

CHAPTER 7 - EXPERIENCES OF PAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Words Of Wisdom From Your Ancestors

The following are nuggets of wisdom from past program participants, pieces of advice that don't exactly fit anywhere else in this manual. They are opinions that have been learned through experience and that, when passed along, will hopefully make your experience even more beneficial.

There's Something For Every Participant: I have to say the program is wonderful! The people and experience are top notch. Everyone in the program has a similar, but unique, experience and the best part of someone's tour may be the worst of another's. So, take everything with a grain of salt. I wish everyone in the Agency could go through this developmental program.

While You Are Still In The Planning Stages: Read the materials, listen to the information at the seminars, and talk with former participants at your Center or those who have rotated to a Center.

If You Will Have To Travel Cross-Country: Make your trip to/from the Center an adventure, as we visited Memphis, Tennessee, The Grand Canyon, and the Mojave Desert on our way to California and we plan to go through Yellowstone on the return trip.

Do In Rome As The Romans Do: If you are coming from out of the DC-VA-MD area, ensure you have enough cash (credit card, or travelers' checks) on-hand when you arrive at NASA HQ to pay your first month's rent and deposits. The place where I stayed required either cash or money order.

Time Flies: We found that the early part of the program year is often characterized by an investment on the part of the participant. Give it time. It takes awhile to come to grips with the new acronyms and work environment. The later part of the year is where the great and unique benefits are gained. Many participants agree that by the end of their year they would love to have the first few months back.

Don't Sell Yourself Short: This is one of the best opportunities in any job to do what you want to do. Don't limit yourself to just work, that's only 8 or 9 hours of your day. The new area you are in has a lot of stuff to do. I think that may be personified in D.C., but wherever you are, remember, it's temporary. So don't hesitate, and say yes to every opportunity you possibly can.

Go Where YOU Want To Go: You don't have to have an impressive resume to get a new assignment (i.e., experience). Most offices will welcome you with open arms and teach you the ropes. No group has enough people to get all the work done, so you are the help they are looking for. If your host assignment doesn't meet the expectations you have for your year, don't let anyone inhibit you from seeking a better one.

How To Figure Out Where To Go: The more your rotations are based upon need for work and your enthusiasm for that particular set of tasks, the more rewarding the experience. Not every assignment, nor rotation, is successful. However, if your interviews with employees in your target organization are focused on specific tasks, deadlines, expected products and impacts, you will have enough information to decide if this rotation/assignment is appropriate. You must be proactive in your search for assignments. Select a Host Supervisor who will agree to take an active part in your training and development.

Do Some Homework: The only advice I have is to find out as much as you can about your developmental work assignment before you begin in order to make sure there are no surprises. But even if there are, remember, "THIS IS YOUR YEAR," and you have a lot of flexibility to move to another assignment.

Formal Program Training: The program will have various training sessions, meetings and workshops throughout the year. Make every effort to participate in all of them. They were planned with a particular purpose in mind. Take any pre-work for workshops seriously; it has been designed to get you to think about what really matters in your career. The training planned into the program concentrated on leadership, orientation, teamwork, congressional operations, negotiation, creativity, benchmarking, and the re-entry process. Don't be afraid to venture out on training of your own. This program opens doors to training opportunities that may not be readily available at your normal work location. Look at OPM courses, Universities, commercial, Brookings Institute, Smithsonian Associates Program, etc.

It Can't Be Stressed Enough – HAVE FUN! Plan class outings, parties, and get-togethers, especially when you are 'out of town' on workshops. Our group had a Christmas party with a karaoke machine and we had a blast. Remember you are forming acquaintances and friendships that will last a lifetime. Also, remember to share the responsibility of planning the events, you are all top-notch leaders; don't be afraid to use your abilities.

Don't Limit Yourself To "NASA Only" Assignments: Look for assignments outside of NASA as well. There are opportunities at other government agencies, Academia and Commercial companies. Even international

industry assignments are within the realm of possibilities, as a member of the 2001-2002 class proved with an assignment to Italy, although it required more paperwork than anticipated. Focus on where your career is and where you want to go when choosing a primary assignment or a collateral assignment.

Look For These Things In An Assignment: A desirable primary and collateral assignment should have the following requirements:

- Well-defined job with responsibility
- Exposure to top management decision making
- Involvement in the budget process
- An opportunity to meet people in the Code (HQ) and develop an understanding of what everyone does in that particular Code
- Periodic feedback sessions with the Supervisor to review assignment (s) progress and issues
- Logistical support (desk, computer, electronic mail, etc.)
- The hosting organization has to be aware that you will also be involved in other program activities.

Work Outside of NASA: In particular, look for opportunities to work on national issues, administration priorities and the congressional process. This provides wonderful opportunities to see how NASA fits in national policy, see how other organizations handle issues, change, challenges, and various cultures; and gain exposure to and learn from as many different leaders and role models as possible. In addition, there's a lot to learn from a corporation or Agency that is downsizing, starting-up, merging, or restructuring. Be a part of that decision process and learn new ideas. I believe it is beneficial for NASA if we work with our customers to better understand their processes and issues (i.e., private industry, other federal agencies and universities).

Keep In Touch With Your Planned Host Supervisor: for your initial assignment, even before you get here. If your assignment is outside of NASA it is especially important to make sure you have met requirements of your host assignment (e.g., security clearances, agreement between NASA and host, work assignment details) as soon as possible to maximize the experience and hit the ground running.

Don't Feel Intimidated By The Folks That You Will Come In Contact With: I did my assignment in Code S where everyone had the title "Dr." before their name except me. At those first staff meetings, several folks thought I was another secretary. In the early part of your assignment, you may have to explain to folks several times just what you're there for, and then offer to be of assistance to them. No one turned me away because I didn't have a Ph.D.

