

National Academy of Public Administration

Study Summary

USDA Farm Production and Conservation Business Center

Inventory of Services, Recommendations for an Electronic Shared Services Catalog, and Development of Service-Level Agreements



Project Overview

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Production and Conservation Business Center (FPAC-BC) provides services to employees and customers across the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Risk Management Agency (RMA). The services provided by the FPAC-BC were designed to improve operations and efficiencies within USDA and bolster support for America's farmers, ranchers, and foresters. The FPAC-BC became operational in October 2018 and has undergone some minor structural changes to improve output.

FPAC-BC engaged the National Academy of Public Administration to develop an enterprise-wide Service Level Agreement (SLA) framework for FPAC-BC Divisions and Customer Agencies and to provide recommendations on an effective electronic service catalog. The study was conducted from September 2022 – 2023. As a part of this study, the Academy Study Team conducted a twelve-month analytical assessment of FPAC-BC's strategic, operational, and administrative functions to articulate the services FPAC-BC provides and worked with FPAC-BC Divisions to confirm the accuracy of the inventory of services, validate categories of service delivery, and to identify which services were to be included in Division SLAs.

The SLA framework was developed based on existing USDA SLAs and federal best practices. The Study Team worked with the FPAC-BC Divisions, the Office of the Chief Operating Officer, and FPAC Customer Agencies to tailor the enterprise-wide template to the needs of each Division and Agency. The SLA framework provides standardized terms, definitions, policies, and processes for like services across FPAC, while recognizing unique requirements for specific services/Customer Agencies. The SLA establishes clear expectations and targets for service delivery to ensure mutual accountability and provides clarity on roles, responsibilities, and authorities to all FPAC BC and customer agency staff involved with service delivery to enhance transparency. The SLA also includes appropriate performance indicators to ensure quality of service and reinforce a customer service culture. Finally, the enterprise-wide SLA framework incorporates mechanisms to enhance accountability and governance and offers a forum for divisions and Customers to engage.

Before the close of the study, the Academy Team worked with FPAC-BC to develop a plan for ongoing FPAC-BC service delivery improvements to the FPAC mission area. This included developing a comprehensive communications strategy, a timetable for SLA discussions and implementation, as well as providing key action steps for FPAC to undertake over the next 24 months.

Deliverables

I. Develop Inventory of Current Services

The Study Team created an inventory of services drawing from the Unified Shared Services Management (USSM) framework, FPAC documents, and online sources such as myFPAC and internal dashboards.

II. Recommendations for an Electronic Shared Service Catalog

The Study Team interviewed subject matter experts to identify best practices for the design and interface of electronic service catalogs within existing online platforms. The Study Team also engaged with FPAC-BC employees to understand their needs and preferences for an electronic shared service catalog.

III. Create SLAs for FPAC-BC Catalog of Shared Services

The Study Team developed an enterprise-wide SLA template based on existing USDA SLAs and federal guidance. The Study Team worked with the FPAC-BC Divisions, FPAC Customer Agencies (RMA, NRCS, and FSA), and the FPAC-BC Office of the Chief Operating Officer to tailor the enterprise-wide template to the needs of each Division. The Study Team worked with 13 FPAC-BC Divisions to develop SLAs that were ready for customer discussions.

Expert Advisory Group

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