President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency

Committee on Inspection and Evaluation

SURVEY

ON

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS OF

INSPECTIONS AND EVALUATIONS UNITS

JANUARY 1998

INSPECTIONS AND EVALUATIONS DIVISIONS WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

This project was initiated under the auspices of the Committee on Inspection and Evaluation of the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency (PCIE). To identify ways for encouraging productive relationships across the inspector general community, the Committee conducted a survey in June 1997 to solicit information on the current practices and past experiences of Inspection and Evaluation (I&E) units in developing effective working relationships with the various entities with which they work.

The objective was to:

- identify best practices used by I&E units to develop a good working rapport with others;

- examine any difficulties encountered by directors of I&E units;

- evaluate experiences of other Office of Inspector General (OIG) units that interact with I&E staff; and

- provide recommendations for consideration to foster improved working relationships where needed.

Survey instruments were distributed to 15 Inspectors General (IGs) concerning the practices and experience of their respective I&E units. (See Attachment) The assumption was that each IG would forward the survey to their I&E unit for completion. In all but two cases, the individuals responsible for directing the I&E unit did provide the responses. In total, 14 IGs submitted completed surveys. Shorter surveys were given to 15 Assistant Inspectors General for Audit (AIGAs) and 15 Assistant Inspectors General for Investigations (AIGIs). Twelve

replies were received from AIGAs and 12 from AIGIs. Overall, we received 38 responses from the 45 survey instruments distributed.

This report provides a summary of our findings by OIG component:

   I. Inspections and Evaluations Units,

  II. Offices of Audit, and

  III. Offices of Investigation

General recommendations are also offered to promote sound working relationships between members of I&E units and the individuals with whom they are most likely to interact.

Survey Results

I. Inspections and Evaluations

The survey contained questions concerning the working relations between established I&E units and five other distinct groups:

- Offices of Audit and Investigations within their respective OIGs,

- Host agency officials,

- Other OIGs,

- the Congress, and

- the Office of Management and Budget.

Each I&E unit was asked to describe and rank any problems its members had experienced, to identify the source of a particular problem, and to describe what practices have been found to

be particularly successful in developing effective working relationships and resolving any identified problems.

A. Internal OIG Relations

<u>Audit</u>

Survey respondents clearly reflected that most difficulties occur between audit and inspections units. Responses from I&E units cited the most common problems which they encountered with audit groups resulted from perceived overlapping responsibilities, lack of communication, and little or no coordination in planning between the two groups within an OIG. Many I&E directors expressed a problem with jurisdictional disputes. The perception is that many auditors do not accept the need for an I&E function and believe their OIG would be better served if resources were redirected to the audit function. Four I&E directors attributed problems to the lack of statutory support for the I&E function in the Inspector General Act of 1978 (as amended). Five I&E respondents indicated they had encountered no difficulties whatsoever with their audit counterparts.

The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that existing problems could be addressed through more open communication, a better exchange of information and shared involvement in the planning process among audit and inspection personnel. Many OIGs have achieved success through the use of weekly meetings to ensure that all staff are aware of all ongoing reviews. The respondents also stressed the need for the IGs to direct all their employees to cooperate with one another and to hold everyone accountable for doing so.

<u>Investigations</u>

Ten respondents reported no difficulties existed in the relations with investigative units, two failed to respond, and the remaining two indicated minor problems with overlapping responsibilities and a perceived need to clarify I&E's role.

B. Host Agency Officials

The chief difficulty identified in working relations with this group was their lack of knowledge or understanding of the I&E mission and operations. Program managers have a tendency to consider audit and inspections units as identical entities, while others. offering no explanation, displayed little enthusiasm for implementing I&E recommendations.

Again, the solution proposed in most surveys was to strengthen communication and establish credibility through quality reviews. Many believed involving program managers in the project planning process and keeping them informed throughout the various stages of a review have proven to be very successful practices for improving working relationships.

C. Other OIGs

With one exception, I&E units have not experienced any difficulties in their interactions with other OIGs. One respondent did, however, cite a significant acceptance problem by an OIG that did not have an I&E unit within its organization.

The majority of responses indicated that members of I&E units believe the PCIE Inspections and Evaluation Roundtable has served as an excellent forum for the discussion of I&E projects and issues. The Roundtable reportedly has fostered better coordination among I&E colleagues from other OIGs.