On-The-Job Training Is Important: It appears that getting fully integrated into an existing organization presents a difficulty common to many program participants. This is an artifact of moving into an existing organization that may have a well-established organizational personality. It appears that time provides the best solution to this situation. I suggest that participants look for opportunities to maximize this on-the-job training, and pursue them. Sometimes, you have to take the initiative and make it happen.

Establish A Detailed Work Plan: It is my advice that as you are making your final decision with your host organization supervisor, you should request that a detailed work plan be prepared. This plan should be available to you during the summer orientation, so that you can utilize it to design your individual development plan. Once you make your final move, you can continue your conversations with your supervisor to fine-tune the plan.

Get Maximum Exposure: Get an assignment that gives you maximum exposure to as many Codes or offices as possible.

Keep In Touch With Your Home Center Supervisor: It is important to periodically contact your Home Center Supervisor to keep he/she up-to-date regarding your developmental experience. In addition, share a copy of your Mid-Term Report with your permanent supervisor to communicate the progress that you have made and your plans for the remainder of the assignment, as well as the Final Report. Not only does your permanent supervisor have a genuine interest in your developmental experience; remember that he or she approved your participation in this exceptional program.

Look For Responsibility: My only word of advice is to work with your Host supervisor to obtain responsibility for one or more activities within the organization. Your responsibilities should be clearly defined and the associated activities should have milestones and deliverables associated with them. It doesn't matter how big or small the activities are as long as you are responsible for getting them accomplished.

Stay Receptive To Changes In Assignment: I made one mistake that I would caution future participants against: making a commitment to stay in one Code for the entire year. I felt awkward breaking my one-year commitment to the office I started in when another opportunity arose; they were gracious about it although the situation caused me personal grief. So, the moral of this story is: you don't know what opportunities may present themselves, either through chance or from your own networking. Don't limit yourself to one office, and be flexible. (The program now

requires a 90-day collateral assignment, so you can't stay in one place for the whole year.)

Be Flexible: People try to make sure everything is arranged before they get here in terms of how the entire year is to be structured. I think you should have your first assignment arranged but you will find once you get here that there are opportunities to work in almost any area. Plus, you might find that the job you thought you were to do is not really all that fun. Since this is your year, you want to get the most out of it, so be flexible. As the year progresses, you will learn about other areas that you might become more interested in.

The Secret To Success: You basically get what you plan for and adjust to. The training personnel and budget resources will support your decision if selected but the employee who is creative, assertive, and innovative will have the highest probability for success. This will not guarantee success, but the probability will greatly increase-especially if you choose to "find or create" your job/rotation.

You Can Make Some Good Friends: From a previous assignment at Headquarters, I can say that the friends you make during an assignment like this are very important. I am still close friends with many of them, even after ten years. Their help enabled me to make a major career change and I still benefit from their help and guidance. I am sure the same will be true of the current program class.

You Can Depend On The Coordinators For Support: I probably encountered more bumps in the road in the beginning with my developmental work assignment than any of my other classmates. Rather than reliving the gory details, I'll simply say the program leaders, along with members of my office really went the distance to smooth out those bumps and level the potholes I encountered in the beginning. I mention this to make you aware of the fact that if you have any problems at any point during your assignment, the programs leaders are always there for you to discuss any issue with them.

What Kind Of Collateral, And When? My collateral provided me with an opportunity to gain insight into other areas of NASA not related to my specific field. I was also provided an opportunity to gain deeper insight into areas at my Home Center. I performed my collateral assignment during the middle of my year. Looking back, I personally recommend this rather than electing to perform it at the end of my year because it provided me more opportunity to concentrate on my re-entry to my Home Center.

Consider A Unique Collateral: Explore the opportunities to do a collateral assignment in one of the Codes that is unique to NASA Headquarters.

These include External Relations, Policy and Plans, and the Office of the Administrator.

Take Chances: When I started the year, I was excited, optimistic and ready for change. I quickly found out that the change I expected was “lightweight”. The Orientation and subsequent workshops will demand a soul-searching you have never imagined. Some days you'll feel lost, confused, and overwhelmed. But if you keep an open mind, the fulfillment is extraordinary. I conceived my collateral at our Orientation to work at Kennedy Space Center and possibly gain industry experience as well. With just two months to go before I began my assignment, I lined up work on the International Space Station hardware integration and testing as well as potential industry experience with an onsite contractor. If I hadn't spoke up and acted on my hunch, I would not be writing these words to you. Everything that I've done during this year has been a chance and not once have I regretted the outcome. Stay tuned...

Workshops: Draining, but beneficial. If you're serious about making a difference in your life and if you are serious about the program, “soak up” all the information you can at each workshop; the results are quite stimulating.

Balance Your Time Wisely: The program has several elements in it that could turn out to be very demanding unless you make a conscious effort to balance. Those elements that are challenging, but rewarding are: Being a part of Workshops, AA Briefings, Shared Experience and actively participating to improve and benefit from the program. Developing skills and experiences through various training opportunities. Making a contribution to the organization of your primary and collateral assignments. Establishing you own leadership choices in values and vision, and then taking the action required to accomplish results towards your personal mission through the leadership model.

For Those Of You Going To Goddard: The ability to perform the collateral assignment at HQ is a convenient option from GSFC.

Ask! Ask! Ask! I found during my assignment at Headquarters that if there something I wanted to do, a meeting I wanted to attend, a person I wanted to meet, all I had to do was ask. I'm not sure what it is like at the Centers, but Headquarters is used to having Developmental Program participants around and many of the people there will bend over backwards to help you out.

