

About the National Animal Identification System (NAIS)
Part 21: Who is “Booz Allen Hamilton”
and what does it have to do with NAIS?

By Bruno Schmidt

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How many people heard USDA’s Deputy Secretary Chuck Conner proclaim, at the “*NAIS Community Outreach Event*” in Kansas City, Missouri, on Oct. 31, 2006, that:

“This is Voluntary with a capital V. Not a currently voluntary, then maybe a mandatory system. This is a permanently voluntary system at the federal level.”

Yet, on the other hand, the USDA is spending a big chunk of money – \$21 million this year alone – to aggressively register premises across the country with an additional \$500 thousand being spent to conduct a “Benefit / Cost Study” of the NAIS. In 2006, the agency also retained “Booz Allen Hamilton” (BAH), a major contractor to Federal agencies (such as the DoD, DoJ, FBI, IRS, CIA), for the purpose of designing the USDA’s “*communications campaign [for the NAIS] currently being implemented at the National level*”. This is a firm that not only promises but also gets paid for success. Obviously, there is a push here for premises registration.

Last fall, as part of the “USDA/NAIS Outreach Campaign” project, BAH produced a 12-slide presentation template entitled “*The Top 6 Reasons to Register Your Premises*” along with a companion manual, the “*NAIS How-To Handbook*”, materials that were NOT being offered to the public. Instead, they were handed out by USDA/APHIS to a select group of 132 “Partners” at the above event.

Beginning in December 2006, USDA/APHIS added a monthly “NAIS Community Outreach Partner Bulletin” to its communications campaign. Much like the other materials, these bulletins are only being offered to the following “Community Outreach Partners”:

- **State and Tribal Animal ID Coordinators** who have “*access to the APHIS-led communication and information network ... to pass on information to producers, stakeholders, and the media*”
- **Federal Animal ID Coordinators** who “*work with producers and livestock markets on a daily basis [and] ... have access to all the tools and resources necessary to motivate producers to register their premises*”
- **Other Partners** ... Animal ID Coordinators who “*are encouraged to ... seek volunteers from diverse backgrounds that are willing to proactively engage their communities and speak on behalf of NAIS. There is power in numbers.*” (NAIS How-To Handbook, Page 5)

This “*NAIS How-To Handbook*”, a 57-page training manual last updated in Feb. 2007, reveals the strategy the Federal government has evidently adopted: to increasingly address NAIS-related issues (pro and con) at the local level. With the expert help from BAH consultants, USDA/APHIS has scripted a 5-step road map for aspiring coordinators to aggressively accomplish registration of premises, from assessing the current level of NAIS participation to communicating with a “prioritized audience” and later evaluating actual results.

The handbook provides additional instructions for using the “NAIS Toolkit” effectively, how to tailor the message with as many as 87 pre-scripted talking points, suggesting that they be geared to an audience at the 6th-grade reading level. The productive use of the different forms of media is discussed extensively, pointing out strengths and opportunities for promoting the NAIS in general and specifically premises registration.

An entire chapter of the handbook is devoted to “Facing the Opposition”. According to the USDA, “*complaints and concerns [of opponents] generally fall into a few buckets*” (page 24) which allows for the development of “core responses” that can be used repeatedly by the coordinator. Here is where the USDA acknowledges the existence of an “Opposition Network” and lists four internet-based “Network Hubs” (web sites) which the agency claims have been thoroughly analyzed and investigated. The suggested approach for dealing with such troublesome materials is to “*monitor the major anti-NAIS Web sites and Blogs to stay on top of the most recent opposition statements*” in order to update messages and materials which may reveal how to deal with this audience more effectively. (Page 25)

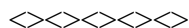
It is recommended, however, that coordinators concentrate their time and energy on the “pro-NAIS” and “On-the-Fence” audiences rather than on those who are strongly opposed and who, according to the USDA, are spreading misinformation about the NAIS and simply adding to the confusion. It would appear that the approach chosen by the agency is to marginalize and discredit dissent rather than dealing with it objectively.

The handbook goes on to discuss topics such as “Forming Local Partnerships” (page 31), “Developing a Direct Mail Campaign” (page 33), and improving the State’s NAIS Web Site (page 36).

With this slick, 12-slide presentation that is rounded out with a suite of 8 message- and color-coordinated full-page ads, its companion How-to Handbook, a dedicated web page and monthly “*Community Outreach Partner Bulletins*”, the message seems clear. The Federal government means business and is determined to have all premises registered regardless of the amount of motivation, or persuasion, it might take.

Towards that goal, USDA/APHIS has engaged one of the major powerhouses in this field: Booz Allen Hamilton, headquartered in Mclean, Virginia, with 98 offices worldwide, serving the U.S. and foreign governments as well as the private sector. In their words, they are a “*global strategy and technology firm that is committed to delivering results that endure.*” <www.boozallen.com> Does this sound like a “voluntary” system, voluntary with a capital “V”?

Footnote: For its role in the above “USDA/NAIS Outreach Campaign”, BAH received the “2006 Fall Magellan Award” from the League of American Communications Professionals (LACP).



Bruno & Charlene Schmidt are co-authors of the self-published “Farmer’s Field Guide to the NAIS”. They have spent in excess of 1500 hours over the past four years researching the National Animal Identification System including applicable laws, regulations and rules. For more information and latest updates, please visit www.FarmersFieldGuide.com

