

**USDA Forest Service  
Bureau of Land Management**

# **Service First Program**

**Focus Group Report**

**Managers and Employees  
April 2001**

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## **Report Summary**

# Project Overview and Objectives

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- **Project Objectives**

- To investigate whether the Service First program has been successful and if any changes are needed.
- To learn how the program influences customer service.
- To learn how the program influences employees' personal work capabilities.

- **Methodology**

- Focus groups were organized in Lakeview, Oregon, and Canon City, Colorado. Four focus groups occurred in each location: one with managers from both agencies, one with BLM employees, one with Forest Service employees, and one with stakeholders.
- The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management recruited participants from among the managers, employees, and stakeholders involved in the Service First program.
- Pacific Consulting Group (PCG) conducted the Oregon focus groups on March 21st and March 22nd, 2001, and the Colorado focus groups on April 3rd and April 4th, 2001.
- This report reflects PCG's analysis of the managers' and employees' discussions. The stakeholders' discussions will be presented in a separate report.

# Report Highlights

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- **Managers and employees from both the BLM and the Forest Service agree that Service First has improved the service they provide to external customers.**
  - By cutting down on multiple contacts and multiple permitting, service is more timely and efficient.
  - Combined, the two agencies have more resources which they use to serve their customers better. However, differing laws, regulations, and policies across the two agencies sometimes have a negative effect on both external and internal customers.
  - The two agencies have different ways of doing the same things, which is frustrating, but participants have learned how to use the two separate systems to their advantage.
- **Service to internal customers often is more difficult to provide.**
  - Employees are overwhelmed with the increased workload (not seen by all as a direct result of Service First).
  - Differences in funding cycles between the two agencies create budgeting and staffing problems.
  - BLM and Forest Service computer systems are incompatible, and their accounting systems differ greatly, which has a negative impact on employees' work environment and on the service they provide their customers.
- **Managers and employees involved in Service First genuinely enjoy working together.**
  - Many of them collaborated long before the formal establishment of Service First.
  - Managers feel that their hiring options have expanded, since they now have a larger pool of qualified people from which to choose.
  - All participants feel that this interagency experience is advantageous for their careers.
- **However, while, people work well together at the local level, many of their collaborative efforts are blocked by upper management. A widespread feeling exists that the state, regional, and national offices are not promoting the Service First concept.**
- **Participants expressed concerns about how Service First and collaboration has affected their work environment.**
  - Employee policies and pay grades are different between the two organizations, which leads to resentment.
  - Cultural differences between the agencies cause problems, especially higher up.
  - Different practices and procedures regarding budgeting, accounting, and other financial issues cause many administrative problems.
  - Employees don't like the physical separation between themselves and their supervisors. They feel they don't have enough access to managers from the other agency.

# Summary of Recommendations

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- **All participants feel that, conceptually, the Service First program is heading in the right direction. However, several barriers can prevent successful implementation. These issues must be addressed for Service First to succeed.**
  - **Involve employees in the planning and do not force collaboration**
    - It's extremely important to talk to employees and listen to their concerns.
    - Don't impose too much structure or too many expectations from above. Service First is most effective when the local employees have the freedom to do what they think is best for their customers and when they're allowed to proceed at their own pace.
    - Service First should be spread out to other offices, but it should not be driven by headquarters in Washington, D.C.
    - If you try to micromanage Service First, the program will not be a success.
  - **Managers and higher-ups need to support the idea of collaboration**
    - In order to get to the point where customers can do "one-stop shopping," state and regional levels need to show more support for properly instituting the program.
    - There needs to be more support from upper management. Most people at the local level are interested in collaborating with the other agency, but they feel that upper management blocks many of their efforts.
  - **Collocation and the layout of a shared building is important**
    - The physical space in which the employees work drives what they do. Collocation is an important step toward collaboration and full integration.
    - Disperse BLM and Forest Service offices within shared buildings. In most instances, office space is still divided by the two agencies.
  - **Each agency should maintain its own identity**
    - Managers felt strongly about maintaining each agency's identity. Since each agency has an external identity to their customers, it's important not to blend them to the point where there's no distinction. In contrast, some employees from both agencies supported the formation of a single agency.
    - When referring to Service First, address both agencies equally. Be sure to address employees' collocation concerns. (This is more of an issue for employees of the BLM, whose field operations are more centralized than the Forest Service.)
  - **Simplify and standardize the systems and policies of the two agencies**
    - Standardize joint funding; make more resources available for shared activities.
    - Redesign customer handouts, maps, forms, etc., to a more user-friendly format (i.e., one page format).

## **Respondent Profiles**

- **Managers**
- **Employees**

# Managers

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- The Oregon managers focus group consisted of eight participants. Of these eight participants, five were employed by the BLM, two were employed by the Forest Service, and one was employed by both agencies.
- The Colorado managers focus group consisted of three participants, two from the BLM and one from the Forest Service.
- All of these participants have had past experience working with the other agency or have been involved with interagency projects prior to the initiation of Service First.