Experiences By Headquarters Code Or Field Center

The following are brief descriptions of the experiences that previous participants had in various Headquarters Codes or at Field Centers. This information is provided to give you a sense of the wide range of opportunities available for your primary and collateral assignments. Some information may be dated due to changes in organization, programs, and functions.

AMES RESEARCH CENTER (ARC)

Betsy Carter (1997 – 1998)

Host Center: Ames Research Center

Home Center: NASA Headquarters/Code I, External Affairs (International)

When it's time for a change of scenery, I highly recommending pulling up all roots and going somewhere entirely different! From HQ Office of External Affairs, I went to Ames Research Center Office of External Affairs - same office title, but extremely different in focus. From a focus on international relations, my core assignment at Ames was as a Public Affairs Officer -- essentially media and press relations. My timing was excellent to step into a role that placed me smack in the middle of intense preparation for the launch of Ames' only "Discovery" space science mission -- the Lunar Prospector was to be launched in January. This provided me with immediate tasks to learn about Ames, the project, and press relations; tons of visibility; more travel than I wanted; more hours working than envisioned; and a rare opportunity to see a project through. I interfaced with many Headquarters and KSC folks, providing me with an excellent opportunity to assess the "HQ/Center" and "Center/Center" relationships -- and was very pleased with what I experienced. If you can arrange a "discrete" project such as this, I highly recommend it!

Joseph Watson (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: Ames Research Center

Home Center: NASA Headquarters, Resources Analyst

I selected work in the Space Projects Division. My assignments have vacillated between resources and manpower work on the proposed Astrobiology Institute, evaluation of cost proposals as a member of an SEB cost committee for the Space Station Centrifuge Project, evaluation of and cost strategy for a Discovery Mission proposal- KEPLER, cost team member for SOFIA subcontract bids (NASA to industry prime), as well as other more immediate and short projects. My experience and workload has been everything but routine due to the nature of project and program scheduling adjustments. (I will not discuss furloughs nor RIF meetings, etc.) Assignments have ranged from presentations to photocopying; from on-site visits to Aerospace companies, to off-site resources classes; from

attending night classes at San Jose State University to attending two day seminars; from reviewing major proposals to writing and designing the strategy for Discovery proposals; all for an employee whose former primary assignments were budgeting for salaries and hires, etc. Also, I have attempted to take advantage of the ARC on-site training opportunities as well as selected seminars and tours.

HEADQUARTERS (HQ)

CODE A

Pam Bookman (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code A

Home Center: Kennedy Space Center/EO

My last six months were spent in Code A, as Executive Officer for the NASA Chief Scientist. This assignment gave me an even broader perspective of the Agency and the relationship between Headquarters and the Centers; and first-hand knowledge of the intricacies of managing a major NASA program, such as the Science program. In addition, it provided me with an opportunity to interact with other Federal agencies, as well as private and academic entities.

Robert M. Savage (2001 – 2002)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code AE, Office of the Chief Engineer

Home Center: Goddard Space Flight Center

Jim O'Donnell (2002 – 2003)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code AE, Office of the Chief Engineer

Home Center: Goddard Space Flight Center

(Robert) I think the Office of the Chief Engineer offers a broader perspective than anywhere else at Headquarters. We had the opportunity to meet and network with a number of the Enterprise Associate Administrators and their representatives throughout the assignment. There were three participants assigned to the OCE when I was there and there still was plenty of work to do. We attended almost all of the Program Management Council meetings, Program Management Council Working Group meetings, Engineering Management Council meetings as well as other one-on-one meetings with various EAAs. Specific duties included writing minutes for the above meetings, helping to disposition comments to NPG 7120.5B, helping to establish stop light criteria for program reporting and numerous other small tasks. It was a great experience!

(Jim) I second Robert's assessment above. There are some other advantages of working in the Chief Engineer's Office, as well. It is a fairly small office, so it is easy to get a good introduction into all of the activities that go on in it. Like many organizations in Headquarters, the office is used to hosting program participants, so they are very accommodating to the schedule for the program year and very willing to help you accomplish your goals. I had standing permission to ask anyone in the office to tag along with them to any of their meetings. Finally, because AE gives you very broad exposure across all of the Enterprises at Headquarters and to all of the Centers, it is an ideal place from which to find a good collateral assignment (I am going to JPL).

Chan M. Kim (2001 – 2002)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code AO, Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO)/

Home Center: Glenn Research Center

I had the opportunity to work and gain experience in how NASA's information policies are planned and decided. I also had the opportunity to develop core competency in key CIO functions through everyday work and classes at the CIO University Program. Another benefit in my assignment was the opportunity to meet and get to know Agency's CIO community at various levels of meetings and workshops where I was able to develop a broader perspective. The biggest benefit I gained in my assignment in one of the Strategic Resources Review (SRR) activities was the opportunity to work with experts from Agency's different functional areas. This assignment helped me better understand how information technology is linked to NASA's missions, programs, projects, and services.

Gale Allen (2002 – 2003)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Space Architect & Code M

Home Center: Kennedy Space Center

I began my assignment in Code M working for the Assistant Associate Administrator for Advanced Systems. He was also the chair of the NASA Exploration Team. My job was to develop a communications strategy that could be used to discuss the shift in NASA's philosophy from destination driven missions to science driven, technology enabled missions and could be used for many audiences including the public, Congress, and OMB. This effort centered around Codes S, U, and M. Three months after I began the assignment my sponsor was named as the NASA Space Architect and promoted to a staff position to the Deputy Administrator. Mr. O'Keefe liked the stepping stone approach the Exploration team was using and adopted it for the entire agency. I spent the next five months as a Special Assistant to the Space Architect. During that time we developed an exploration strategy and rationale for the Agency. The product, an

Integrated Space Plan is changing the way NASA identifies and prioritizes new initiatives in the Agency.

