management area to DPI's CERP outreach section. The position previously solely supported WRM's internal web (IWEB) and external web (XWEB) pages. The position will now support the CERP and the District's WRM XWEB sites, devoting approximately 50% of available time to each web site. Up to this point, the USACE has been largely responsible for posting all content and providing web design of the CERP site, and had requested assistance from the District. The District will now be more of an equal partner in supporting the CERP website. However, this position represents additional workload to DPI, and will not assist in relieving DPI of any of the workload for CERP outreach outlined in the Audit.

- The CERP outreach manager is working with the District's joint venture contractor to contract for a public facilitator this year, and possibly into the FY04 year. The facilitator would be responsible for:
  - a) providing training of meeting facilitation skills for project managers and outreach staff who conduct CERP public meetings, workshops and other events;
  - b) providing facilitation of internal CERP outreach workshops with District outreach staff to determine the goals and related tasks of CERP outreach, improve levels of consistency among service centers, and build a team atmosphere among all CERP outreach staff members;
  - c) facilitating the development of four strategies for the individual task groups identified in the Program Level Public Outreach Plan. These strategies, and subsequent implementation plans, will help guide program-level outreach decisions for the next three to four years. The facilitator will hold facilitated sessions across the 16-county region to receive input from selected target audiences, stakeholder groups, and agencies, to be applied to the development of specific outreach strategies. It is anticipated that the majority of the work to develop the outreach strategies would be completed by September 30, 2003.
- The CERP outreach unit has requested funding in FY04 to hire a public relations or communications firm or firms to assist in implementing the strategies that will be developed through use of the facilitator. The four strategies to be implemented include: 1) General Public Information; 2) Public, Stakeholder, and Agency Involvement; 3) Minority Communities Outreach; and 4) Outreach to Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Communities. This may either be handled by hiring one firm for all strategies (possibly with sub-contractors), or several firms with expertise in the respective strategy areas.



- In addition, separate funding has been requested to begin a regional public information program to raise awareness of CERP and its goals among the members of the general public of South Florida. This is the beginning of a multi-year effort to raise awareness of CERP throughout South Florida, and to possibly include efforts on statewide, national or even international levels, as Everglades restoration is of worldwide public interest.
- DPI agrees with the Inspector General's Office that a comprehensive baseline level of awareness assessment should be conducted on both SFWMD-related issues (water conservation, the agency, understanding of water management in South Florida) and CERP-specific issues. We also agree this can be combined into one assessment instrument (survey) if needed, and should be reflective of the 16-county region. This assessment will help guide outreach efforts in the future, allow us to spend outreach dollars more effectively, and allow us to measure the success of our efforts 3-5 years from the completion of the survey. Timeframe for completion is the same as noted in recommendation #1.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** Ongoing

**ESCO Program Needs Assurance of Sustainability**

Through the Environmental Studies and Community Outreach Program (ESCO) the District has committed considerable funding for the expansion of environmental studies programs at various educational institutions. The cooperative agreements authorizing these expenditures total \$2.7million. The sustainability of the programs will depend upon long term funding considerations. The District provided seed-money only. It is up to the various institutions to secure additional funding to ensure continuity of the programs. Therefore, District staff should maintain close ties with the ESCO agreement institutions.

One of the objectives of the Environmental Studies and Community Outreach Program (ESCO) is to provide seed money to community colleges and universities in order to expand environmental studies curricula. On January 29, 2001, the District entered into the first of seven ESCO cooperative agreements with Florida Memorial College (FMC), a private four-year institution, for \$300,000. Subsequently six other agreements have been or will be executed for \$400,000 each. One of the goals of the ESCO program is expanding environmental studies programs to develop a readily available workforce. It will take several years before students start completing these programs and start entering the workforce. The new environmental studies program at Florida Memorial College is planning on graduating five students with bachelor's degrees (also available under the program will be two year degrees and training certificates) in environmental science this summer. The District's ESCO program manager has taken steps to acquaint these students with the District and make them aware of opportunities that the District has to offer. In order for the District to benefit, it is important that we remain actively involved with FMC and the other institutions so that program progress can be monitored and students are kept aware of opportunities at the District.

Of greater concern is continuity of the environmental studies programs. The seed money provided to establish environmental education programs is provided without any assurance that supplemental funding will be found by the institutions to ensure the program's continued existence. Florida Memorial College, the first ESCO recipient has not secured any supplemental funding for their environmental studies programs. Nevertheless, FMC believes that the program can sustain itself through normal funding sources

**Recommendation**

such as tuition. All of the ESCO agreements require that the recipient institution submit a plan for supplemental funding. No assurance was provided that supplemental funding will be secured. As such, the District should stay engaged with college administrators and provide assistance if necessary with finding supplemental funding.

- 5. The District should remain engaged with the institutions that have executed ESCO agreements to ensure the continuity of the environmental studies programs and to track the graduates from these programs and tap them for careers at the District.**

**Management Response:** Management concurs with this recommendation and will enforce the provisions of the contractual agreements that require District engagement. The District will remain engaged with the institutions and monitor performance as required under each contract to ensure the continuity of local programs. ESCO Cooperative Agreements are now four-year contracts. In April 2002, the Governing Board approved non-recurring or seed funds for five agreements. Funds are to be appropriated over a two-year period. Two additional years were added to the agreements to allow for monitoring and reporting of program outcomes. These program outcomes will include an increase in the number of graduates in relevant degree and certificate programs related to District mission, programs and projects. Data regarding the availability of these graduates will be shared with District Human Resources to expand the pool of employable candidates. Even after contractual obligations have ended, DPI will continue to monitor programs' level of activity and ensure an adequate return on our investment in the programs.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** Ongoing

**ESCO Agreement  
Goals Outcome  
Based But Not  
Clearly Defined**

ESCO agreements lack specific target goals. One of the general goals of the program is to increase minority involvement in college environmental programs. The effect of not setting specific targeted goals could result in the program not producing the desired outcomes. We also noted that while the goals are outcome based, the status reports provided by ESCO participants tend to focus more on outputs, such as the number of outreach activities held. This occurs because the institutions are paid on the basis of tasks performed. While it is important to measure program outputs measuring outcomes is far more meaningful to the goals of the program.<sup>5</sup>

The stated goals of the ESCO agreements include expanding environmental studies programs, increasing minority involvement in those programs, facilitating workforce preparation, and expanding environmental awareness in the community and on campus. These are outcome goals meaning that they reflect the desired benefits of the program. Outcomes measure to what extent communications materials and messages, which were disseminated, have resulted in changed perceptions, attitudes, and behavior.