# Employees

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- In each location, one focus group consisted of Forest Service employees, and one consisted of BLM employees.
- In Oregon, each employee focus group consisted of twelve participants. In Colorado, the BLM focus group consisted of eleven participants, while the Forest Service focus group consisted of six participants.
- Many of the participants have had past experience working for each agency individually.

## **Experience of Service First**

- **Serving Customers**
- **Personal Experience of the Work Environment**

# Summary of Serving Customers

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- **Participants were asked to compare their experiences with serving customers in the joint office to their experience in separate Forest Service and BLM offices.**
  - Managers and employees of both agencies agree that, in general, service to external customers has improved as a result of the Service First program. However, service to internal customers has deteriorated due to decreased budgets and increased workloads, which overwhelm employees.
  - Participants find the differences between the two agencies to be frustrating, but understanding and knowing how to take advantage of those differences enables them to provide better service to their customers. The collaboration between the two agencies provides greater flexibility in how employees perform their jobs.
  - Many participants indicated that they had been collaborating with one or both agencies even before the establishment of the Service First program. All participants agree that collocation is a critical step that, if implemented, will lead to successful implementation of the Service First program. They feel that the Service First program is the right way to move forward in order to meet customers' needs.

# Serving Customers: Managers

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- **Managers from both agencies have seen an improvement in the service they provide to their external customers. They believe there are benefits in working in an interagency environment.**
  - The integration of the two agencies' services has led to more positive customer feedback.
  - Participants feel that collaboration between the two agencies has improved external customer service since it allows customers to do “one-stop shopping” and get Forest Service- or BLM-specific information from either agency. Collocation increases efficiency, enabling the agencies to provide better and more timely service to their external customers.
- **Managers recognize the difficulties in providing service to both external and internal customers.**
  - Due to increased workloads, managers often find themselves unable to provide much direction for the employees under their supervision, especially interagency employees. This lack of direction and guidance results in reduced customer service, particularly for internal customers.
  - Differences in regulations and policies between the two agencies make it difficult to provide service to customers. Agency-different funding cycles and procedures magnify these problems. (Many of these problems can only be solved by the upper management in the regional or national levels.) However, they have managed to work around the difficulties by learning how the agencies differ and educating customers about those differences.
  - The two agencies sometimes interpret the same laws in different ways, creating another difficulty. This stems from differences in agency cultures and histories. Managers feel that such differences in agency cultures impact customer service. However, participants warned against trying to erase all agency differences because the two agencies have specific corporate images, and, to maintain clarity for the customers, it is important to preserve those images (e.g., through the continued use of agency-specific uniforms and vehicles).

# Managers' Positive Comments about Serving Customers

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- “The greatest benefit in working with interagency projects is using the best of both worlds and finding out new ways to do things. Instead of saying, ‘We’ve never done it that way,’ we say, ‘Let’s see how we can do it.’”
- “It’s been great to have other people of expertise in the office, because I see us collaborating all the time.”
- “There were a lot of fears as far as what Service First might do to morale. We met those straight on, and most of those issues turned into non-issues.”
- “Where we’ve integrated services, the efficiency and the feedback, both internal and external, has improved. It’s really been wonderful.”
- “Service First has resulted in better understanding between the two agencies of why there are differences.”
- “Service First has made it easier for us to do the things we were trying to get done anyway.”
- “Service First brought attention to what we were already doing.”
- “I don’t think I’ve seen any negative comment cards come in.”
- “Service First helps us provide a better message – a more unified and easily understood message – to the public.”
- “The interagency program has fostered networking and relationships with people in other agencies, which has improved the customer service we provide to the people who visit our offices.”
- “I fully support Service First when it improves customer service or increases efficiency. I see a lot of that happening because of the way in which we’re implementing it in this office. It makes sense for us to share a building so there is one-stop shopping, and our customers are then better served – they only have to contact or visit one place to get answers.”
- “There’s improved efficiency when both agencies are in the same office. We’re getting together and working together on more of a landscape basis, trying to look at the big picture and not stopping at the imaginary boundary.”
- “Being collocated makes it easier for the customers to be able to come in here and know that they may be able to get all their business done.”
- “Customers recognize the corporate image: the uniform, the vehicles. We need to have a presence on the ground and we need to be recognized. I push the uniform as a way to do that.”