I have become acutely aware of the complexity when trying to make major changes in an organization as large as NASA. Not only have I honed my technical and managerial skills I have really developed my interpersonal skills because the office can only influence change not direct it. This has been very worthwhile for my career development. The hours are long but you gain a sense of pride in knowing you made a difference. I highly recommend an assignment in the Space Architect's Office.

CODE F

Pam Bookman (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code F

Home Center: Kennedy Space Center/EO

During the first six months of my assignment at Headquarters, I was in Code F, Office of Human Resources and Education. I chose this assignment because it offered experience in an area that was separate from, but clearly related to, my field of Equal Opportunity. In this organization, I was assigned several projects that helped me understand human resources management at the Agency level and how Agency policies affect, and affected by, the Centers.

CODE H

Becky Barth (2000 – 2001)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code H

Home Center: Goddard Space Flight Center

I have been lucky to have had a dual assignment in the Office of Procurement, Code H, because I have been supporting two divisions: the Procurement Analysis Division (Code HC) and the Program Operations Division (Code HS). Being in the Headquarters Office of Procurement has given me a terrific insight into many considerations that Center folks don't usually see. In Code HC, I have been working with the Sponsored Business Research Activity, which is looking at ways to improve NASA's grant and cooperative agreement processes. In support of Code HS, I have participated in the Procurement Management Survey at LaRC and a joint Air Force-NASA review of the Joint Base Operations Support Contract (J-BOSC) at KSC. I am also scheduled to participate in an Independent Annual Review (IAR). Participating in these reviews has given me a great opportunity to visit other Centers and see how things get done, and to compare best practices.

John Brett (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code H, Office of Procurement

Home Center: Glenn Research Center

My collateral assignment was in the Office of Procurement, Code H. It was a dramatic change from Code K. I went from having an office (with a door, a window, and real wooden furniture) to working out of a cubical with soft walls on the fourth floor. Instead of reporting to an AA, I report to a division chief. There are about 55 people in Code H. The work I was assigned consisted of a number of short-term assignments, since I would not be there for anything long term. It was very similar to the work I had left at the Home Center.

CODE K

John Brett (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code K, Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization

Home Center: Glenn Research Center

Code K is the smallest code at NASA. There are two secretaries, one summer student, four small business specialists, and the Associate Administrator. The primary mission of Code K is to assist small businesses, minority owned businesses, and women-owned businesses, to do business with NASA. One might think that working in such a small code would limit one's opportunities as a PDP. My experience turned out to be totally opposite. I worked directly for the Associate Administrator. Mr. Thomas had an excellent attitude about my assignment and was very excited to get me involved in the day-to-day activities of the code. I was given responsibility for a new initiative, which included developing training for all small business personnel throughout the agency. Mr. Thomas encouraged me to accompany him on a number of high level meetings, as well as sending me out on my own to meetings with the public, as well as to congressional hearings related to small business matters. For a week I was acting Associate Administrator (everyone else was out of town) and attended a senior management meeting in his absence. I had plenty of work to do in Code K with a need to interface with many different "stakeholders". The most difficult challenge came in trying to leave. Because the code is so small, and everyone has more than enough to do, breaking away was very difficult. I got a great deal out of my assignment in Code K, and would strongly encourage others to pursue a primary or collateral assignment there.

CODE M

Ron Mueller (1997 – 1998)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code M, Expendable Launch Vehicle Requirements
Home Center: Kennedy Space Center

My assignment in the Office of Space Flight exposed me to a broad range of activities and experiences. I became involved in policy, budget, requirements and the politics of working at NASA HQ. In working ELV Requirements, I have participated in a 'Launch on Demand Impact Study' by the DoD's Space Architect Office, I have worked with the FAA's Commercial Space Transportation Office, and I have attended various conferences on space launch vehicles within and outside of NASA. I have also interfaced with code's B, G, J, S, and Y.

CODE R

Jean Bianco (2002 – 2003)
Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code RS
Home Center: NASA Glenn Research Center

I spent my primary assignment in Code RS as the Senior Technical Manager to the National Aeronautical Test Alliance (NATA). This assignment became available when the NASA Director to the NATA Office was temporarily re-assigned to support the U.S Aerospace Commission. I was involved in preparation, organization, and coordination for several meetings between aeronautical ground test facility managers from three of the NASA Code R centers, from the AEDC Air Force test installation, the Enterprise Associate Administrator, and his counterpart at the Pentagon. One of my primary assignments was to contract out and track a one year study on NASA's aeronautical ground test facilities leading towards recommendations to the AA on the right suite of facilities needed to support future aeronautical research needs.

I took advantage of my opportunity in Code R and spent part of my time working on the strategic planning of the Vehicle Systems Program within the Aeronautics Technology theme.

The challenge I faced in the beginning of my assignment was making the adjustment from center to HQs and finding sufficient and satisfying work to do. I found the managers of Code R to be quite busy and therefore I took the initiative and starting offering my services to others within the division as well as within other divisions. The workload soon picked up.

CODE S

Gail Wade (1996 – 1997)
Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code SR

Home Center: Goddard Space Flight Center

After reviewing my previous experiences and discussions with my Home supervisor, I chose an assignment in Code S, the Office of Space Science because I thought the new assignment would be similar to things that I'd done in the past. Boy was I wrong!

