

Air Force Center of Excellence

AF ACE—An Innovator's "Field of Dreams"

TERRY LITTLE

After just two months as Director of the Air Force Acquisition Center of Excellence, I am beginning to feel a little like Kevin Costner in the great baseball movie "Field of Dreams."

"Build it and they will come," Costner, who played an Iowa corn farmer, was told. He built it, and they did come.

We're still very much in the process of building the ACE, but already they are coming. In our case, the "they" are acquisition pros who just know there has to be a better way.

We're open for business and ready to assist anyone in the acquisition community who needs a hand breaking down bureaucratic barriers, eliminating non-value added steps, and challenging the tired philosophy that says, "We've always done it that way."

Already, program managers and others interested in doing things smarter are contacting us. The response to the initial news of the ACE's formation confirms for me that there are many Air Force acquisition professionals out there who are eager to break out of the process-bound, checklist-oriented approach that for too long has delayed delivery of new capability to our warfighters.

Here's a sample of what's come in:

- We're helping an aircraft modernization program figure out a creative way to use long-lead purchases of computer hardware that could cut nine months off of the delivery of improved avionics.
- We're assisting a manager to get a waiver from a requirement to produce a complicated mission needs statement and operational requirements document for a simple, off-the-shelf software purchase.



We're open for business and ready to assist anyone in the acquisition community who needs a hand breaking down bureaucratic barriers, [and] eliminating non-value added steps...

- And, we've been working to break a logjam in a yearlong policy debate over when government employees and support contractors who are traveling to the same destination can share a ride. One of our acquisition centers estimates that a sensible relaxation of the rules could save that center more than \$1 million a year in transportation fees charged under support contracts.

In and of themselves, none of these efforts is going to change the world, but as we attack bad processes one at a time we will build a better system.

This is my first assignment in Washington after more than two decades in the field. My experience tells me that many—perhaps even most—of our acquisition professionals know a dumb process or counterproductive rule when

they see one. What they haven't known is where to turn to get help to make things better. In the past, too often it just didn't seem worth the trouble to fight the status quo. It was easier just to continue to punch the checklist.

The ACE exists to change that.

We can't promise to overhaul everything at once. But I do pledge that we will team with you to bring a common sense, results-oriented mindset to everything we do. If you have a suggestion, need help, or just want more information, please contact us at ACE@pentagon.af.mil or call us at 703-253-1450.

Terry Little

Director, Air Force Center of Excellence



Terry Little is DoD's most seasoned program manager with more than 20 years' experience heading major weapons acquisitions. He is also noted as one of the Department's most forceful advocates for acquisition and logistics excellence. He currently heads the Air Force Acquisition Center of Excellence (AF ACE). Prior to joining the ACE, he headed the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) program, as well as the Small Diameter Bomb (SDB) program. Both programs are models for acquisition innovation in the DoD. Prior to his current assignment he led the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) program for five years; JDAM was a pilot program for using commercial practices to buy military-unique systems.