



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

The Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Patrick E. McFarland, Inspector General

FROM: Beth F. Cobert, Acting Director 

SUBJECT: Your Memo of July 22, 2015

Thank you very much for your July 22 memo, which raised a number of important issues that I take very seriously. I appreciate that you have offered them in an effort to “clear the air and rebuild a productive relationship” and want to underscore that I too am committed to ensuring a cooperative relationship between us and our respective staffs. I have discussed the importance of this issue with my leadership team and they are fully supportive of rebuilding a productive relationship, and fully understand how that will help us collectively deliver on OPM’s mission.

There are many lessons to be learned as we move forward, and I have done my best to articulate some of them briefly below. This memo proposes an overall approach to the issues that you raised, and also outlines some specific steps that my team has identified to address them.

[REDACTED]

I view the ideas below as a starting point for how we can enhance our working relationship—we would hope to refine them and make them more specific in discussions with you and your team. I look forward to a continued dialog with you to that end, as we work together to confront the challenges OPM faces. The team here, including the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) – working side-by-side with experts from across the Federal government – has been working incredibly hard to enhance the security of our information technology (IT) systems and support those who have been affected by the recent cybersecurity incidents. The recent results of the Cybersecurity Sprint demonstrate the progress that has been made, although everyone recognizes there is more to do.² I have been impressed with the team’s dedication and commitment to this very challenging task.

[REDACTED]

² http://www.performance.gov/sites/default/files/Cybersecurity0_Sprint_Results_report.pdf

One key issue that permeates your memo, [REDACTED] is your frustration about what you perceive to be ineffective communication between your office and the OCIO. We agree that the provision of timely and accurate information is essential to the operation of your office, and wholeheartedly share your desire to find ways to improve that process. With the perspective of one coming into this Agency anew, and based on observations and information gleaned in my first few weeks here, there are several steps I propose to take, and which my team embraces, to improve communication and responsiveness as we move forward:

- 1) In addition to the bi-weekly meetings we have recently established between you and I (IG-Director Meetings), and the weekly meetings we have recently established between your senior staff and mine (Senior Staff Meetings), we believe we would also both benefit from separate, regularly scheduled meetings between your IT team and OCIO (IG-OCIO Meetings). We propose, at the outset, that we would meet once a month, and can adjust the frequency as needed. We would propose leadership involvement in those meetings, whenever possible, as well. Our OCIO team will come prepared to brief you on recent events and progress on ongoing activities, and you will have the opportunity to raise any questions or concerns on a regular basis. Typical agenda items would include, but not be limited to:
 - a. Short term and long-term planning;
 - b. Proposed new projects;
 - c. Updates on ongoing projects, gaps in deliverables, and plans to address any such gaps;
 - d. Identification and mitigation of any technical issues that might develop;
 - e. FISMA audits and compliance.

These IG-OCIO Meetings will provide another forum in which to discuss new projects and afford an opportunity for early input in their development. The process will facilitate a more rapid and consistent information flow to you, and more rapid feedback for us. We will memorialize any issues that arise during the meetings, to help track any needed follow up.

The meetings identified above would supplement the existing process of having your IT team attend the regular bi-weekly Infrastructure Improvement Project Status Meetings held within OCIO, which address project updates and open items relating to the infrastructure improvement project, a subject in which you have indicated a particular interest.

- (2) We believe we would both benefit from identifying a central point of contact in each of our offices who can help facilitate the information flow and tracking of requests. When requests come from multiple people to multiple people at various times, the requests can be hard to track and follow up, and it can be difficult to determine how to prioritize them

to get you what you most need most quickly. We propose that a senior official in the Merit System Accountability and Compliance (MSAC) Office serve as a central point of contact to provide you with additional support in gathering the information you need and to ensure agency and program office leadership maintain real-time visibility into ongoing OPM-OIG interactions.⁴ This approach would facilitate the tracking of requests so we can each quickly determine their status, help identify other offices/individuals who may be able to help provide the information sought, and follow up as needed. The tracking of this information could also help to flag requests that might inadvertently be overlapping, or that might require additional time to complete, and thus facilitate a conversation about those issues. We thus believe that having MSAC fill this role will facilitate both the tracking, follow up and prioritization of your requests.

- (3) [REDACTED] I have asked OCIO for a comprehensive listing of findings identified in your prior audits or reports, along with our progress in addressing them. We believe we would both benefit from sharing those trackers with you, on a regular basis. The trackers are living documents, to be regularly updated, that should provide both of us with a ready mechanism for reviewing and tracking the status of the work, and that will provide a more current view of the status than is furnished by the existing mechanism for reporting findings in the annual FISMA audit reports. We would propose an initial meeting, which would include your office, OCIO and MSAC, for the purpose of reviewing these trackers, in August.

You have also identified, as one of your more significant concerns, a lack of information about the full scope of the IT infrastructure improvement project (Attachment A, Ex 4), [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we agree it makes sense to develop documentation of those critical components to facilitate your – and our own – review and oversight as we move forward. Under any circumstances, recent events and developments would warrant a review and update of the plan, including goals, milestones, near-term deliverables, funds required, and outputs expected. Such a plan should incorporate an agile methodology that is iterative in nature, and that allows us to continue to adapt to evolving needs, circumstances and technologies. As our Strategic IT Plan explains, we will use successful practices and initiatives that allow us to operate, manage, and develop IT solutions with greater accountability and efficiency while supporting innovation; employing an iterative approach to plan, implement, and assess our progress in adopting these successful practices. OCIO will update project documentation and submit a current business plan in

⁴ There may of course be occasions where you do not want to copy the MSAC POC on a particular request. In those circumstances, we would be happy to identify someone in the General Counsel's Office to step in to assist you.

September, and I recommend we review it at our proposed monthly meeting. We welcome your input in this process, to help make sure the project moves forward expeditiously and stays on track to accomplish its critical goals. Your attendance at the various meetings described above will also provide visibility into project planning on a going-forward basis, and provide an opportunity to raise any questions or concerns.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

In addition to the foregoing items, we propose that we work together to implement lessons learned and best practices from OPM’s own experience and from other components of the Executive Branch. To that end, we have reached out to a number of our sister agencies that have analogous IT challenges and projects, in order to better understand the processes and procedures they have in place for ongoing communication with, and input from, their Inspectors General. We have contacted the Federal Chief Information Officer, in order to benefit from any executive-branch-wide best practices they may have identified. We also welcome your suggestions for how to best leverage the expertise of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity & Efficiency Information Technology Committee, to obtain any information technology “best practices and current capabilities.”⁵

I thank you again for your memo, and for your continued commitment to promoting accountability and transparency both within and outside of OPM. I look forward to working together as we confront the challenges ahead and in order to ensure that the OPM continues to deliver on its mission: to develop and honor a world-class workforce for the American people.

⁵ <https://www.ignet.gov/content/information-technology-0>).