

Q&A

Q1. What is a Feasibility Study and what is its purpose?

A feasibility study is a structured process to determine the feasibility of conducting a public-private competition in accordance with the OMB Circular No. A-76, *Performance of Commercial Activities* and USDA *Guidance for Determining the Feasibility of Conducting Competitive Sourcing Competitions*. The Forest Service is using feasibility studies to examine the practicality of public-private cost comparisons before committing to competition. A Feasibility Study includes work activities to study, how best to package the activities, what sequence to study them in, and what options make most sense. Feasibility studies include input from subject matter experts and both the steering committee and oversight committee to help clarify competition or realignment objectives. For each activity under consideration, the feasibility study makes prioritized recommendations and proposes the appropriate methodology and timeline for leadership consideration. Methodologies may include a public-private competition, business process re-engineering or other means of gaining efficiency.

Q2. Who conducted the Aviation Feasibility Study?

The Study team was comprised of four line officers, seven aviation subject matter experts and a contractor, Management Analysis Inc. who brought experience and organization to this effort.

Q3. What happened when the Feasibility Study was completed?

The study team presented the findings and recommendations to the Chief. After reviewing the recommendations of the Feasibility Study Team and the comments and recommendations of Forest Service Leadership Team, the Chief made the decision accepting the study and recommendations.

Q4. What functions within the Aviation program were studied?

The Feasibility Study examined all functions related to the Aviation program including the workforce, Full Time Equivalents (FTE) accomplishing the work in addition to the mix, type and condition of agency owned and contracted aircraft, equipment and facilities. The objective of the study was to determine exactly what the scope of Aviation program is and to determine what areas within that scope would benefit from further review.

Q5. Were all the functions studied separately?

No. Given the inter-related nature of much of the work, the study team grouped the functions into six basic business areas:

- Aerial Delivery of Firefighters – This area includes the various methods to transport Helitack and Smokejumpers to the fire scene and agency owned bases and facilities.
- Aerial Detection and Command and Control – This includes the use of ASM, ATGS, Leadplanes and Infrared technology.
- Aerial Fire Suppression (Airtankers and Large Helicopters) – This area includes the use of airtankers and helitankers to provide large volume aerial delivery of fire retardants or suppressants on forest and range fires.

- Aerial Resource Support – This business area includes support to the overall Forest Service mission to maintain the forest health, nation’s water supply, research and development, recreation areas, timber resources etc.
- Aviation Management and Quality Assurance – This includes the control and monitoring of all contract aviation services.
- Aviation Program Development – This area includes obtaining and maintaining effective aviation capabilities to complement ground firefighter capabilities throughout the country.

Q6. How many people work in these areas?

The Study Team sent out a series of data calls to identify the FTEs. It’s important to remember that the business function analysis looks at how many FTEs do the work after you add up 5% of one person’s time, 75% of another person’s time, and 50% of another person’s time and so on. For example, in the Aviation Program Unit business area, 268 total permanent and temporary personnel are involved in the work but the percentages of their time dedicated to Aviation Program Development adds up to 49 FTEs.

Q7. What are the specific studies or other recommendations? When do they start?

The Aviation Feasibility Study recommendations that were accepted by the Chief include key decisions that will start immediately. Before making a decision to undertake any public-private competitive sourcing competitions, the Chief has directed that important studies be completed to provide information on current efficiencies and needed improvements so the Forest Service can clearly identify what functions may benefit from further reorganizing or competition. The Aerial Delivered Firefighter (ADFF) update, the Aviation Business Case Analysis (also called Exhibit 300), and the aviation workforce analysis are already underway and are to be completed for review in six months.

Business Process Reengineering planning will begin immediately and include centralizing management functions and program administration, consolidations of helicopter rappel training and creating a national platform contract for the Air Tactical Group Supervisor Function. The complete list is included in enclosure 1 located at www.fs.fed.us/fire.

Q8. What is Business Process Reengineering?

Business process reengineering (BPR) is another tool that can be used to redesign business processes to bring about improvements in efficiency and effectiveness, particularly when improved policies and procedures are needed. BPR is a rigorous process and can be as long and complex as a competitive sourcing study, but it does not include a competition between the government and the private sector. Forest Service leadership chose BPR as the method to guide the restructuring and reorganization of Human Resources and Budget and Finance programs.

Q9. What is Competitive Sourcing or OMB Circular A-76?

