

**Working Draft**

# **Administrative Reforms in the Department of Education**

By

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## **Introduction**

To put the word “Reforms” alongside administration is to indicate a dynamic process. It is a process intended to bring about positive change in methods, systems and outcomes of public institutions.

Typically, the push to undertake administrative reforms is driven by one or a combination of several factors. Foremost of these is the mandate that the institution is obligated to deliver, and its concomitant public expectations. Another driver is the continuing pursuit of greater effectiveness and efficiency, to which many theories

and approaches of administrative reforms are directed. Finally, changing conditions, both internal and external, are also a constant driver of administrative reforms.

Today I am tasked to discuss administrative reforms in the Department of Education (DepEd). I welcome this as an opportunity to reflect on this not just as a Professor of public administration, but also as a practitioner, having assumed the position of Secretary of the Department for close to ten months now.

My discussion will cover four parts. I will start by providing a brief characterization of the Department of Education. This is critical because such characterization discloses the peculiarities that we are dealing with. Second, I will discuss the administrative challenges arising from the peculiarities of DepEd. Third, I will share some of the major administrative reforms intended to respond to the challenges. I divide these between reforms introduced before I took office, and reforms that my administration is presently pursuing. Finally, I will share my reflections on the implications of these on public administration.

## **Characterization of DepEd**

One character of DepEd that stands out is its core function as a key implementing agency of the state's mandate to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and to take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. Corollarily, the state is commanded to establish and maintain a system of free public education in the elementary and high school levels.

The constitution backs the mandate with the necessary resources by requiring the state to assign the highest budgetary priority to education. From recent years

data, the DepEd budget has climbed from 16.92% of total budget in 2013, to 21.73% of total budget this year, the first budget year of the Duterte administration.

The highest budgetary allocation translates to having to manage the biggest bureaucracy in the public sector. Today DepEd has a total of 802,003 authorized plantilla positions, of which 770,656 are teaching positions.

Our elementary and secondary schools are spread all over the country, with presence in the urban centers to the remotest barangays. Our most recent data shows that we have 38,803 elementary schools, 8,282 Junior High Schools, and 5,958 Senior High Schools.

Our public school system catered to a total of 22,994,842 learners in the just concluded school year, of which 1,596,754 were in kindergarten, 14,488,231 are in elementary level, 6,177,876 are in Junior High School, and 731,981 are in Senior High School.

#### **Enrollment, 2016-2017, Public Only**

Kindergarten	1,596,754
Elementary (Grade 1-6)	14,488,231
Junior High School (Grade 7-10)	6,177,876
Senior High School (Grade 11-12)	731,981
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,994,842</b>

With a heavy constitutional mandate comes great public expectations. I often say that that Filipinos regard education as the cause of everything.

## **Administrative Challenges**

Arising from the unique character of DepEd -- in terms of its constitutional mandate and the resulting size of its budget and bureaucracy, its geographic spread and the public expectations -- are equally distinct administrative challenges.

In fulfilling its mandate, DepEd is required to provide not just any education, but quality education. Administratively, this means having the systems and personnel to generate quality content. K to 12 should be seen in this light, in terms of introducing major changes in curriculum and approach in teaching. In summary, K to 12 strengthens early childhood education by making kindergarten compulsory, encourages relevance through contextualization techniques, tries to improve proficiency through the use of Mother Tongue as language of learning from Kindergarten to Grade 3 (the theory is that the use of the most familiar language in early years facilitates better thinking and learning to build stronger foundation among learners), shifts the curriculum approach from “discipline-based” to “spiral progression” from the basic to the complex, and providing various tracks towards either further education or employment.

With the attribute of having a huge budget comes the challenge of absorptive capacity. Being trained in fiscal administration, the very first glaring concern that I flagged was the rate of budget utilization.

Having a very large bureaucracy and wide geographic dispersion of operating units present a number of administrative challenges. For one, it presents challenges in professionalization from the hiring of personnel to in-service training and capacity building. The challenge becomes particularly acute in times of major changes such as K to 12. For another, monitoring is very difficult. When I came into office, for example, I could not be given an update of the status of funds managed at the field, or implemented by DPWH with respect to school buildings. In this context, you can imagine that leadership plays a very important role.