D. Congress

Only one respondent indicated that an OIG's I&E unit had experienced difficulty with Congress but also underscored the fact that some Congressional staff members may not fully understand the purpose of an I&E function. Others reported various levels of contact with Congress, and all stated that any response to a Congressional request for information was handled both promptly and thoroughly. Several respondents specifically recommended keeping appropriate Congressional committee staff informed of I&E work.

E. Office of Management and Budget

All respondents stated they had little, if any, interaction with Office of Management and Budget personnel and had encountered no major problems.

II. Offices of Audit

The AIGAs were asked to describe (1) any difficulties they or their staffs had encountered working with I&E units, (2) what they perceived to be the major source of any problems, (3) what actions that they have taken to ensure effective working relationships or remedy problems, and (4) their suggestions for improvement.

Eight AIGAs indicated they or their staff had not experienced any problems in their dealings with I&E personnel. In fact, they believe the key to their success has been a direct result of joint planning sessions, open discussion of the issues, and immediate action to address any problem as soon as one was identified.

Four AIGAs have reportedly encountered various levels of problems but explained that these problems stem from a perception that there are overlapping responsibilities between inspection and audit groups. It was apparent, from the perspective of three of these AIGAs, that significant tension exists between the two groups within their respective offices. Consequently, each expressed the need to more clearly define the roles of I&E units because jurisdictional problems have proven troublesome. In their view, auditing and inspection staffs frequently misunderstand each other's mission, but too often fail to open lines of communication. These same AIGAs believe that inspections personnel often perform reviews that fall within the Office of Audit's responsibility, that inspections staffs are not held to the high standards required of their auditing counterparts, and, therefore, inspectors often provide little documentation for their findings. Interestingly, this same group of AIGAs indicated that better communication between an Office of Audit and an I&E unit would help to improve current working relationships. They did suggest, however, that a clear definition of I&E units' responsibility was critical for any future success and acceptance.

Only one AIGA stated that the audit and inspection components should be combined.

III. Offices of Investigation

We provided the AIGIs with identical questions as those provided to their audit counterparts. Because their interaction with I&E units is more limited, the responses were very concise. Of the twelve survey respondents, ten indicated that investigative staff had encountered no difficulties when dealing with I&E personnel. The remaining two respondents described minor problems related to communications, overlapping responsibilities and planning.

There is a clear consensus that the key to success between an I&E unit and its respective investigative counterpart is good planning and open lines of communication. Problems arise only when the two entities are unaware of each other's projects. The AIGIs believe that more interaction and understanding of their counterpart's responsibilities are essential to maintaining a good rapport among different OIG units.

Conclusion

The majority of OIGs have taken the necessary steps to integrate the I&E function into their operations. It is clear, however, that a number of OIGs continue to experience communication difficulties among their functional components. Obviously, the IGs and their senior executive staffs must identify ways to ensure friction among functional units within OIGs is minimized or, better yet, eliminated. Jurisdictional disputes, in particular, cannot be permitted. Such conflict destroys the ability of any organization to fulfill its mission and constrains the options available to IGs for use in meeting their oversight responsibilities.

The results of this survey suggest that the first step in resolving problems is opening lines of communication through regular staff meetings which include non-supervisory personnel from all OIG components. Both the Federal Audit Executive Council and the Inspections and Evaluation Roundtable should also encourage their members to take more positive steps to open lines of communication, to encourage joint planning of projects, and to share information and data sources.

Cross training should also increase cooperation. The practice of detailing individuals to other OIG components or assigning them to work on joint projects for learning purposes and professional development should be strongly considered. Even short familiarization tours could be beneficial.

The PCIE's Committee on Inspection and Evaluation offers the foregoing general recommendations to all IGs for their consideration in improving the current working relationships between I&E units and their corresponding Offices of Audit and Investigations. One important measure of success for any OIG is the degree of cooperation and coordination exhibited across all of its staff components. Only a solid record of accomplishment by all OIG components will ensure the continued effectiveness and success of the inspector general community.

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION UNITS: WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Internal OIG Relations

1.   In what areas, if any, has your IE staff encountered any difficulty in dealing with the auditing division in your organization? (Check as many as apply and indicate degree of difficulty as (1) minor problem; (2) somewhat troublesome; or (3) serious barrier to project completion.)