One of my tasks was to document how NASA is doing in terms of acquiring, distributing, storing, and archiving its data. Seemed easy enough. It was only after I started that I found out that what you can do at a Field Center where you may have only a single entity to deal with and with whom you direct contact, does not translate to Headquarters where you have a host of entities each with a different relationship to NASA. Just trying to get inputs for the monthly Code S Monthly Program Reviews with the AA was a chore, but what a learning experience. In the past, where I thought Headquarters sat on high and dictated to the Field Centers, I came to understand how in tune Headquarters folks are to the Field Centers and to the commitments/agreements it has with the number of agencies, universities, etc. they must deal with on a daily basis.

Opportunities did abound in Code S as they had just undergone reorganization before I arrived. While this made it difficult at times understanding whom to see for what, it provided the chance to get in a work on a number of small tasks. While none of these things may change the course of space science, the discipline scientists seemed to appreciate getting help on some things that seemed so trivial like responding to the hundreds of e-mail requests.

CODE U

Phillip Mortillaro (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code UG, US

Home Center: Kennedy Space Center

I chose an area where I could get exposure to the rest of NASA. Code US is the Flight Systems Division for the Office of Life and Microgravity Sciences and provided me with an overview of the various NASA Codes. Their charter is the integration of research into the shuttle program (mostly Life Science) and the Mir Phase 1 program (all user codes). I spent 7 months in US and felt it was an outstanding introduction into the HQ arena. The people were top notch and the environment was filled with fast paced rapid changes. Not something I was used to at the Center.

For my collateral work assignment CODE UG, Microgravity Sciences and Applications Division (MSAD) recruited me. This is a user code that develops and directs the microgravity research within NASA. They do the

manifesting, cost, schedule and performance at a HQ level. Here I was able to get my hands on specific tasks and felt I had more control over the environment.

CODE X

Ken Hunt (2002 – 2003)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code X, Office of Security Management and Safeguards

Home Center: Ames Research Center

This office is responsible for providing security for NASA personnel, information, technology, and assets. It can be an interesting place for program participants provided they have an interest or background in security or counterintelligence. The structure of the office can make it appear hard to penetrate; they have no regular staff meetings and many individuals are working on classified projects, the details of which they will not share with you unless you have the proper security clearance and “a need to know.” Nonetheless the responsibilities of this office are growing and there is plenty of need for assistance. If you are not shy about introducing yourself to people and asking, “What do you do here?” and “Can I help you?” this can be a rewarding assignment.

CODE Y

Frank Peri (1997 – 1998)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code YF, Program Planning and Development Division

Home Center: Langley Research Center

My assignment was unique because the Code did not advertise a developmental slot; rather I cold-called my Host supervisor, told him what I was interested in doing and asked if they needed help. He enthusiastically supported my interests since they aligned well with his Division's.

Many things had changed in Code Y since my predecessors had been there. Most importantly, the Program Office had moved to GSFC Code 170. This caused a dramatic change in the responsibilities for Code YF, which until then was the Flight Program Office for MTPE (which by the way during my watch changed its name to the Earth Science Enterprise, ESE). One of the major responsibilities that the Division did assume was strategic planning for the development and infusion of new, enabling technologies for the EOS follow-on missions. Without going into hoards of detail (I'll leave it to the reader to research what ESE's technology program is all about), I'll say that I was right in the midst of designing the technology program. I worked with/for the Chief Technologist for the

Division and was responsible for building a cross-Agency team, guiding the development of the strategies, and preparing briefings for the Enterprise AA.

In addition, I reviewed the newest NPG 7120.5A, NASA Program and Project Management Processes and Requirements document and incorporated that experience into my task to write a PCA (Program Commitment Agreement) for the Earth System Science Pathfinder Program. Overall, it was a rewarding experience.

Throughout my stay in Code YF, the staff and especially my mentor and supervisor were extremely supportive of my developmental goals and treated me as if I was permanent staff.

Sharon Welch (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code YF

Home Center: Langley Research Center

The majority of my time has been spent working in the Program Planning and Development Division of the Office of Mission to Planet Earth. I did not have an assignment when I arrived, rather my assignment evolved from tasks, which I was initially given. It took about one month into my program stay before the assignment became apparent. The level of responsibility and involvement in my project has been high and, as a result, I have gained new insight into the science planning and implementation processes at NASA HQ.

Vickie Connors (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code YS

Home Center: Langley Research Center

I spent my tumultuous year in the Office of Mission to Planet Earth, working for two Program Science Managers (Tropospheric Chemistry and the Earth Observing System). I worked on a wide range of tasks some that required hours to days and others that required weeks to months to complete. I was responsible for coordinating a national workshop whose goal was developing the tropospheric chemistry consensus on what the scientific priorities should be in Tropospheric Chemistry and drafting the response of that community in the form of a report to the Board Of Sustainable Development. The workshop was the first time that members of the ground-based and airborne measurements communities worked with the space-based measurements group; and this was also the first time that the aerosol measurements community worked with the atmospheric chemistry measurements group. This report was stored on-line at the EOS Project Office home page for documents; since its

publication, it has been used as reference material at a number of MTPE workshops and meetings.

Another challenge came in the form of coordinating the first full peer review of the original EOS Interdisciplinary Science Investigations. This entailed creating the evaluation form, organizing rigorous mail reviews for each of the 28 teams; summarizing the results; providing the evaluations to the program science managers; coordinating the panel review of the teams; developing the final performance summaries; drafting the letters to the Principal Investigators and negotiating the language with the program science managers and the Science Division Director; sending the letters and “confidential” mail reviews to the Principal Investigators; and finally writing letters to the panel review members, reporting how NASA used their recommendations. This process began in September and the procurement packages were compiled in April.

