



Survey of USGS Biological Resources Discipline Employees

Selected Essays

Twenty-one percent of survey recipients returned a completed survey, of which 69% provided written responses to the following survey question: **The integrity of the scientific work produced by BRD could best be improved by . . .**

The state of the respondent and whether he/she is a line scientist (S) or manager (M) is indicated.

I. Not Forcing Scientists to Be Fundraisers

CA-S

Support for at least some basic research in BRD.

CO-S

I was hired by a research center but am now in a “cost” center without a product to sell.

FL-M

It is clear that biology is the poor stepchild of USGS. They are trying to force a Water Resources Division model on BRD which is highly inappropriate. The Common Business Practices approach has turned BRD into a consulting firm, and whoever looks at overhead charges and expects BRD researchers to get 20% of their salary lives in a fantasy world. They (Water Resources Division) don't even want us to use the word conservation.

In a few years, all research in BRD/USGS will be outsourced, and based on temp-term personnel – a house of cards...

LA-M

Getting rid of common business practices.

CA-M

Adequate funding. Although I have an outstanding publication record and am studying top priorities within BRD I am finding that research funds are extremely competitive and limiting my ability to work to my full capacity.

CA-S

Not depending on reimbursable funds.

CO-S

Research centers have become science centers and are not “cost centers.” Process is killing the science. Managers don’t get it.

CO-S

Supporting BRD scientists during writing of scientific manuscripts rather than only making new starts that bring in big money.

CO-S

Improved budgets. We are being told, but not in writing, that we should try to get 20% of our salaries from outside sources. So we chase money whether it results in worthwhile projects or not. Need to have base funding for federal science not so much reimbursables. Federal science should be longer term and less tied to short term issues/politics.

CO-M

Remove all requirements for individual scientists to raise their salary – “science for dollars” is just wrong, period! BRD scientists were taken from the agency who paid them and put into NBS BRD to remove bias in their science. The same people are now pressured to get, 10 years later, cash up front!

CO-S

Providing base funded research for salaries and for operating expenses, meeting attendance and travel. The FY '05 support = \$0 for the first time in [decades]. This has decreased from \$80,000/year for operations, research travel technical support.

CO-S

Achieving full-funding (or at least 80%) for science so we don’t lose objectivity by becoming a “soft money” shop.

CO-S

Budget process and allocation a mess. Lack of funding by USGS to cover salaries has further limited ability to do work and credibility with other federal agencies. Getting worse annually.

FL-M

We have a \$900+ million budget and we can’t cover researchers’ salaries but we can cover managers! I’m ashamed of our management – our scientists are super!

GA-M

Providing base dollars to support identified research needs.

HI-S

Long term research with short term funds doesn’t work!

MO-S

Easy way out of tough budget times is to promote reimbursable funding – a non-sustainable solution that inevitably compromises scientific integrity. In my experience integrity has been maintained, so far. But the future does not look good.

ND-M

Stop treating research as a “business.” Research (especially long-term research) needs a stable funding base.

OR-M

Adequate base funding so I don’t have to spend my time begging my salary from customers through reimbursable contracts. I want to stop the blood-sucking leeches from taking so many research dollars in overhead, which makes us less competitive.

II. Reducing Overhead Fundraising Quotas

CA-M

Less administrative costs at Reston level; no special overhead rate for DOI agencies which causes us to use base funds to supplement overhead.

CO-S

Most important: removing extra overhead charged to research for our most important clients: DOI agencies!!!

CO-S

Re-allocating funds away from support to bureaucratic and administrative positions and functions and making them available for research operations.

CO-S

Too much emphasis on Regional, sub-regional and Reston administration limits \$ available to do actual work.

FL-S

Reduce overhead charged to scientists and their projects – largely could be accomplished by significantly reducing the size of administrative staff – especially not needed are the disproportionate large numbers of high-level (GS 12 and above) administrators.

LA-M

Reduce overhead costs for research – increased costs have pushed us out of the market and client DOI agencies are rebuilding their research staffs.

OR-M

Funding science from the top down, rather than funding science from the outside and then using overhead to fund the HUGE and GROWING administrative staff.

UT-S

It is ridiculous for USGS to take the limited dollars the NPS, BLM, FWS and other agencies have for research into their crucial needs and using it to pay for our pencils. We

should have our base administrative needs taken care of with base funding. It is also ridiculous that we tax ourselves the same way – our research programs provide funding to accomplish research, but we tax these research dollars to support the administrative functions and personnel. This should be covered directly by our budget provided by Congress. Effectively, we have lost 20% of our research budget.