Finally, one factor that can upset all planning and preparation in such a big institution is the external factor. One of these is political. As a big institution we are naturally a magnet for political intervention, in good faith and bad, from the Executive, the legislature and local governments. The other is disasters, whether natural and man-made.

## **Administrative Responses**

**Major Reforms Prior to Present Administration.** There have been a number of major administrative reforms prior to my assumption of office, intended to respond to the administrative challenges of the Department.

The first is the so-called “trifocalization” of education management in 1994 to 1995. Prior to this, the then Department of Education, Culture and Sports or DECS had authority over all levels of education. As may be gleaned from the Administrative Code of 1987, the Department covered elementary, secondary, physical and international education; non-formal and vocational or technical

education; higher education; and development of culture. In 1990, Congress formed a joint commission to review and assess Philippine education. Among the recommendations in this joint commission's report in 1991 was for DECS to prioritize basic education and give it its undivided attention.

Following the recommendation, Congress passed Republic Act 7722 or the Higher Education Act of 1994. This created the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), to be independent and separate from DECS, and attached to the Office of the President for administrative purposes. CHED covers both public and private institutions of higher education as well as degree-granting program in all post-secondary educational institutions, public and private. The functions and responsibilities, along with personnel, properties, assets and liabilities of the Bureau of Higher Education of DECS, including those for higher and tertiary education and degree-granting vocational and technical programs in the regional offices, were transferred to CHED.

Subsequently, Republic Act 7796 or the Technical Education and Skills Development Act of 1994 was also approved. It created the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), which absorbed the DECS Bureau of Technical and Vocational Education and the personnel and functions pertaining to technical-vocational education in the DECS regional offices.

Another major administrative reform is embodied in Republic Act 9155 or the *Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001*. Aside from renaming DECS into the Department of Education, RA 9155 provided for the allocation of responsibility and accountability among the field units, particularly at the regional, division and schools level. The idea was to give field units greater leeway in translating the

policies of the Department that are set at the national level into programs, projects and services that are adapted to local needs and conditions.

RA 9155 also transferred cultural agencies within DepEd to the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and the Department's Bureau of Physical Education and School Sports (BPESS) was abolished and its personnel were transferred to the Philippine Sports Commission.

Finally, I entered the Department at the tail-end of the implementation of a Rationalization Plan. This The Rationalization Plan traces its origin from Executive Order No. 366 issued by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in October 2004, which directed all Department Secretaries to lead in a strategic review of the operations and organization of their respective Departments. The review was for the following purposes: focusing government efforts and resources on its vital/core services; and, improving the quality and efficiency of government services delivery by eliminating/minimizing overlaps and duplication, and improving agency performance through the rationalization of service delivery and support systems, and organization structure and staffing. It appears that sometime in 2006 the DepEd submitted to DBM its Rationalization Plan/Program in line with EO 366, but was not immediately approved. Secretary Luistro revived the matter by reconstituting a Change Management Team (CMT) to review, redraft and resubmit the Rationalization Plan. In December 2013, DepEd announced the approval by DBM of its Rationalization Plan which introduced changes in the structure and staffing pattern at different levels of the Department.

I will not give an evaluation of these prior reforms as this will require a systematic, thorough and deliberate process. Suffice it to say for now that this forms part of the administrative framework in which DepEd currently operates.

**Reforms under the present administration.** Let me start by providing the substantive context in terms of the present administration's priorities.

Last year the Executive Committee had a strategic planning, in which we were assisted in the process by our colleague in NCPAG, Prof. Lily Domingo. The exercise resulted in the following vision within the current administration's term, as follows:

*By 2022, we will have nation-loving and competent lifelong learners able to respond to challenges and opportunities through the delivery of quality, accessible, relevant and liberating K to 12 Program by a modern, professional, pro-active, nimble, trusted and nurturing DepEd.*

This term vision encapsulates the vision and agenda that I earlier presented at the Education Summit sometime in November last year. This vision and agenda commits the present administration to four core deliverables:

First, the constitutional mandate of DepEd is not only to provide education; it has to raise the quality of education. Our commitment to the full implementation of K to 12 is related to this core deliverable.