Competitive sourcing is the structured process by which the federal government determines whether functions described as “commercial in nature” are best provided by the private sector, by government personnel or by another agency through a fee-for-service agreement. The [OMB Circular No. A-76](#) sets the policies and procedures that executive agencies must use to

identify commercial activities and to perform commercial activity competitions, also referred to as “public-private competitions” or “competitive sourcing”.

Q10. Are Forest Service Aviation and Other Airborne Activities jobs at risk?

Possibly. As with any business study where streamlining and improved efficiencies are the goals, organizational restructuring may eventually occur. Restructuring would result in changes to the way the agency is currently performing Aviation work but it is much too early in the process to make any predictions as to what changes will occur and how individual positions might be impacted.

Q11. When will the actual competitions for the Aviation functions start and how long will it take?

The Chief’s current decision only calls for proceeding in the Aviation areas identified as benefiting from BPR, and completing the ongoing studies. The BPR effort will take approximately 12 months to complete and the ongoing studies will be completed in six months. At that time, the Chief and Forest Service Leadership will examine the results of the Studies and a review the Feasibility Recommendations to determine if any further reengineering is warranted or if competitions should be initiated for certain Aviation program areas. Any actions based on the Chief’s decision will be implemented and discussed at the time she releases her decision.

Q12. Is competitive sourcing being applied throughout the Forest Service, or only to specific work areas?

 activities in the Forest Service have been evaluated as to whether they are “inherently governmental” or commercial as part of FAIR Act Inventory. Based on that inventory, the Green Plan sets forth a timeline to study all commercial activities for potential public-private competition. An oversight team of NLT members has been charged to ensure that these studies are fair, consistent, and effective. A complete listing of Forest Service functions that have been studied (either A-76 or BPR) as well as draft plans for future Feasibility Studies is found in the Forest Service Green Plan available to Forest Service employees on the CSPO Website at <http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/pma/main/index.htm>

Q13. Since many of these elements work in an interagency environment, did the study include DOI aviation functions?

No, DOI is not prepared to study such functions as helitack or smokejumpers and did not directly participate in the Aviation Feasibility study. The DOI Office of Wildland Fire Coordination assisted with data collection as requested and will cooperate in the future. The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior are working together in 2007 on the Feasibility studies for the dispatch and training functions.

Q14. Who decided that the aviation functions were commercial activities?

Generally, commercial activities are recurring services that could be performed by the private sector. An "inherently governmental function" is a function that is so intimately related to the public interest as to mandate performance by government employees. These functions include those activities that require either the exercise of discretion in applying government authority

or the making of value judgments in making decisions for the government. Governmental functions normally fall into two categories: (1) the act of governing, i.e., the discretionary exercise of government authority, and (2) monetary transactions and entitlements. Decisions as to which functions are commercial are based upon these definitions. Many government activities are readily available in the private sector and are clearly commercial in nature.

The Office of Management and Budget requires that all agencies annually submit a complete inventory of all government personnel that perform commercial activities, reported by full-time equivalents (FTE), in accordance with the Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998 (FAIR Act). The revisions to OMB Circular No. A-76 of May 29, 2003 added the requirement that each agency also submit an inventory of inherently governmental activities performed by government personnel. The Forest Service FAIR Act inventory forms the basis for assessing which commercial FTEs may be suitable for an efficiency study.

Q15. What is the goal of Competitive Sourcing?

The Forest Service is committed to using competitive sourcing as a management tool to increase performance and decrease costs associated with commercial activities. The agency's past efforts have demonstrated both where competitive sourcing can be most effective and where other improvement methods are better suited to maximize results. Feasibility studies will help enable appropriate decisions in this regard.

Q16. Where can I learn more about the Competitive Sourcing process?

Information on competitive sourcing is available for Forest Service employees only at the following website: <http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/pma/main/index.htm>. As the Feasibility Study recommendations move forward, a link will be placed on this site to take employees to information specific to the study. In addition, employees will be kept informed through periodic written updates. Outside the Forest Service, information is available at www.fs.fed.us/fire.

Q17: Why aren't Feasibility Study Reports being posted to the web?

Although the non-disclosure provisions of the Circular are not new, clarification of how the requirements apply to feasibility studies is necessary. When a feasibility study is performed in strict accordance with USDA OCFO direction, the study includes the bulk of the preplanning process as outlined in OMB Circular A-76. If the preplanning information were available exclusively to a potential bidder, including the agency MEO, it could give that bidder an unfair advantage. For that reason, the feasibility study/preplanning process is protected under non-disclosure and feasibility studies will no longer be distributed and posted to the web.