# Managers' Suggestions for Improvement about Serving Customers

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- “We have seen a decline in internal customer service; we attribute that to greater workload. We never thought of it as being an effect of Service First.”
- “Having worked in the BLM, and then going to an interagency position in that same job title, I found that there’s just not enough of me to go around. As an interagency employee, my greatest frustration is that I’m not able to provide the level of service to which I’ve been accustomed. As a result, our internal customers have suffered.”
- “It’s a personal benchmark for people to give good service internally and when you’re no longer able to do that, – when you can’t give the kind of service you’re used to – it’s hard on the employees.”
- “It changes the morale when a person isn’t able to accomplish his expectations in a job.”
- “The higher up you go in the hierarchy of either agency, the more territorial it becomes.”
- “Some of our customers are not served better, because they used to go to BLM and if they couldn’t get a permit, for whatever reason, then they were able to go to a second choice: Forest Service.”
- “There are things that are tied to delegation of authority, or maybe even rooted in law, that are going to prevent us from doing all of what we imagined we could do in order to be efficient and effective. But a lot of it is our own perception that we can’t do it because there’s no way to track it. It’s going to take strong support from the chain of command to change this perception. People need to be reassured that interagency collaboration is the right way to do business; it’s the right way to provide what the customer is looking for, and it’s an efficient and cost-saving measure for the agencies.”
- “When we were trying to come up with a single permit for grazing permittees, the attorneys were the ones who stopped that effort because there were some issues relating to laws.”
- “We’ve got to have the support from upper management to challenge those policies and loosen up on the policies – not the laws and the regulations. It’s the policies and our normal operating procedures that stop things lower in the chain of command.”

# Serving Customers: Employees

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- **Employees from both agencies have also seen an improvement in the service they provide to their external customers.**
  - Participants enjoy having the option of using both BLM and Forest Service methods to serve their customers. They also appreciate being able to direct their customers to the proper person in the proper agency.
- **All employees stress the importance of compatibility in interagency communications, including telecommunications, computer systems and software, and fire radios.**
- **Employees have differing opinions about the ideal level of collaboration.**
  - Employees from Oregon feel that they would be able to serve their customers better if the BLM and the Forest Service were combined into a single agency.
  - Employees from Colorado generally feel that the current balance between integration and separation is appropriate.
- **Employees agree that, conceptually, one-step shopping is the right way to go. Service First is enhancing the movement in that direction, but is doing so more slowly than the ideal. This is due to differing regulations and policies, and to the territorial tendencies of some individuals.**

# Employees' Positive Comments about Serving Customers

- “Fire is the most collaborative group. We’ve made fairly good strides in both our internal and external customer service. We’ve come a long way, but we have a lot more areas that we haven’t covered. There’s a lot more integration that needs to happen, and I think we’ll see it in the future, with the management that we have at this point.”
- “When external customers come in to get clarification on some issue or try to find out something about the program, the fire shop that’s in this office is so integrated that any one person could answer questions on either side. In that way, we’ve served our external customers better.”
- “As for the internal customers, one thing that I’ve noticed is that I have good relationships with the folks over there and it’s been wonderful. Now they’ll give us data that they wouldn’t have in the past because it’s Service First – they honestly want to work with us.”
- “You’re taking the fun out of doing the work if you tell me to do it all the BLM way or all the Forest Service way. It doesn’t matter which agency you’re affiliated with; they’ve both got their drawbacks. But it seems like if one has a drawback, the other one’s got a positive. So that’s the joy of doing the job: figuring out the best and most efficient way to get things done.”
- “We have a unique situation of being collocated with employees working essentially for both agencies. They can use whatever rule set is most convenient for them.”
- “We’re supposed to use the same style signs across agency boundaries. That’s a good step forward; once the public understands and recognizes those signs, it’ll be easier for them to use them when they cross the boundaries.”
- “In Safety and Health, the part that’s really made a difference is in sharing the cost of training. We can train more employees from both agencies. We also share trainers. There were Fish and Wildlife people at the training as well.”
- “How does this benefit our external folks? It benefits them a lot, but they’re intangible concepts. We need to be working together and looking at landscapes. Those concepts do benefit the public because they allow us to do things across boundaries and look at larger areas. You can’t really measure that. If Service First is working really well, you can interview all the customers you want, and they’re not really going to understand, because it’s transparent to them.”
- “Customers love it. Everything’s consolidated right here, and we can answer the questions for all the agencies. I enjoy it myself. I’ve learned so much from the different agencies.”