The second goal is to make education accessible to every Filipino child, wherever he or she is-- in the Philippines or abroad. It is estimated that in the Philippines alone, there are 5.4 million out-of-school children and youth. In other countries, we have thousands of undocumented children of Filipino parents. They cannot go to local schools lest their parents be deported. They cannot read or write. They do not even know they are Filipinos. Our commitment to expand and intensify the Alternative Learning Systems is related to this deliverable.

The third goal is to make education relevant to the ever-changing needs of development in our country. Oftentimes, employers and even parents complain that what our learners learn from us are irrelevant to the everyday struggle for survival. During the APEC Ministerial Conference on Education, the President of Peru stressed the importance of relevance in education when he said, "by the time our learners graduate and go into the world of work, everything that we have taught them will already be irrelevant." Our commitment to assist education with ICT, and to integrate enhancements in curriculum on illegal drugs, reproductive health, and climate change and disaster preparedness are related to this deliverable.

The fourth goal is to make education truly liberating. Education should finally liberate our learners from the bonds of poverty. It must liberate our minds and our capacities for creative and critical thinking, for appreciation of our history, culture and arts.

It is within this context that we are pursuing a number of administrative initiatives and interventions.

At the transition, I took the approach of combining continuity and fresh initiatives. As you know in public administration, continuity and stability is very important, and this is the reason why I retained a number of Undersecretaries and Assistant Secretaries. At the same time, we need a fresh look at where the Department is, and this I expect to come from a number of my own team that I brought with me to the Department.

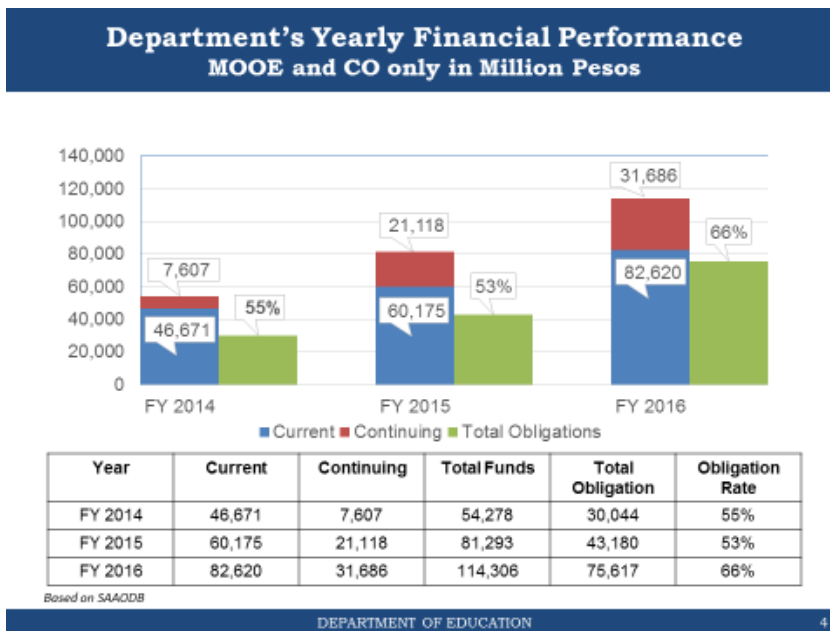
As may have been anticipated given the size of the budget, the challenge that first confronted us is absorptive capacity. At the very first Executive Committee meeting that we had, I made a presentation of the budget and asked our officials retained from the previous administration how they have allowed budget utilization to stagnate at such levels.

Thus, fiscal management reforms became the focus of our immediate and now continuing interventions. These include:

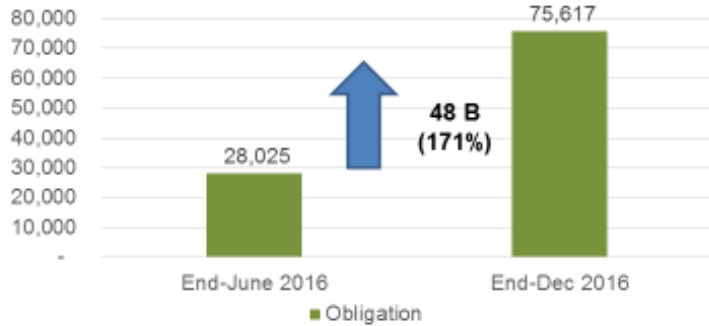
- Entrusting executive leads to champion Disbursement and Accounting, Budget and Performance Monitoring, Administration, and Procurement to efficiently utilize human and financial resources
- Creation of the Education Programs Delivery Unit (EPDU) to facilitate faster programs delivery and budget utilization as well as address bottlenecks, challenges and constraints
- Creation of five (5) Bids & Awards Committees to fast track procurement of education inputs
- Calibration of budget and accounting skills of central and field personnel through financial management operations training
- Establishment of a faster feedback mechanism with Regional Directors on fund releases and procurement challenges