III. Cutting Paperwork Burdens of Scientists

CO-S

Process oriented individuals are encouraged more each day, and as a consequence there is an ever-growing set of forms, procedures and approvals that are redundant, unnecessary and counterproductive.

FL-S

Eliminate duplication in accounting and frequent changes in accounting requirements and practices.

LA-M

Reduce administrative workload on Principal Investigators. Improve the financial accounting programs – the BASIS+ system is unwieldy and makes tracking budgets very difficult and time consuming.

MO-S

Tools and practices to promote common business practices suck the life out of my research time. I spend more time being “accountable” than doing the work.

NM-S

Let researchers conduct scientific research and stop the roadblocks placed by management. Stop the paperwork and checkboxes and promote peer reviewed publications. The current system halts and greatly reduces the ability of PhD Scientists to work on publishing results.

OR-M

The USGS motto is NOT ‘Science for a changing world.’ The motto is: Good ideas poorly implemented. For example . . . Peer review: Hugely duplicative of the scientific process and weighted toward executive branch control.

OR-M

Getting rid of the new OMB ‘double’ peer review process – it is a ploy to slow research results getting out.

WI-S

Reducing drastically the meaningless and time wasting bureaucratic processes that scientists are subject to. These cumbersome processes are done in the name of accountability but all it is is an attempt to control everything we do. The ‘controllers’ have no clue about the details of good science hence only slow the process down to a near-stopping point. For example, it takes 5-6 months to get a study plan approved. Who

knows how long it will take a manuscript to be approved now that they will all be going to Reston for approval.

WI-S

Within the past 5 years highly paid scientific personnel have been spending a very disruptive and discouraging amount of time doing clerical and administrative work. We sometimes joke that there is a ‘conspiracy’ to keep skilled government scientist tied down with busy work.

IV. Setting Priorities According to Scientific Need

CO-S

Having administrators that respect and understand science rather than hollow showmanship.

CO-S

More money towards staff that do the research and support the researchers – such as librarians and technicians.

CO-S

Demonstrating that science is a priority not an afterthought.

CO-S

USGS administration needs to refocus their emphasis on substantive science rather than the stylistic approach now taken. They need to spend more time and resources doing science rather than trying to convince everyone that USGS is the premier science agency.

CO-M

Downsizing scientific staff to provide adequate support for core functions.

CO-S

Encouraging an atmosphere of doing good research instead of the current environment, which encourages a focus on process, paperwork and appearances.

CO-M

Put the scientist and science at the true front of the agency, NOT process, e.g. C.B.P., Basis, and mandatory computer-based training.

MI-S

The USGS has been touting the term “integrated science” for years, yet very little has been done to actually make it happen. Scientists at the grassroots level from all of the disciplines are working to make this happen in spite of management’s lip service to integrated science.

MO-M

Emphasize science not perpetual planning.

WV-M

In a “science” organization, theoretically admin/mgmt supports research. Currently it’s the contrary – and the future looks like increased and more of the same.

WV-S

Scientists at my facility are expected to obey not question.

V. Training, Promotion and Retention of Scientists

CO-S

Apply promotion criteria equitably across the full spectrum of USGS scientists.

FL-S

Offer more permanent positions to young scientists and technicians so that there is continuity in programs and quality replacements for aging scientists.

FL-S

Our program within BRD is crippled by our center not approving any permanent hires so there’s a lot of turnover and a lack of continuity.

FL-M

Even a senior scientist (GS-15) will never be in a leadership position, as petty research failures control BRD.

MI-S

The vast majority of the problem of poor quality science stems directly from the policy of hiring personnel on term appointments and contracts. BRD is losing all of its institutional memory. We spend more time and money training people to do a job then we do actually perform it. It is frustrating to see more mid-level management positions (many of them permanent) being created as the science suffers.

CA-S

Creating permanent jobs for staff with room for advancement and more support for long term (3+ yrs) research/minority projects. USGS is no longer a place for young scientists.

CO-S

More and more of my colleagues have left the agency in the past few years due to a lack of willingness from administrators to promote from within. In the face of shrinking budgets, science staff are cut at the expense of maintaining a cohesive group of well-trained, objective scientists.

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