# Employees' Suggestions for Improvement about Serving Customers

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- “Purchasing is still two separate entities. There are too many different authorities.”
- “The office needs to be set up in either functional or working groups. It’s nice to be able to have both sides of the fence sitting in the same group, because if we need to have a meeting, we just walk in and sit around a table, and we can solve issues or conflicts in a matter of minutes. If they did the same thing throughout the office, you would see a lot more efficiency.”
- “The money has been a real disparity. If the BLM wants something, they’ve got the money. In the Forest Service, things are just falling apart before anybody gets rid of anything.”
- “It’s such a pain to move money across agency lines, we just keep a running list. At the end, we hope we balance.”
- “The problem isn’t what we can do here, the problem is those laws that have to be changed at some other level. We can’t do anything about them.”
- “It makes my job difficult down at this level when you can’t get your higher-up supervisors to agree on what to do. We have so much Forest Service and BLM land mixed in together, that it would save a lot of money and make sense if we all had one direction. This cooperation needs to start at the top.”
- “I think we may have lost ground going from an informal way of doing it to a more formal way.”
- “To serve the customers as best we can, we have to look at how we manage our resources, including our human resources. If you don’t have happy human resources in the office, the customer is going to get the short end of the stick.”
- “There are some advantages to having two systems, but sometimes there are two bureaucratic mazes and you may be familiar with one and not be able to find your way through the other. There is an added level of complexity dealing with two agencies that do not do things quite the same way.”
- “At the front desk, we have two different agency collection systems and we can’t mix money. Different computer systems and different paper systems. It would be much more efficient and easier for employees to work in either a combined system of some sort, or one system or the other.”
- “It’s the level of bureaucracy above us, and the people making decisions up there who won’t talk to each other and come to a decision – they’ve lost contact with the ground and don’t recognize the safety issues involved in the BLM and the Forest Service having incompatible fire radio systems.”
- “If many of the obstacles – the payments, the forms – could be the same, those kinds of things can save time and can end up saving the customer time, but we aren’t seeing that. I don’t think we are saving the customer time right now.”

# Summary of Personal Experience of the Work Environment

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- **Participants were asked whether they felt comfortable working with the other agency.**
  - Managers are positive about their interagency experiences. Employees from both agencies also feel comfortable with the other agency, after experiencing an initial period of discomfort.
  - All participants express dissatisfaction with the differing payroll systems, pay grades, and vacation policies of the two agencies. They agree that such disparities can lead to resentment.
  - Participants express concern about the different budget cycles and practices of the two agencies.
  - Participants agree that differences in agency cultures and histories affect the work environment.
- **Participants were asked how the collaboration has affected their work environment, work relationships, and relationships with supervisors from the other agency.**
  - Managers and employees of both agencies feel that interagency experience is beneficial to their future careers.
  - Participants see both positive and negative aspects to working with, or working as, a supervisor from the other agency. Interagency supervisors are often less available to their employees, due to their increased workload and physical separation.
  - Participants also mentioned that the Service First program has encouraged collaboration with other agencies, such as the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

# Personal Experience: Managers

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- **Managers from both agencies feel that collaboration and collocation has enriched their personal work experiences.**
  - Participants feel that working together has given them more freedom to do what they think is right. They enjoy not being a pilot program, and not having to establish specific timelines and goals and officially report what they do.
  - Participants realize that some agency members will not accept collaboration, and that sometimes it takes the retirement of some people to get things moving. Managers stress the necessity of maintaining the pride, individuality, and integrity of the separate agencies. They feel that the only way to ensure that they remain separate agencies is to cooperate.
- **Managers believe that interagency collaboration is beneficial in terms of work relationships and career advancement.**
  - Managers appreciate the increased pool of employees from which to hire. Collaboration between the two agencies has brought in more qualified people. When hiring new employees to the joint office, managers generally disregard what agency the employee is originally from.
  - Difficulties arise in supervisory relationships when managers forget to use the proper agency's procedures and policies for each employee.

# Managers' Positive Comments about Personal Experience

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- “The Service First program seems to have gathered a group of people who are risk takers, innovators, and who want to be creative. That is pretty exciting.”
- “We have a green light and we’re able to try a lot of things. Sometimes they work and when they don’t, you back off and try something else. That’s one advantage of not being a pilot program, because nobody’s looking over your shoulder. You don’t have to report units, you can just be creative. We have had pretty free rein, and that’s important for things like this to work.”
- “Now the BLM and the Forest Service are not only sharing the same office, we’re sharing staff, we’re sharing activity rooms, training, potlucks, goody-days....”
- “After working with both agencies, to go back to working singularly would be a less rich experience. It’s a richer experience to have the whole horizon of people and issues and programs.”
- “Personnel issues are personnel issues, natural resource issues are natural resource issues, and it doesn’t make any difference if they occurred in the sagebrush or the pines.”
- “In terms of opportunities for promotions, the interagency experience is more of a benefit than a negative.”
- “I’ve worked on a couple selection panels, and having interagency experience was a key factor in terms of opportunities for promotions.”

## Managers' Suggestions for Improvement about Personal Experience

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- “It’s important to keep the pride of the separate agencies. We can each say to the other, ‘Hey, we do different jobs, and let’s see how we can work together to make both of our jobs better.’ That needs to come from the management.”
- “Those people at the front desk have to absolutely glow of Service First and customer service, because the impression that customers walk away with is going to be what they get from those people and that up-front appearance of the office.”
- “You have to be very careful about how you talk about Service First so as not to give the impression to one set of employees that the other agency is gobbling them up. When the Forest Service and the BLM started getting together, the feeling was that the Forest Service was the 800-pound gorilla. Management stopped that.”
- “We aren’t getting management support from higher up and so it discourages folks at our field office level.”
- “It’s important that we try to maximize our efforts to work together, but it’s also important to maintain the integrity and the values of both agencies’ cultures. There are different ways to do that. Certainly, continuing to use the different uniforms is one way to do it.”
- “My predecessor on the Forest Service side was probably able to give the employees a lot more one-on-one direction and be a little more involved with them. I have been able to have one meeting with them in two years, so I think they do suffer from lack of direction.”
- “Supervisory relationships can be difficult because you need to remember to use that agency’s process for that employee.”