- Streamlined downloading of funds and other financial processes for the conduct of activities
- Program Profiling and Portfolio Analysis as basis for needed interventions and policy changes
- Monitoring of Financial Reports mainly for all Regions and ongoing programs
- Continuing monitoring of big budget ticket items

These reforms had immediately started to bear fruit. In terms of performance in MOOE and Capital Outlay, we have increased combined obligation rate from 55% in 2015 to 66% in 2016. In a span of six (6) months, the agency has obligated 48 billion pesos bringing obligation rate to 66% in December 2016 from 26% in June 2016. This indicates improvement in capacity to utilize funds.



**Increase in Obligation Within Six Months**  
**MOOE and CO only in Million Pesos**

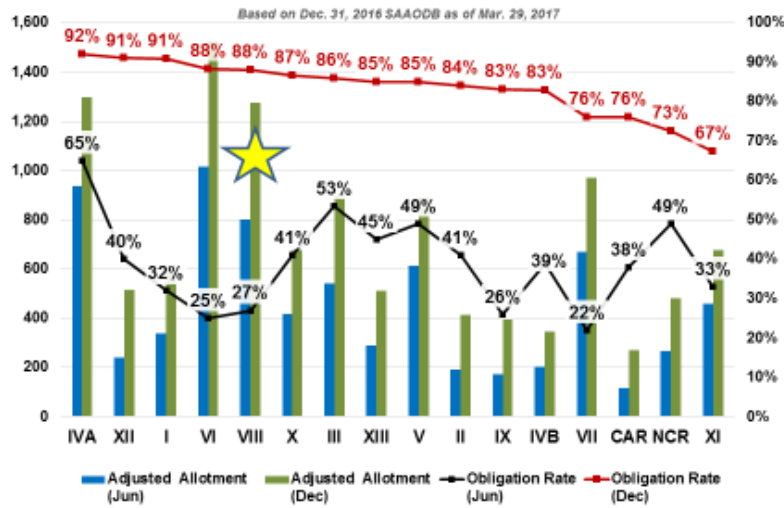


Particulars	End-June 2016			End-Dec 2016		
	Continuing (FY 2015)	Current (FY 2016)	Total Funds	Continuing (FY 2015)	Current (FY 2016)	Total Funds
<b>Allotment</b>	30,322	79,318	109,640	31,686	82,620	114,306
<b>Obligation</b>	12,658	15,367	28,025	26,031	49,586	75,617
<b>Obligation Rate</b>	42%	19%	26%	82%	60%	66%

Based on SAAODB

Arising from our efforts to effectively monitor regional performance, we have seen greater increases in obligations across regions, with obligation rates going up from a range of 22-65% in June 2016 to as high as 67-92% in December 2016 for Continuing Funds. The same performance can be said for Current Funds wherein obligation rates went up from a range of 22-51% in June 2016 to as high as 79-92% in December 2016.

