

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN



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# Interagency Councils

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## INTERAGENCY COUNCILS

*By Steve Brockelman and Dave Mader*

While it's common to think of the U.S. federal government as a single massive organization, the reality is that it operates more as a federation of many distinct departments and agencies. These organizations have their own missions, budgets, governance structures, and operating cultures. Left to their own devices, agencies tend to pursue their objectives independently. But when agencies are called upon to solve challenges that cut across agencies—which is happening more and more frequently—they must learn to work together effectively.

Nowhere is this more evident than in providing the support services vital for effective mission delivery—contracting, finance, human capital, IT, and performance management. These so-called “mission-support services” are actually quite similar from agency to agency. The job of a Chief Information Officer (CIO) in the Department of Agriculture, for example, is not so different from that of a CIO in the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Because of this, federal government officials frequently work across agencies to collaboratively tackle shared challenges and develop mission-support policies.

Perhaps the best mechanism for cross-agency collaboration among mission-support functions is the group of federal interagency management councils, collectively known as the “CXO Councils.” These are long-standing councils of agency officials, most of which are established by law, who lead mission-support functions within the 24 largest federal agencies. Each CXO Council is chaired by the senior-most official at the corresponding management office in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), with a leading career agency CXO often serving as Vice Chair.

The CXO Councils work along two dimensions:

- **Horizontally:** Peers come together from across government to identify common “pain points,” to share what’s working (and what isn’t), and to gain a broader perspective on their evolving roles in supporting their agencies.
- **Vertically:** Councils serve as a forum to connect OMB with agency CXOs to discuss policy priorities and management plans. In response, agencies have the opportunity to collectively voice concerns about draft proposals and recommend approaches that will improve policy implementation and outcomes.

If you are a mission support leader in your department or agency, you will find yourself wearing two hats that parallel the councils’ dimensions. Horizontally, you will find yourself working with other mission support colleagues in your agency (chief information officers, chief human capital officers, chief

acquisition officers, chief financial officers, and performance improvement officers). Likewise, vertically, you will have three interrelated roles:

- Ensuring compliance with government-wide requirements imposed by law, OMB, OPM, or GSA
- Ensuring the delivery of services to your customers
- Serving as an advisor to agency leaders on issues for which you are the expert

The most well-known CXO Councils include:

- **Chief Acquisition Officers (CAO) Council.** Chaired by the Administrator, Office of Federal Procurement Policy at OMB, the CAO Council promotes effective business practices that ensure the timely delivery of best value products and services to the agencies; achieve public policy objectives; and further integrity, fairness, competition, and openness in the federal acquisition system.
- **Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Council.** Chaired by the Controller of the Office of Federal Financial Management at OMB, the CFO Council advises and coordinates the member agencies' activities on such matters as consolidating and modernizing financial systems, improving financial information quality, financial data and information standards, internal controls, legislation affecting financial operations and organizations, and any other financial management matter.
- **Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council.** Chaired by the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the CHCO Council advises and collaborates with OPM and other stakeholders to create human capital management strategies that attract, develop, and retain a high-performing, engaged, and diverse federal workforce.
- **Chief Information Officers (CIO) Council.** Chaired by the Federal Chief Information Officer at OMB, the CIO Council's mission is to improve practices related to the design, acquisition, development, modernization, use, sharing, and performance of federal government information resources.
- **Performance Improvement Council (PIC).** Chaired by the Associate Director for Performance and Personnel Management at OMB, the PIC serves agency Performance Improvement Officers by assisting with implementing the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act, facilitating the sharing of effective performance practices across government, deepening performance improvement capabilities within the federal workforce, and resolving cross-cutting performance issues.
- **President's Management Council (PMC).** Chaired by the Deputy Director for Management at OMB, the PMC advises the President and OMB on government reform initiatives, provides performance and management leadership throughout the executive branch, and oversees implementation of government-wide management policies and programs. The PMC is comprised of the Chief Operating Officers of major federal government

### **Firsthand Experience from Dave Mader, Controller, Office of Management and Budget**

I've served as Co-Chair of the CFO Council for the last several years and as Chair of the President's Management Council (PMC) during my tenure as acting Deputy Director for Management at OMB in 2015. This experience has reinforced my long-standing view that many of the "all of government" challenges such as cybersecurity, category management, and shared services can be effectively driven only through the collaborative mechanism of the CXO Councils and the PMC.

This horizontal integrating mechanism allows for several critical success factors in implementing new policy or program direction. First, the councils ensure that policymakers can gather input from key stakeholders in the functional community. Second, they drive consistent program or policy direction implementation across government. Last, the councils provide a forum for sharing best practices and feedback.

agencies, primarily Deputy Secretaries, Deputy Administrators, and agency heads from GSA and OPM.

### **The Office of Executive Councils: A "Force Multiplier" for the Interagency Management Councils**

In 2010, a dedicated team was established at the General Services Administration to increase the overall impact and effectiveness of the CXO Councils. The Office of Executive Councils serves in a government-wide capacity, providing management, analytical, and operational support to the councils. Their activities include:

- Facilitating annual CXO Council strategy sessions to set priorities that reflect consensus among agencies and OMB
- Managing CXO Council budgets to align spending with council priorities and maximize return on investments
- Conducting analyses to determine what's working (and what isn't) in CXO functions across government
- Documenting leading practices and sharing across the CXO community to improve performance, essentially building a "Center of Excellence" for federal management
- Training incoming CXOs at "boot camps" and providing development opportunities for "rising stars" in support functions

A final piece of advice for incoming agency officials: Even if you're not serving in a mission-support role, it's important to be familiar with the interagency

management councils and to have a solid working relationship with your agency's CXOs. Too often, incoming leaders encounter what they perceive as obstacles when trying to hire and develop talent, acquire goods and services, formulate budgets, deploy technology solutions, or any number of enabling actions. It's simply not possible for agencies to deliver on their core missions if their support services are not working in concert with mission delivery. By gaining an understanding of your agency's support services and by involving CXOs in the development and implementation of agency mission strategies, your chances for success are greatly enhanced.

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