# Personal Experience: Employees

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- **Employees from both agencies see interagency collaboration as a positive situation, but express certain concerns and frustrations.**
  - Participants state that they felt apprehensive about moving into a joint agency office, but now they generally enjoy working together. They appreciate the increased number of problem solving options that collocation has given them.
  - Forest Service employees stress the importance of emphasizing the agencies' common purpose while downplaying agency distinctions. They sensed some rivalry between the two agencies when they were first collocated.
  - BLM employees see Service First as a positive step, but they have fears about collocation and they tend to be less satisfied with the current implementation of the program. Since the BLM is more locally centralized, employees worry about being divided up among the more numerous Forest Service field offices. They often feel outnumbered by the Forest Service employees.
  - Many employees cite the differences in laws, regulations, and policies as their greatest frustrations with Service First. They feel that true collaboration and integration are halted by differing laws or differing interpretations of the same laws, making their work much more difficult.
  - In contrast to the managers, all of whom stress the importance of maintaining agency integrity, some of the employees from both agencies express a desire for the establishment of a single land management agency.
- **Employees feel that collocation and collaboration have had positive effects on their work environment, but have also caused difficulties in some work relationships.**
  - All employees are conscious of the pay grade disparity between the two agencies.
  - Forest Service employees tend to feel like they are the “have-nots” compared with the BLM, but they appreciate being able to take advantage of the BLM's looser restrictions and bigger budget.
  - BLM employees feel that their agency is often forced to put up more than its fair share of funding for Service First.
  - One participant said that her relationship with her interagency supervisor has been beneficial, allowing her more flexibility and freedom. Other participants, however, are frustrated because they find it difficult to talk with their supervisors, whom they view as being too busy.

# Employees' Positive Comments about Personal Experience

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- “Time takes care of any discomfort about working interagency. Eventually, you don’t think of which agency it belongs to, you just think this is what I need to do. I don’t think of them as different agencies anymore, it’s just how the system needs to be done.”
- “It was advantageous to have worked for each agency separately and then be put in this collocation thing, because I have an understanding of both structures so I can help external customers when they come in, and internal customers as well.”
- “Overall it’s for the good of the land. I was so excited in the beginning because we really all do the same thing, so why do we have these two separate agencies anyway?”
- “I enjoy working with the other agency. It’s so much easier and things seem like they work a lot better. So I’m comfortable with working with the other agency.”
- “I see us working more closely with other agencies as well. That concept has caught on. There are a lot of benefits to working with the other agencies.”
- “I’d never go back to single agency fire management responsibility. There’s so much work to be done, we can’t do it on our own, we have to have help.”
- “Collaboration is beneficial for me, because if I have a certain problem, I have several different ways or options of looking at solving that problem, and if I can’t get it down one avenue I switch hats and I go down the next one and I can usually get it done.”
- “One of the reasons we have a little better blending and a little better cooperation is because we are physically in the same place.”
- “I think career advancement opportunities are greater for people who are coming out of this work situation.”
- “For me it’s been beneficial to have a supervisor from the other agency because where the BLM is looser on some things, we generally go with the looser interpretation. Sometimes it’s been really hard in that the supervisor doesn’t understand exactly what it is we do, but there’s positives to that too: he or she leaves you alone.”
- “Before we moved over, I was a little apprehensive, but I like it now that we’ve come over. It wasn’t as scary as I thought it would be.”
- “We couldn’t do Service First to the degree that we’re doing it, if we weren’t in the same building. Service First is the most effective when you’re collocated. That doesn’t necessarily mean the whole district; it could mean just a few employees working in the other office.”