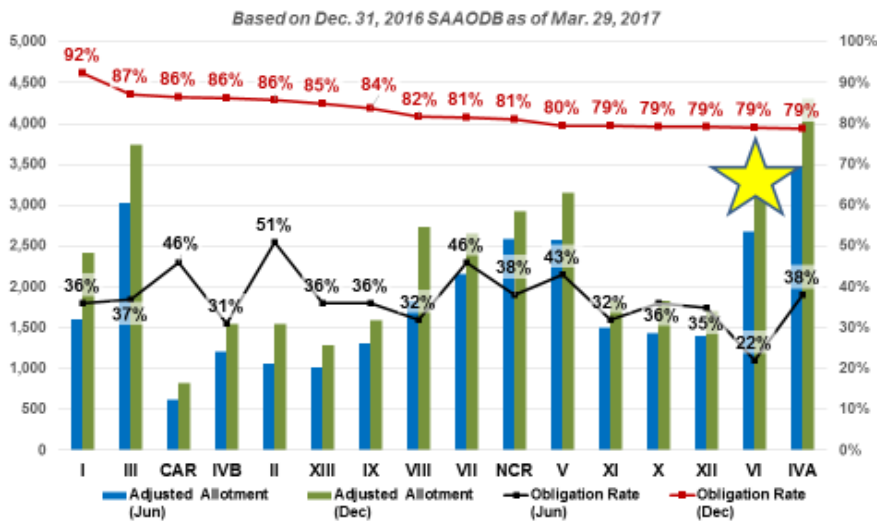
**Status of FY 2015 Funds, by Region**  
**MOOE and CO only in Million Pesos**  
 (June vs December 2016 Reports)



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**Status of FY 2016 Funds by Region**  
**MOOE and CO only in Million Pesos**  
 (June vs December)

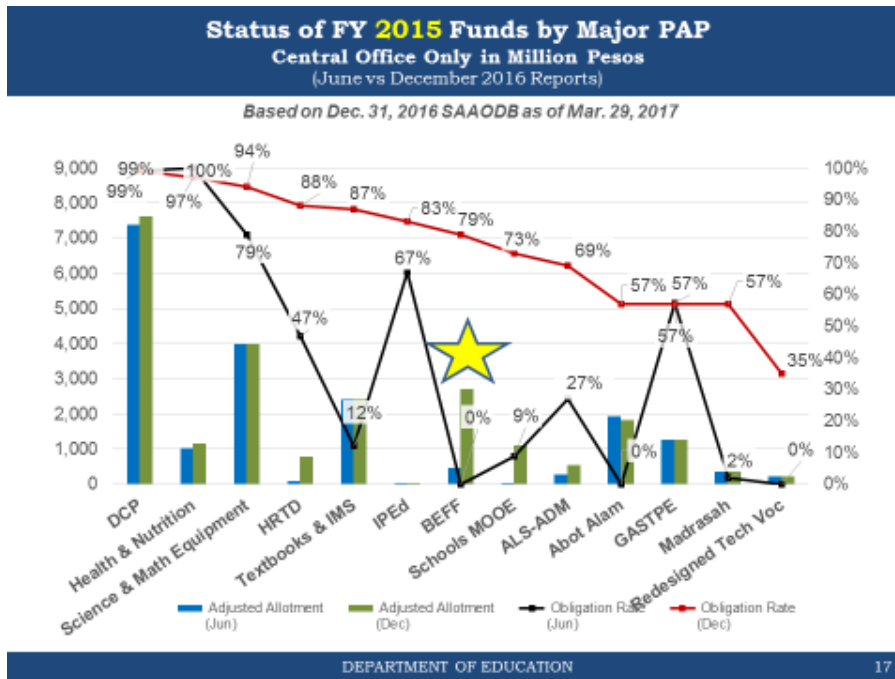


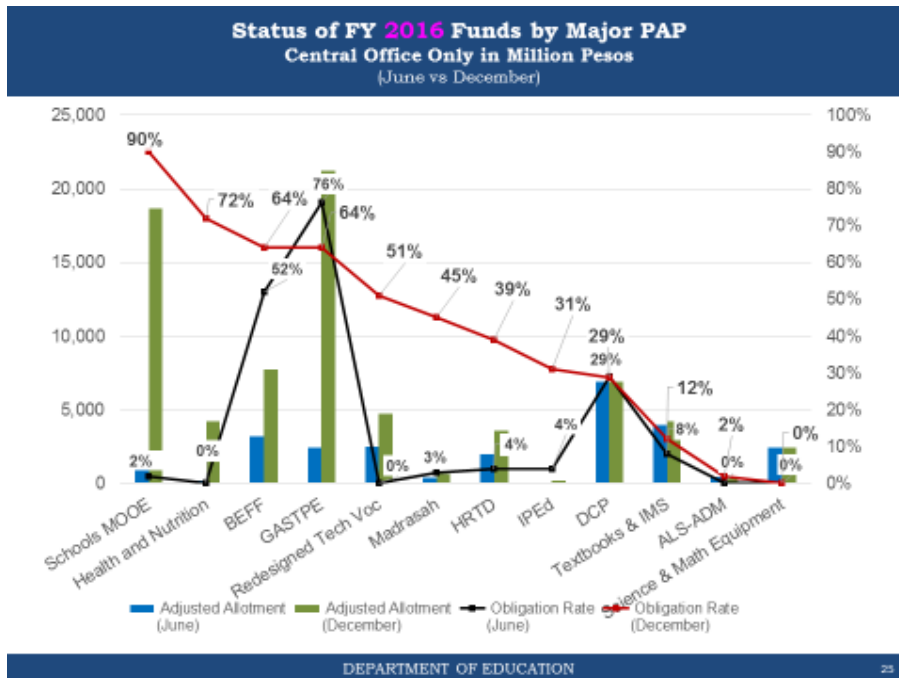
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Major improvements in obligations are also apparent among major programs, obligation rates of which have gone up from a range of 0-98% in June 2016 to a