One of the desired behavioral outcomes of the ESCO program is to entice minorities into environmental studies programs. There is no indication as to what the desired level of minority participation should be. The way that this goal is stated would allow it to be achieved with even the slightest increase in minority participation. Quantitative targets or expectations should be set for each of these goals. For example, the goal of increasing minority participation in environmental studies should state what an acceptable increase would be given the resources available. Each year a new target could be set. Establishing intermediate quantifiable goals will allow our ESCO partners to administer these programs with greater efficiency by requiring that they continually evaluate and assess their strategy.

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<sup>5</sup> Walter K. Lindenmann, Ph.D., *Public Relations Research For Planning and Evaluation* (Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation: University of Florida)

**Recommendations**

**6. Outcome goals containing specific targets should be included in future ESCO agreements.**

**Management Response:** Management concurs and notes that targets have been included in ESCO agreements where baseline data are available. Each agreement requires partnering institutions to develop quantitative and qualitative performance measures, as well as, program monitoring and evaluation methodology for all activities in cooperation with the District.

We will review future agreements to ensure consistent application of targets.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** Ongoing

**7. Encourage ESCO partners to report on outcome measures as well as outputs.**

**Management Response:** Management concurs with this recommendation. The DPI recently modified the quarterly and annual reporting procedures. A standard format has been designed for all partners to use. The format requires the identification of measures, outcomes and comments on variances / shortfalls.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** Ongoing

## **Administration of Outreach Contracts Could be Improved**

We reviewed several contracts entered into by the DPI and found two instances where the administration of the District's outreach contracts could be improved. We found that an ESCO cooperative agreement with an educational institution to provide outreach was structured so that payment was made based on planned outreach activities. Ordinarily outreach contracts are structured so that the outreach provider is paid on the basis of outreach activities actually performed. In this case the planned activities were more extensive than what was actually performed. In addition, due to the significant amounts paid under the ESCO program (\$400,000 per agreement) the District should consider auditing the agreements. We also noted where the District paid for outreach services without first obtaining adequate documentation that the services were provided. The District's Procurement Policy states that contracts can't be paid until there is satisfactory completion and delivery of all required services and products.

We reviewed the ESCO cooperative agreement with Florida Memorial College (FMC). FMC was selected for review because it was the only institution that had received the full amount under the ESCO program. The agreement required the submittal of a marketing and communications plan. The purpose of the marketing and communications plan is to outline the activities that will be a part of the institution's outreach program. FMC submitted the required plan along with other deliverables such as a work program for their newly established Center for Urban Environmental Studies, a supplemental funding strategy, the final curriculum for the environmental studies program, a student recruitment plan, and other resource needs. Submission of these deliverables entitled FMC to a \$100,000 payment under the agreement. Our review of FMC progress reports revealed that they performed a host of planned activities, however, there was no evidence that various mass media activities were performed as planned. FMC issued press releases, gave radio and television interviews, conducted a direct mail survey, produced a newsletter, hosted a number of environmental seminars and education programs, and participated in other events. Planned activities not performed included public service announcements, feature stories (other than in the campus paper), a video documentary, advertising in trade publications, and a press kit. Further, we noted that support provided to verify that these tasks were performed was in some cases inadequate.

In another instance, the District entered into a purchase order agreement with a consultant to communicate the District's message to the urban core and inner cities of the District.

Payment of \$45,000 was authorized without first receiving sufficient documentation that all tasks contracted for were completed.

In contrast, our review of a contract with a public relations firm hired to perform Hispanic outreach revealed that payment was contingent upon performing various outreach tasks and sufficient documentation was submitted to verify that the required tasks were performed. However, we did note that subsequent ESCO contracts were more consistent with consultant contracts in that they allow for some payment when a plan is submitted and approved with the remainder to be paid when activities are performed.

The amount of funding that DPI is giving to many organizations ranges between \$45,000 and \$400,000. The State of Florida, in 1998, enacted the Florida Single Audit Act that requires a single audit when a grantee organization expends over \$300,000 in a fiscal year. While most agreements don't meet the criteria of the Single Audit Act, given the similarity that they have to a grant, and level of funding involved relative to the District, consideration should be given to exercising the audit rights in the agreement.

## Recommendations

- 8. Outreach contractors should be paid for outreach activities that are actually performed for which there is adequate documentation.**

**Management Response:** Management concurs with the recommendation. It should be noted that the project/contract manager felt sufficient documentation was submitted regarding the completion of all tasks as specified in the contract agreement. DPI will more closely monitor deliverables and ensure project managers authorize payment only after sufficient documentation is received that contracted outreach activities were performed.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** Ongoing

**9. The District should consider exercising their audit rights for cooperative agreements**

**Management Response:** Management concurs with the recommendation and the DPI will support the Inspector General's review and audit of outreach cooperative agreements.

**Responsible Department:** Corporate Resources

**Estimated Completion Date:** Ongoing