# Employees' Suggestions for Improvement about Personal Experience

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- “It seems like it’s more comfortable for us at the lower level to work together than it is for the people at the state office and regional office.”
- “I was gung-ho right from the start. My excitement of being collocated has diminished some since the beginning, because they do things so much differently that we have difficulty doing things together sometimes.”
- “It’s not that my BLM supervisor is not approachable, it’s just that I don’t see her just going over and talking about her day with the Forest Service employees the way she does with the BLM employees.”
- “We have an interagency supervisor. I feel she is so busy, and it’s not that she doesn’t do her job, because she is swamped. She has so much responsibility on both sides, there is no way she could oversee both sides efficiently. I don’t need a bunch of supervision, but when I need to talk to her, there’s not that opportunity because she is so overwhelmed with everything she has to do.”
- “I’m dedicated to my job, but I’m not dedicated to the point where I want to spend every weekend here doing my job because they don’t want to bring in additional help. I have a family that I feel is number one in my life.”
- “We all still do identify with one or the other agency, because we have to follow different rules for each. You can’t really achieve a blend when you have to always be shifting your brain into one agency or the other to complete that task.”
- “When it first started it was pure hell. It took six to eight months to prove myself to the BLM.”
- “There’s been a lot of hostility in this building. A lot of it is agency pride, but a big part of it is fear of lost jobs. Because as soon as you start combining responsibilities, immediately people jump to the idea that you can do it with less people, you just have a bigger area of responsibility, so some people’s jobs grow enormously to the point where they can’t handle it, and other people lose their jobs.”
- “There’s possibly some opportunities for promotion, but with lower levels of turnover, those opportunities are minimized. And in many cases, we have simply eliminated positions and moved the responsibility across the aisle, so there is no position for someone else to move up into. That’s in keeping with declining budgets, but it doesn’t exactly give employees extra opportunities.”
- “Some of the difficulties and struggles that we have are primarily related to things that exist at the departmental level. Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior – we’ve got two separate sets of manuals, we’ve got two separate sets of regulations, policies, directives. Those things make it difficult at times for us to do our jobs.”
- “We are treating different groups differently because we have to. It’s policy. I think the employees are aware of that, and it’s especially frustrating for them. They may be doing the exact same work, but still the frustrations are the fact that there are different requirements for experience and certification.”



## Employees' Suggestions for Improvement about Personal Experience, cont.

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- “The only problem I’ve experienced is lip service: saying ‘Service First,’ but then the attitude isn’t about collaboration in many places.”
- “What we have the most problems with in Service First is the administrative part, because of the differing rules and regulations.”
- “The thing that does not work smoothly is the administration part. When you start handling money and working with national finance and the different agencies and accountability, that’s where the majority of our problems lie.”
- “It works really well to be collocated, but the delegation of authority has been our problem. We’ve taken very busy managers and given them our agency’s problems, therefore our problems don’t get the attention they need. Lack of management’s attention to the day-to-day things is what’s really caused the external things to suffer. That’s a workload problem.”
- “Because of the rules, regulations, and laws, and the acts that put the agencies together, under BLM on some things a certain percentage of the money comes back to the county/state office; under the Forest Service it may not, or it’s a different percentage rate. So it gets really confusing on the financial side.”
- “Inconsistencies with upper-level management affects the lower levels. It says that you want us to do things, but then when we do them and it goes up the ladder, you whack it. So where’s the support for Service First, where’s the support for what we feel is right?”
- “This points to the real issue of the fact that there are problems with the regulations and laws between the two agencies. If we’re going to do something with Service First, you can’t just work at the field level and think that you’re going to make it happen. You can say that we have flexibility to do this, but we actually don’t have that flexibility when it gets to a certain point. The support’s gone and there’s an unwillingness to change the laws. But there has to be some effort to identify these problems, and a mechanism to move them up through the system to get to where we say, ‘Here’s the hurdle, and somebody needs to work on those things.’”
- “With Service First, you’ve got two levels it has to work on. It has to work on the person-to-person basis, but we also have to get the rules changed on the top. We need to fix the way they do business with computer systems and with payments.”
- “There are some problems as you go up the ladder, and I attribute that to poor, or lack of, management direction.”
- “Differing laws, regulations, and policies are the things we should identify, and then pass them on up the chain for somebody to deal with.”
- “You can cooperate quite a bit and you can blend a little bit, but there is an upper limit to that. It only goes so far and you simply can not mix any further, unless the very top of the organization is fused together and we start actually doing everything the same way.”

## **Recommendations for Service First**

- **Advice for Setting Up Service First**
- **Most Important Improvement for Service First**

# Overcoming Potential Barriers

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- **Participants discussed potential barriers that other offices may face, and how to overcome those barriers.**
  - **While support for the program needs to come from the top, too much direct national involvement would be counterproductive.**
    - Administration from the top down would not work well. Try to keep program decisions at the local level; Service First will work better that way.
    - Over-administration could be a problem; try to back-off a little.
  - **Collocation is an important step, but additional efforts are required to make Service First work.**
    - Rivalry and resentment can be lessened by allowing employees of both agencies input into developing the floor plan and décor of the joint office building.
    - Collocation does not necessary mean true interagency collaboration. Moving into the same building is an important step, but everyone needs to make an extra effort to work together.
  - **Differences in systems and policies between the two agencies cause difficulties.**
    - The computer operating systems don't work together. Any solutions would involve changes at higher levels.
    - The budget structures and financial systems are different, which makes it difficult to allocate funding and transfer money between the agencies.
    - Managers are required to fill out a lot of paperwork for each interagency employee they supervise.
    - Having a common set of tasks and goals will help employees understand the differences between the agencies and learn how to work around them.
- **Oregon participants did not address specific Service First successes and failures, but overall, they feel the program was a success and that most things they have done together have worked.**
- **Colorado participants feel that Service First has worked better in their area than in other parts of the state. They pointed out some of the difficulties they encountered at those other offices, and stressed ways in which the program could be better implemented. Overall, they feel that the Service First program is a good idea.**

