

Federal Lakes Recreation Demonstration Laboratory Questions and Answers

QUESTION: What is a reinvention laboratory?

ANSWER: Reinvention laboratories are defined as an “experiment” in changing the way we conduct business to improve products or services to our customers. Laboratories are opportunities to be creative and innovative in finding new and better ways of doing business more effectively and faster, and with the same or fewer resources. They are places that cut through red tape, meet or exceed customer expectations, and unleash innovations for improvement from employees. The results of successful “experiments” can be shared across organizational lines to improve services across the Federal government. The Federal Lakes Recreation Demonstration Laboratory is a management laboratory that involves innovative ways of planning, developing, implementing, and managing recreation programs or activities.

QUESTION: As a reinvention laboratory is there any new money for my agency or lake?

ANSWER: In general, the reinvention laboratory designation does not provide a specifically identifiable funding source. Funds necessary to implement laboratory activities will have to come from funds available to each agency. In some cases the planned activities will be compatible with and be able to be achieved within currently identified resources. Where new or additional resources are needed they should be included in future budget plans.

QUESTION: If there is no additional funding, what’s in it for us?

ANSWER: Under the reinvention laboratory concept, you will be able to solve problems more easily because you will be given the freedom to find innovative new ways of doing business and operate more efficiently. The idea behind the lab is to remove barriers placed in the way of efficient operations thorough removal of encumbrances established by agency regulations. The laboratory designation allows for and encourages, where believed to be necessary, the waiving of agency policies and regulations. By removing regulatory constraints, except those established by law, managers will have the opportunity to be more innovative. Problems should be more easily solved. As a result, existing resources will end up going further and local managers will have an opportunity to experiment as never before. Good ideas could end up as agency policy, or new or revised regulations or legislation.

QUESTION: What is a waiver and how do we get one?

ANSWER: Waivers are delegations of authority to deviate from existing internal agency policies and procedures and expedite innovation and improve customer service. They are often sought by managers who are trying to make their operations work better, cost less, and get results. Waiver requests are made to the agency having jurisdiction who will either process the request or if not within its power, will forward it to the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR). The NPR will work with the agencies involved to resolve the issue.

QUESTION: How much work is involved for us?

ANSWER: There is an old adage that says, “You have to give something to get something.” The same is true for reinvention laboratories. Managers must invest time and effort in the lab to end up with useful results. The honest answer is “It will be what you make of it.” Lots of effort could potentially result in broad rewards. Minimal efforts could result in few rewards.

QUESTION: What’s in it for the public?

ANSWER: Customer service and satisfaction is a primary mission of all Federal agencies. Visitors to the federal lakes seek and often demand high quality recreation services and facilities. By participating in this pilot lake demonstration laboratory, new opportunities will be available to work collaboratively with the various managing partners, the private sector and the visiting public on recreation issues. The customers stand to gain the most in the way of improved services and higher quality facilities. The economies of local and regional communities will also be improved.

QUESTION: How much real flexibility will we have?

ANSWER: The parameters of a management lab designation are very broad. The idea behind the labs is to remove barriers placed in the way of efficient operations through removal of encumbrances established by agency regulations except those established by law. As a rule of thumb, pretty much any thing is allowable unless conditions laid down in public law prevent the agency from making changes. It will be what you make it.

QUESTION: What are some examples of what we might be able to do with this new designation?

ANSWER: Examples of efforts and experiments include:

- The development of innovative contracting methods to eliminate burdensome and time-consuming tasks established under agency regulations.
- Experiment with reservoir water levels for above dam recreation activities, and water releases to better accommodate downstream recreation uses.
- Conduct a joint study that identifies and assesses recreation needs and possible solutions.
- Development of a commercial recreation business plan to be able to provide better recreation services and facilities.
- Engage in various communication techniques in an effort to better reach out and understand customers and managing partners.
- Seek out various ways to fund recreation facilities.
- Experiment with different federal and non-federal management partnership arrangements;
- Highlight a local or regional campaign like a clean boating campaign.