

Final Report of the Situation  
Controller and Budget  
NMSU  
October, 2012

Introduction

The Division of Administration and Finance at New Mexico State University executed an interview process of as many of its roughly 700 employees as possible, between Oct. 1 and 10, 2012. The purpose of these interviews was to gather data to describe the current state of the organization for a strategic planning initiative.

The Division also decided to perform a scan of up to 14 customer groups, in order to gather external data on the Division's performance and opportunities.

This report provides the initial results of the employee interviews and the customer scan for the Controller and Budget units.

While an interview and analysis process of this type usually delivers a relatively good snapshot of the non-technical characteristics of an organization, it must be kept in perspective as being only a 'snapshot' in time. The reported results must be integrated with the day-to-day and historical evidence available to the organization. Interview data is credible because we seek patterns of information and do not report stand-alone individual comments but this data is also one sided. The total picture should be considered before conclusions are drawn or actions taken.

The Division and Controller/Budget leadership is reminded that their employees in the interviews were promised that they would see this report at some time.

**Report of the Situation for Controller and Budget**

Due to the nature of the interviewing process, we were unable to separate the results for the two units in the report. There are some differences.

The departments of Controller and Budget have the image of having the ability and willingness to get the job done. If mistakes are made employees simply fix them. Although there have been more approval requirements introduced into the mix, this is not viewed as excessive, at least so far. Supervisors are respected for the most part. Like other sections of A&F, there is a belief that the Controller's unit is top heavy.

The new Director that has been brought onboard is seen as a 'positive' for the department. People feel informed when changes occur – and they occur frequently - and employees help each other navigate these. Other changes have resulted in significantly improved processes like in SPA. Communication is primarily by email and people are copied on lots of these. Documentation is seen as a critical requirement of the job.

There is a sense that there used to be more of a team feel in the department. There appears to be significant polarity – either employees are very satisfied or they perceive hidden agendas and favoritism. Nonetheless, most employees are viewed as hard-working and competent.

Purchasing received a national award for excellence recently. Otherwise, positive feedback is spotty and one supervisor felt saddened that certificates of appreciation could not be handed out in her unit as they could potentially suggest favoritism. On the flip side, there is a tendency for dissatisfied customers to jump over all the levels in the department and take their complaint directly to “the top.” This action has a negative effect on morale.

There has been a revived initiative to become more customer-focused. Student emails receive rapid responses. For those with direct contact with students there is a concerted effort to reach out to them, to be helpful and to be pleasant.

In summary, Controller and Budget appears to be a well-oiled machine with consistent performance which is enhanced with improved technology in data entry and processing.

### **The Customer Scan for Controller and Budget**

The results of the interviews of 14 groups of customers are reported in the following. This report consists primarily of actual customer input – unfiltered or edited.

#### **Controller and Budget**

##### *Strengths*

- Some customers reported relatively rapid turnaround on payments for expense reports
- Some customers stated that they felt AP had been making significant strides in improving their service
- They have been helpful to me
- They are short handed and some people work amazing hours to get the job done
- SPA’s leadership had been willing to talk with us
- SPA met with our college

##### *Needs for Improvement*

- Taking six months to repay a legitimate expense is excessive; Other customers complained about the turn-around time on expense reimbursement
- Delays in reimbursements because of procedure changes that were not communicated to the customers
- They don’t seem to understand the difference between grants and contracts. We are operating on a huge contract and are not spending NMSU’s money; we are

- spending Federal money. Nevertheless, they process our PRs like they were NMSU money.
- Understaffed
  - They are inflexible; the answer to a need is usually 'no'
  - The level of approvals to purchase something is incredible
  - They will reject something for a value that they themselves computed
  - The quality of the paperwork and records we submit is fabulous and yet they still delay processes by looking at every detail
  - They are somehow empowered to stop our process by simply sending a terse email; why don't they just call us if there is a problem
  - There has been high turnover in SPA and thus some of their people are untrained and inexperienced
  - They seem to think that the 'one size fits all' approach is effective
  - They are a policing organization
  - The budget unit seems to be overwhelmed

The primary pattern of these examples seemed to be that activities that were routine and legitimate would suddenly be called into question, causing considerable delays and rework by those submitting the paperwork for payment