# Advice for New Locations

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- **Managers and employees give the following advice to those in locations that are setting up a joint Service First office.**
  - **Managers and higher-ups need to support of the idea of collaboration**
    - “To make it successful, managers have to be committed.”
    - “Be sure that the highest people of that organization are all very supportive of it first, and then work down.”
    - “If the upper level isn’t supportive of the whole idea, that’s going to be instantly obvious to everybody below them and it won’t work.”
    - “You’ve got to have support from the top. If my center manager and his supervisor weren’t promoting interagency collaboration, life would not be good.”
    - “They encourage it on a day-to-day basis by getting people together, showing them how the two agencies work a little bit differently, but how they might be able to find a common path or an agreement or a common understanding, and promote that kind of collaborative effort. Then people start getting over some of their hostilities, and some of their fears, some of their differences, some of the agency pride starts to diffuse a little bit. It has to be positive, though, you can’t just order it and demand it; it won’t work that way. As a matter of fact, I think more employees will rebel against that than would just go ahead and try to make it work.”
    - “Strong, consistent support from management. It has to be there, it has to be evident, and it has to come in a way that every employee on both agencies understands that there is no other option. We’re going to make this work. I don’t mean fully integrated, where there’s shared delegation and things like that, but I mean knowing that we’re not going back to being two separate organizations who don’t share or talk to each other most of the time.”
    - “You need management support from both agencies. Service First doesn’t run itself: you have to have somebody in there pushing it and that’s what we’re kind of lacking right now.”
    - “We need support behind the scenes.”

# Advice for New Locations, continued

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## – Interagency cooperation should not be forced or over-managed

- “The top has to encourage it, they can’t just demand and expect it, because there are too many barriers to work through – really, to evolve through – and a lot of it is just getting used to working with people in the other agency that closely on a day-to-day basis.”
- “When you force it into a timetable framework, then you’re slowing it down.”
- “Don’t try to take it all on at once, get some successes first.”
- “Don’t over-administrate. There really is no grand master scheme and timeline.”
- “Let opportunities develop and take advantage of them.”
- “Where we’ve had successes, it’s been things that have been happening from the ground up.”
- “For Service First to work and be effective, it can’t be directed, it can’t be driven, it’s got to just happen. You’ve got to have the flexibility to make things happen.”
- “You have to be careful not to push too hard too fast.”
- “When starting Service First, try to find the people who are the most open to having a joint project and making it work, and then let that example shine for the rest of the folks. Show them that it’s not so dangerous, not so distasteful to work with the other agency. Then you’ll start getting more people willing to do their job in collaboration with a partner from the other agency. That’s what builds the real partnership.”

# Advice for New Locations, continued

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- **The two agencies need to be located in the same building, but pay attention to the physical layout**
  - “Service First didn’t come together here until we were under one roof.”
  - “When we weren’t physically located in the same building, it sometimes made it easier for customers to play us off each other.”
  - “To be the most effective with implementing the idea of Service First, there has to be some degree of collocation, whether it’s a whole district in with a field office, or just a few employees. Unless you have that, you don’t have total buy-off or acceptance or maybe even opportunities to be able to begin to test those Service First waters.”
  - “I think collocation is probably the key thing, not just being in the same town. That’s the one thing I’d recommend. Collocation, wherever possible.”
  - “One thing that makes it hard on employees, is that as we moved into this office together, BLM has had the funding to put in systems and furniture, where the FS has been so poor. It’s almost come down a lot to the haves and have-nots.”
  - “It was a big mistake to let the Forest Service move in so much sooner than the BLM, because they already had staked out their territory. Everybody should have arrived at the same time.”
- **Involve employees in the planning**
  - “If they’re going to build a new building, don’t let one person dictate what goes in that building.”
  - “If management had decided to ask for employees’ input, and then to listen to it, things would have gone a lot smoother.”
  - “Listen to your employees. We didn’t do a very good job of that. We took the BLM staff and completely split them up. We fragmented our workforce, and then we had no BLM managers.”

# Advice for New Locations, continued

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## — There will be difficulties at first, but things will get better

- “It’s going to be a struggle.”
- “I feel like things in the last six months have gotten a lot smoother. The first year was a real trial.”
- “It’s going to be rough at first, but once it gets going it’s probably going to be better for you. If you’re a creative person, you’re going to have more avenues to go out and get your job done.”
- “I don’t think we’ve run into anything here that hasn’t worked.”

## — Efforts need to be made to be truly interagency

- “We do a lot of social things together, but we’ve never had a joint Forest Service-BLM meeting of which I’ve been aware.”
- “Some of our interagency relationships really are kind of superficial, like ‘goody-day.’ That’s okay, but it doesn’t really build any close working relationships.”