better range of 34-100% in December 2016 with huge leaps across programs for Continuing Funds. The same performance can also be said for Current Funds where obligation rates went up from a range of 0-52% in June 2016 to a better range of 0-90% in December 2016.





The second area for administrative reform is the provision of decisive and participatory leadership. As I already mentioned, one of the first things I did was to publish a clear vision and agenda, in a document titled “Quality, Accessible, Relevant and Liberating Basic Education for All” that now guides our planning, prioritization, and introduction of new programs. For participatory leadership, in addition to the institutional Executive Committee and Management Committee meetings, I have introduced a monthly general assembly of all personnel at the Central Office, and consultation meetings with all Regional Directors.

Equally important, I have made it a point to schedule frequent visits to field units, and I have heard questions raised over my use of a wheelchair in airports whenever I travel by plane. Let me assure you that there is no correlation between the state of my knees and the state of my brains, as well as the capacity to analyze challenges, whether these be related to education, finance, politics and the economy.

I use the wheelchair in airports to conserve energy for the actual visits to the sites, whether in the context of regular visits or in the context of calamities.

From July -December 2016 made 13 regional visits and visited disaster-stricken areas, e.g. Isabela, Catanduanes, Camarines Sur, and Surigao. I have attended out of town national events like Brigada Eskwela, Regional Palaro, and just yesterday came from the Palarong Pambansa in Antique.

Another area for administrative reform will be the extensive use of technology to aid monitoring and planning. I have directed the setting up of a Financial Management Information System, Another area for administrative reform will be the extensive use of technology to aid monitoring and planning. I have directed the setting up of a Financial Management Information System, to add to existing ICT-enabled systems in learner and school-based information. But we are at the same time rationalizing our reliance on these digital information systems by improving field level validation to complete the information.

Our overall thrust is to facilitate a professional, modern, nurturing and NIMBLE DepEd.

## **Implications for Public Administration**

What are the implications of all these to public administration? Let me share a few of my insights to trigger our discussion today.

One, we must understand that theories of public administration help us understand and provide us a guide to administrative actions, but they are not hard



and fast rules. Specific conditions and stage of development of an agency or a country is important. What will work in one country or agency may not work similarly in another; in fact not even among units within an agency. Thus, contextualization is very important.

Two, while we aim to be flexible and nimble, we continue to operate within the law and under norms of accountability. Good intentions cannot countenance short cuts.

Three, administrative reforms will often have trade-offs. Just looking back in earlier reforms, what we may have gained in focus with trifocalization we could have lost in coordination. With the Rationalization Plan, what we may have gained in functional organization we may have lost in program prioritization, such as with the abolition of the Bureau of the Alternative Learning System. With our own reforms, we are now contending with the necessary learning curve and the need for capacity building that can slow down the pace of achieving the intended results.

Four, bureaucracies are powerful. While the power of control and supervision rests with the Secretary, reforms cannot be ensured by the stroke of a pen. This is where consultation and dialogue are very important.

Finally, leadership and the individual matter greatly. At the end of the day, a head of agency must make the decision. This means that every administration will differ, reflecting the role and impact of the individual and leader on the organization. This will also dictate the legacy that will be left behind by each administration.