    ____ Communications
    ____ Acceptance of IE function in OIG
    ____ Overlapping responsibilities/mandates, etc.
    ____ Coordination in planning inspections and audits
    ____ Cooperation in conducting joint projects or supporting inspections
    ____ Other (please specify):_____
    ____ No problems

    Please provide examples of the difficulties encountered.

2.   In what areas, if any, has your IE staff encountered any difficulty in dealing with the investigations division in your organization? (Check as many as apply and indicate degree of difficulty as (1) minor problem; (2) somewhat troublesome; or (3) serious barrier to project completion.)

    ____ Communications
    ____ Acceptance of IE function in OIG
    ____ Overlapping responsibilities/mandates, etc.
    ____ Coordination in planning inspections and investigations
    ____ Cooperation in conducting joint projects or supporting inspections
    ____ Other (please specify):_____
    ____ No problems

    Please provide examples of the difficulties encountered.

3.   What do you think may be the major source(s) of any problems that exist? (Check as many as apply and indicate degree of difficulty as (1) minor problem; (2) somewhat troublesome; or (3) serious barrier to project completion.)

_____ Unclear role or mandate for inspections and evaluation unit
_____ Lack of upper management support for IE within OIG
_____ Lack of statutory support for IE function
_____ Lack of adequate communications within your OIG
_____ Jurisdictional disputes among OIG units
_____ Poorly defined functions for all OIG units
_____ Other (please specify): _____
_____ No problems

Briefly describe the sources of problems which have been identified by you or your IE staff.

4.   Describe any practices that your IE unit has found to be effective in establishing and maintaining good working relations with other OIG components in your organization.

Relations with Host Agency Officials

5.   In what areas, if any, has your IE unit had difficulty in dealing with program officials in your host department or agency? (Check as many as apply and indicate degree of difficulty as (1) minor problem; (2) somewhat troublesome; or (3) serious barrier to project completion.)

_____ Communications
_____ Understanding the IE role
_____ Acceptance of IE function in OIG
_____ Support in IE planning of future inspections
_____ Cooperation during the performance of IE projects
_____ Acceptance of IE recommendations
_____ Implementation of IE recommendations
_____ Other (please specify)_____
_____ No problems

Please provide specific examples you believe illustrate such difficulties.

6.   Describe any practices that your IE unit has found to be effective in establishing and maintaining good working relations with program officials in your host department of agency.

Relations with Other OIGs

7.　In what areas, if any, has your IE unit had difficulty in dealing with other OIGs? (Check as many as apply and indicate degree of difficulty as (1) minor problem; (2) somewhat troublesome; or (3) serious barrier to project completion.)

_____ Communications
_____ Acceptance of IE function by OIGs with no IE unit
_____ Support to IE planning of future inspections
_____ Cooperation/coordination in joint inspections
_____ Other (please specify):_____
_____ No problems

Please provide examples of difficulties encountered.

8.　Describe any practices your IE staff has determined to be effective in establishing and maintaining good relations with other OIGs.

Relations with Congress

9.　In what areas has your IE staff encountered problems in dealing with Members of Congress of their staffs? (Check as many as apply and indicate degree of difficulty as (1) minor problem; (2) somewhat troublesome; or (3) serious barrier to project completion.)

_____ Communications
_____ Understanding the IE function
_____ Support in IE planning future inspections
_____ Cooperation during the performance of IE projects
_____ Acceptance of IE recommendations
_____ Other (please specify): _____
_____ No problems

Briefly provide examples of specific problems.

10.　Describe any practices that your IE staff has found to be effective in establishing and maintaining good working relations with Congress.

Relations with OMB

11.   In what areas has your IE unit encountered the most difficulty in dealing with OMB or other key entities? (Check as many as apply and indicate degree of difficulty as (1) minor problem; (2) somewhat troublesome; or (3) serious barrier to project completion.)

_____ Communications
_____ Understanding the IE function
_____ Support in IE planning future inspections
_____ Cooperation during the performance of IE projects
_____ Acceptance of IE recommendations
_____ Other (please specify): _____
_____ No problems

Please provide examples of specific problems.

12.   Describe any practices that your IE unit has found to be effective in establishing and maintaining good working relations with OMB.

13.   Do you have any additional comments or information you wish to provide?