## — Each agency should maintain its identity\*

- “There are things that are unique to each agency that we just can’t sweep away and say that it’s no longer important, because it is important.”
- “I think there are less problems with what we’re doing here because each agency still has its identity. They’re able to operate separately and yet work together where it makes sense. A lot of it’s attributable to the attitudes and people in this place.”
- “If we don’t work together, that’s one way to almost ensure we’re going to end up one agency.”
- “All you need is the public and Congress to get fed up with the difference, and they can say, ‘We know how to fix the difference: we’re going to have one agency, the Department of Natural Resources for the US.’”
- “As long as we can cooperate, we can maintain our identity, if we don’t, that would doom both agencies.”

\*Note: Only managers expressed concern about this area.

# Most Important Improvement

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- **Participants revealed the one single thing that they believed the Forest Service and the BLM could do to improve the Service First program.**
  - **Make more consistent regulations and policies in the two agencies**
    - “I would like consistency of regulations and budgetary issues.”
    - “I want one map for the visitors to buy that covers the whole area.”
    - “We need to have a clear direction and it’s got to come from the top. Somebody needs to make a decision and all the underlings need to follow it. Because right now we have a path this way, then we have a path this way, and it just needs to be set in stone and followed out.”
    - “It’s the paperwork. It’s the same thing, why can’t we use the same forms? That would help paperworkwise if we could combine them and make it one form instead of having to do ten forms for one agency and five forms for the other to do the same job.”
    - “I’d like to see warrant authorities identified by both agencies and accepted by all agencies, and that takes higher level involvement. The two agencies are under the same warrant system, but we’re always identified by our agency, so we can’t cross agency boundaries with that warrant very easily.”
    - “I think in general people feel that joint permitting is the right direction and that it is a savings and better for the customer.”
    - “Try to look at everything that you do where you have a common partner, and see if you can do it with one piece of paper. Whether it’s a map, whether it’s a permit try to be consistent. That extends also to things like billing.”
    - “I hope that this kind of effort will result in someone championing the idea that there are some real administrative things here that we have to look at closely. Let’s do something to make it easier for those who are thinking about doing Service First in the future. You need to have a champion, a supporter and it has to start with the chief.”



# Most Important Improvement, continued

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## – Improve the budget and accounting systems

- “It’s the budget, getting to where we don’t have to shift the money around, and getting the computers so we can really interact.”
- “Budget and IRM.”
- “Either one pool of money or an easier way to transfer funds back and forth from one agency to the other.”
- “I would like the budget/accounting process to be a little bit easier. It makes life so hard when I have to keep this little tab of this and this little tab of that. It would be nice if we could have this pool of money that we could just pull together somehow.”
- “I would like to have one pool of money to run my operation instead of having to shift money back and forth.”

## – Encourage more collaboration at all levels

- “It would be nice to have Contracting all together, under the same authorities, recognizing each other’s signatures.”
- “I’d like if you could bring Fish and Wildlife in on the mix at some point in time.”
- “Emphasize better communication and interaction.”
- “I’d like the upper levels, the Washington offices, the regional offices, and district offices, to have more working together. I don’t know if they’re really doing that.”
- “I do think we need to remember that we all work for the government. I think we can get along.”

## – Don’t over-manage; allow employees some freedom

- “Let us do our jobs and don’t micromanage. Use what works.”
- “Give us the free rein to do what needs to be done and basically leave us alone at the same time.”
- “Leave us alone, but help facilitate from above. We need that facilitation, not the handcuffs or oversight – facilitation is what their job is.”
- “Part of Service First is taking some risks. As you move to that outer edge of being legal, you can be more productive. Service First forces you to think about that outside edge and pushing the envelope.”

# Most Important Improvement, continued

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## – Have compatible computer systems

- “Make sure that telecommunications, IRM, data networking, and everything can work across platform, across both agencies.”
- “One computer system would be just awesome.”
- “We really need more cross-compatible computer systems. We have a lot of barriers in the computer systems. We have found a few short cuts around them, but for the most part, we cannot effectively communicate across those platforms. We may be heading there, but that’s something we need to work on.”

## – Establish one agency\*

- “U.S. Department of Natural Resources.”
- “One agency – Federal Department of Natural Resources. This would mean more money to the ground, more resource management. It would change very little on the ground in terms of the number of people, but we’d get a lot more money.”
- “We should have one rule, one way.”
- “It doesn’t make sense to have that many agencies managing land. It’s all the same land.”

## – Continue to expand the program; it is working well

- “It is working. I was just thinking of what we’ve been saying, and a lot of it sounds pretty negative, but it’s working pretty well. And it’s working even better in some of the resources.”
- “It works very well. This has been a tremendous success here and I’d like to see more of it around the west and around the country. It does work. It’s nothing to be feared, people aren’t going to lose jobs or grades over this thing. If that was going happen we’d have seen it, and we’re not seeing it. In fact, it’s been just the opposite.”

\*Note: Only Oregon employees from both agencies focused on this issue.

**Appendix:  
Moderator's Guide**