CODE Z

Tracy Lamm (2000 – 2001)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code Z (Office of Policy and Plans)

Home Center: Marshall Space Flight Center

I worked in a variety of areas in the Office of Policy and Plans at NASA HQ for 5 months. (I contacted this Code based upon my previous work experience with them.) The office is responsible for Strategic Planning, Policy, Intergovernmental Affairs, Outreach, and History. I worked in Policy, Intergovernmental Affairs and Outreach. A synopsis of my assignment follows:

Policy: Served on Agency-wide Policy Study Team on Commercial Sponsorship of NASA Assets. Served on Integration Team & Team Lead of the Benchmarking Team of this study group canvassing other Government agencies about their sponsorship activities and policies for asset or event sponsorships. Assigned tasks of eight person Agency-wide team to contact other agencies and gather pertinent data from each, resulting in a final document to be used by other teams involved in study.

Intergovernmental Affairs: Served as liaison between NASA HQ and Executive Office of the President's Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). Coordinated standing meetings with NASA Senior management, and served as Action Officer on work products between NASA HQ and OSTP. Also, served as Intergovernmental Affairs Advisor for NASA HQ to the White House and other Government agencies. (The permanent Advisor left, and I replaced him.) Further, I served as primary NASA contact with state and local governments and their professional

organizations. (My previous work experience with state and local governments was a prerequisite for this part of my assignment).

Outreach: Supported outreach initiatives of NASA Administrator and Associate Administrator of Office of Policy and Plans in disseminating information about the agency to industry and interest groups.

The above assignments were in direct alignment with my goals included in my IDP. This increased visibility and working knowledge of the agency and its interactions with other agencies and branches of the Government provided me with keen insight into internal and external processes and factors, and the parties thereto.

In Code Z, I gained a greater understanding of formulation, integration, and dissemination of policies developed or interpreted at the agency level. Also, I became more knowledgeable about NASA's relationships with other Government agencies and the Administration.

After my five months in Code Z, I went to work on Capitol Hill for 7 months as a staff member for a Congressman. My background in Legislative Affairs at the Center allowed me to gain this

Hill Experience: The member is on NASA's Authorization Committee, and is a Ranking member. I am serving on his personal staff working on science and education issues, and supporting his outreach efforts. I am also working on building an aerospace caucus in the House to further promote the aerospace industry. (FYI: This assignment requires Code L approval and a close working relationship with them is best.)

I have been provided significant visibility with senior NASA Management, including the NASA Administrator, along with Capitol Hill staff. It was truly an incredible experience.

Steve Lambing (1996 – 1997)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code Z

Home Center: Marshall Space Flight Center

My original intention was for Code Z to be my collateral assignment. I was curious about the process for producing the NASA Strategic Plan. Once I got started in Code Z, I made it my primary assignment, and converted my previous 3 months in another code to my collateral.

In working with the people in Code Z in charge of developing and updating the Strategic Plan, I have been exposed to a view of NASA I had never, and probably could never have gotten at any Field Center. The view from Strategic Management in Code Z gives you perspective on the entire

agency, what all is being done, and what direction everyone and every project is going. The same folks are also working on the Strategic Management Handbook and the Agency-wide performance plans and reports. And the work regularly involves some of the Agency's most influential people; AA's and deputy AA's, Center directors, and the Agency Administrator and Deputy Administrator. If you want a fantastic bird's-eye view of NASA and to feel like you've got a hand on the Agency's steering wheel, this is a great place.

JOHNSON SPACE CENTER (JSC)

Carlos A. Liceaga (1997 – 1998)

Host Center: Johnson Space Center/EV12

Home Center: Langley Research Center

My primary assignment involved four tasks. One was to write a Project Technical Requirements Specification for the Payload and General Support Computer (PGSC). The second was to consolidate and streamline the requirements for Shuttle and International Space Station (ISS) certification of government furnished equipment into one set of requirements. A third was to modify the existing PGSC expansion chassis so its conducted electrical emissions would be in compliance with the Shuttle requirements. The fourth was to upgrade the PGSC expansion chassis to one that is compatible with the laptop computer PGSC is upgrading to. After two months, I took a collateral assignment as the Project Manager for the Color Printer Subsystem (CPS). I enjoyed the work because CPS is going to be tested on the KC-135 vomit comet and on the Shuttle before being deployed on the Russian and U.S. segments of the ISS and the Shuttle.

Kennedy Space Center (KSC)

Susan Minor (2002 – 2003)

Host Center: Kennedy Space Center

Home Center: NASA Headquarters/Code M, Office of Space Flight (Launch Services)

One disadvantage of being at Headquarters is that sometimes it is hard to see the trees for the forest. My work at HQ gives me great experience in policy and broad issues concerning space access. But sometimes it's good to get back to a center to see how the "real" work is done. KSC provides great opportunities since it is where most of the payload processing and launches supporting the science codes occurs. I chose to do my detail in the Mission Integration Office of the Launch Services Program at KSC (organization code VA) since my headquarters office is responsible for handling the policy and budget issues concerning that

office. My experience gave me a deeper appreciation for how decisions made at HQ flow down to the working troops and carrying that knowledge back to HQ will be helpful there as well. In addition, I got to play with hardware (always a benefit) as well as follow several expendable launch vehicle missions. One thing that benefited my experience was to interface with all lines of management in the organization to enable a cooperative spirit in my goals for my detail. Anyone seeking a detailed knowledge of how things actually get launched into space would do well to consider a stint at KSC.

MARSHALL SPACE FLIGHT CENTER (MSFC)

Louann E. Beu (1995 – 1996)

Host Center: Marshall Space Flight Center

Home Center: Dryden Flight Research Center

My main responsibility was to learn policy and procedures utilized in the every day operations of meeting the Mission of the Marshall Space Flight Center and to work with management on how they accomplish these tasks. There are plenty of opportunities for creative problem solving and the work is rewarding--plus appreciated.

Experiences Outside NASA

Megan McCluer (2001 – 2002)

Primary Host: Naval Air Systems Command, Patuxent River, Maryland

Collateral Host: Bell-Agusta Aerospace Company, Ft. Worth, Texas and Milan, Italy

Home Center: Ames Research Center

I chose to do my development assignment rotations outside of NASA to get a greater breadth of experience. The work at Naval Air Systems Command, or NAVAIR, has been enriching. This is the world's busiest flight test center, so there is always a lot going on. I had done computational work in graduate school, wind tunnel testing at Ames, and now have exposure to flight testing. The Navy is a great organization to work for. They provide plenty of opportunity and flexibility, and have been extremely accommodating to me personally. The Navy desires a closer relationship with NASA (consistent with Sean O'Keefe's message for NASA to have a closer tie with DOD) and would warmly welcome any future participants.

Working with the Navy has been an excellent means to gain a new perspective. The organizational and working structure is different as well as how specific tasks are approached. Similar to industry, every 15

minutes of time is billed to a program and it appears to motivate people since they are accountable for the charged time. There were many projects that I wanted to be involved with here and it became necessary for me to just pick and choose a few. The program is demanding and I learned the importance of prioritizing since there wasn't enough time to do all that I wanted.

My collateral is with industry. Some paperwork is required to arrange an assignment with a private company, especially if foreign travel is involved. However, if you truly want to do it, and you can justify it as beneficial to NASA, you will be successful.

Linda S. Parish (2001 – 2002)

Home Center: NASA Headquarters

Collateral Host Organization: Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, Kanab, Utah

At the start of the program year, I was unsure what my collateral assignment would be but was determined that it would not be a typical working experience. As I progressed during the program year, focusing on the "triangle," identifying my values, mission and, ultimately revealing my true passion, I was driven to pursue an unusual assignment that I could connect with NASA. Throughout my lifetime I had been emotionally drawn to canines with a natural ability to intensely bond. I had served as a long-term volunteer at a local hospital visiting the mental health and physical rehabilitation units to share my canine companions with others and also trained a service dog to be matched with a physically challenged individual. Today, I continue to work as a volunteer in the canine community as an advanced obedience instructor.

Although I was familiar with local organizations that rescue animals and promote adoption programs, I pursued an out-of-state assignment at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, which was founded in the 1970's and is considered to be the nation's largest sanctuary for abused and abandoned animals. The assignment at Best Friends provided me a developmental opportunity to work at a non-governmental/non-profit organization to provide unique framing of leadership issues outside the world of government for the purpose of gaining new perspectives and, at the same time, to contribute to the organization.

Representing NASA's Development Program, my assignment was to meet with and interview organizational staff to gain knowledge of the organization's vision, mission, leadership strategies, community acceptance, state and federal support, fund raisers, successes and barriers encountered. To fully experience the value of the Best Friends organization, I worked with facility staff daily to comprehend the strategies

required to achieve success outside of the government. At the conclusion of the assignment I was ready to connect my experience and passion with NASA. At the 2001/2002 Graduation ceremony I proudly presented my vision, connecting NASA with the canine community, to NASA's Administrator, Sean O'Keefe, other senior level officials, guests, and the graduating class as follows:

IMAGINE THIS:

NASA Rescues Unwanted Canines to Enhance Agency Security

Once again, NASA is in the forefront striving for the betterment of humankind. A program is underway to enhance security measures throughout the agency. Canines targeted for euthanasia will be trained in scent discrimination to work at all of NASA's installations. These highly skilled working canines will be paired with experienced handlers and housed at each of NASA's installations to utilize one of their most reliable natural skills, scent discrimination. Should the need arise, these teams of canines will be called upon to sniff out explosives, weapons, and even dangerous chemicals. NASA continues to strive for a safer and more secure working environment for its workforce. The agency receives recognition as the first agency to implement this program.

Terri Hudkins (2002 – 2003)

Home Center: NASA Headquarters

Host Organizations: Department of Defense, U.S. Space Command, NORAD, and US Northern Command

I spent a fascinating year working with DoD as they stood-up the new homeland defense organization, U.S. Northern Command. I arrived as the Command was just forming and completed my assignment just before the organization became operational. I also worked with U.S. Space Command as it was merging with U.S. Strategic Command and moving to Omaha, NE. I was exposed to issues and decisions relating to organizational development, mergers and migration, information integration, roles and responsibilities of the military versus local, state, federal agencies and the legal ramifications. I was also involved in the Columbia accident investigation as a liaison between NASA and the Command, working mostly with the public affairs offices. Before I left, I was managing the homeland defense's Interagency Coordination Working Group! This was a terrific win-win opportunity for NASA and DoD. For more information on why I suggest working outside of NASA see "Work Outside of NASA."

Ted Biess (2002 – 2003)
Home Center: NASA Langley Research Center
Host Organizations: DARPA

Some comments if you want to consider a detail at DARPA:

- Each DARPA project manager (PM) is a CEO of a virtual company. Each PM has the ability to structure their program as they wish. The PM does not make the day-to-day project management decisions. The DARPA agent or the entity performing the work (university, contractor, etc.) handles these decisions.
- DARPA does not have infrastructure. They rely on contractor, university, and government facilities. The program may only have two or three people working in the DARPA office (PM, secretary, and one support person). Project managers are frequently on travel.
- DARPA project managers have very little time, and some pride themselves on missing scheduled meetings and writing short, terse emails that have no capitalization. The program manager may get 30 minutes of his boss's time every month. This is not the ideal environment for mentoring.
- All DARPA personnel (this includes management and PMs) have a four-year tour of duty. The institutional memory resides with the contractor support. DARPA is roughly 140 project managers bound together by a common travel agent. It may take a PM time to establish their project and they will have limited time for mentoring.
- A Secret clearance and a DARPA badge is required for unescorted access to the DARPA building. Otherwise, you will need an escort to the bathroom. Security and a badge need to be worked out months before arriving.
- DARPA management may not want to 'officially' get you detailed to DARPA due to legal constraints. This means you will have a temporary desk without Internet or phone access. You can still get a badge. This arrangement is less than optimal.
- If you are given a position as a DARPA program manager, congratulations. Otherwise, DARPA is not setup for a detailed assignment such as a program rotation. If at all possible, make sure you have all details (clearance, badge, office space, phone, internet, expectations, etc.) worked months before arriving. The PMs are extremely pressed for time and it will be much more difficult to work these details after your official start date. It may be easier to obtain a detail with a DARPA agent.

Family Experience

All of the participants in the 2001 – 2002 class took assignments in Centers other than our Home Center. For most of us, this involved a move

to a different location. We approached these moves differently: some of us are in commuter marriages; some moved spouses and families; some of us are single. We provide here some comments about our experiences. By no means do they cover all of the permutations we undertook.

Commuter Marriage

Faith Vilas (2001 – 2002)

Host Center: NASA Headquarters/Code SE

Home Center: Johnson Space Center

A few of us conducted “commuter” marriages during this year. For any of you contemplating this option, it can work, but requires a lot of hard work. I talked to people who are at NASA HQ, both in the program and on other assignments, and experiencing commuter marriage at the moment. When asked about her commuter marriage experience, one person simply said, “Don’t”. Otherwise, here are some guidelines collected from many people.

Make sure your spouse or partner understands that you are not leaving him or her permanently (if that’s not your intention), you are just choosing to participate in this one-year training program.

Call early, call often. One of us calls every day at the end of the day to review what went on for both parties during the day. Many people call multiple times per day. One of us often leaves the phone open during a TV show that both he and his family are watching, thus sharing it with his family. Cell phones offer blocks of time where long distance calls can be made for no extra cost from anywhere in the US covered by cellular service. Get one of those plans – it’s worth it.

Get home at least once per month. Any less frequently suggests that you are deserting the person at home with responsibilities of maintaining home and family.

Pace yourself on going home. I tried to fly home every weekend during the first few months, which proved to be exhausting and allowed me about one night to relax before I started gearing up to travel back the next day. Now, I have extended time between visits but try to make the visits longer (long holiday weekends, business trips). One person who drives home 2 – 3 hours one way each weekend finds that embarking on the drive is even hard at times.

Share the travel. Bring your spouse, partner, and family to your assignment location for a visit. Incorporate them in your hunt for a place to live. What might have seemed alien to them now will be a known commodity. Exploring new locations is fun!

Roll with the punches. I never anticipated the events of September 11, 2001, and they threw a monkey wrench into carefully crafted travel plans by canceling or changing reserved flights, and closing Reagan National Airport.

If something significant happens at either location, contact each other. The spoken interaction, and simply knowing that your loved ones are safe, is invaluable (even for an "I").

Be ready to drop everything and return home on a moment's notice if something serious comes up. That's not negotiable, even for the program.

Taking The Family With You

Many program participants brought their spouses and sometimes families with them when they relocated for the year. A common difficulty that was experienced by the parent who stayed home with young children following relocation was due to the lack of friends nearby and no access to a babysitter, s/he found himself mostly trapped in the temporary apartment or house.

Other tips from parents:

- Call the local chamber of commerce early (as soon as you know in which community you want to reside or when you know you are in the program) to get contacts for team sports such as soccer and football as the sign-up for these activities occur in spring for the fall season.
- Contact several churches for pre-school programs (not just daycare) and ask for recommendations of other churches in the area that may have programs/openings. One participant found a preschool at a local church upon asking the secretary at his new church where her child went.

The Prince Family Experience

Andy Prince (2001 – 2002)

Host Center: Langley Research Center

Home Center: Marshall Space Flight Center

The developmental program year is an exciting time for the participant, but can be challenging for other family members. The following are some observations based on my experience in relocating my family to the Hampton Roads area of Virginia.

- The program does not pay for relocation or housing of family members, so if you decide to take your family with you, it will come out of your

- wallet. Fortunately, the per diem is sufficiently generous that you can still come out ahead if you don't go overboard.
- The most difficult thing for my spouse was leaving her friends and family. Since she was very involved in volunteer activities at our church, she had to leave her "job" in order to accompany me to LaRC.
 - My children were suitably young (3 and 5) so that, despite leaving grandparents and friends, the transition was relatively smooth. One thing that we missed was the stable of competent baby sitters that we had cultivated in Huntsville.
 - For us, the best thing we did was choosing a church to attend regularly. Through our adopted church family we were able to make new friends and get involved in local and community activities.
 - We have taken the opportunity to get out and see everything we can while we are here. The ages of our children make doing some things difficult (such as going to see the Virginia Symphony).
 - The program requires a fair number of long trips away from home. Because we had all moved to Virginia, my wife did not have her usual support network to back her up when I went out of town. For her, it became a growth experience in learning how to run the household with me gone.
 - My final message is be sensitive to the stress and demands being placed on the spouse and children. For the program participant, the excitement of new experiences and training help offset the inconvenience of being away from home for a year. Provide similar experiences and strong emotional support for the spouse and children so that they may find this year as fulfilling as you and well worth the aggravation.

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