

# DEAR TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION AND REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS



Annet Forkink, project lead/ facilitator  
Shelley Yaun, co-facilitator  
Bonnie Hall, co-facilitator  
Drew Bartlett, champion

Tallahassee, Florida  
January 28, 2010

# Set Direction: Charter

**Problem or Need:** The following problems have been identified in the (TA) Process:

1. the Travel authorization process is too complicated,
2. the traveler makes too many errors on the forms,
3. traveler lacks awareness and/ or knowledge and importance of the travel policy, and
4. an apparent excessive number of signatures.

**Background:**

The Travel Authorization process for the Division DEAR is currently taking too many hours and the process has not been standardized. There is a need to reduce the number of hours staff spends on preparing the travel authorization and reimbursement and to standardize the process to increase efficiency and decrease the number of errors.

**Scope:** The process will begin when the traveler gathers information and the process will end when the traveler receives travel authorization. Nothing can be purchased for this process until budget restrictions are lifted. This might be several years. The number of signatures can not be reduced at this time.

**Mission:** The mission of the team is to simplify the travel authorization process. The benefits of an improved process are a reduction of the number of hours staff spends on preparing travel authorization and a standardized process for all DEAR staff.

**Time Commitment:**

Two days set aside for a modified Rapid Process Improvement event, Tuesday and Wednesday, 8.30 AM to 1 PM May 5, 6, and 1 – 2 PM May 11. The team Leader is responsible for implementation of the new process.

**Project Team:**

**Champion:** Drew Bartlett

**Team Leader:** Kelly Williams

**Team Members:** Kelly Williams, Sara Amour, Frances Moore,

**Facilitators:**

Annet Forkink, Bonnie Hall, Shelley Yaun

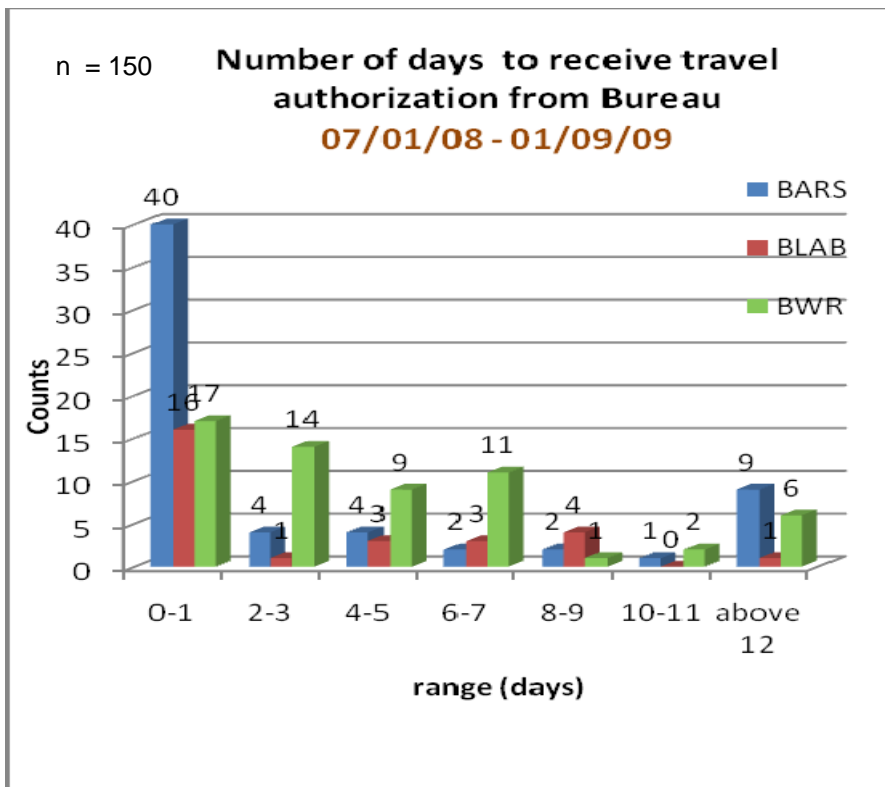
**Bench strength/ support staff identified:** Debbie Cobb, Pat McPhaul, Carla Gaskin, Yvonne Zola, Bonnie Hyde, Dana Jones, Renee Gray, Amanda Cantrell

# Measure: baseline data -1-

07/01/09-01/09/09	Number of days to receive travel authorization from Bureau			
	BARS	BLAB	BWR	Sum
n (number of travelers)	62	28	60	150
% of total	41%	19%	40%	100%
average	4.4	3.2	4.5	4.2
standard deviation	7.8	3.4	3.9	5.8

## Number of days to receive travel authorization from Bureau

- Total travel authorizations documented by the Bureaus was 150.
- The majority of all travels (83%, n=124 of 150) were authorized within 7 days.
- On average travel was authorized by the Bureaus within 4 days. It was estimated that this can be reduced to at least 3 days (average of best performer = BLAB) and should be reduced to 1 day (target); gap is approximately 3 days.



BWR = Bureau of Watershed Restoration  
 BLAB = Bureau of Labs  
 BARS = Bureau of Assessment and Restoration Support

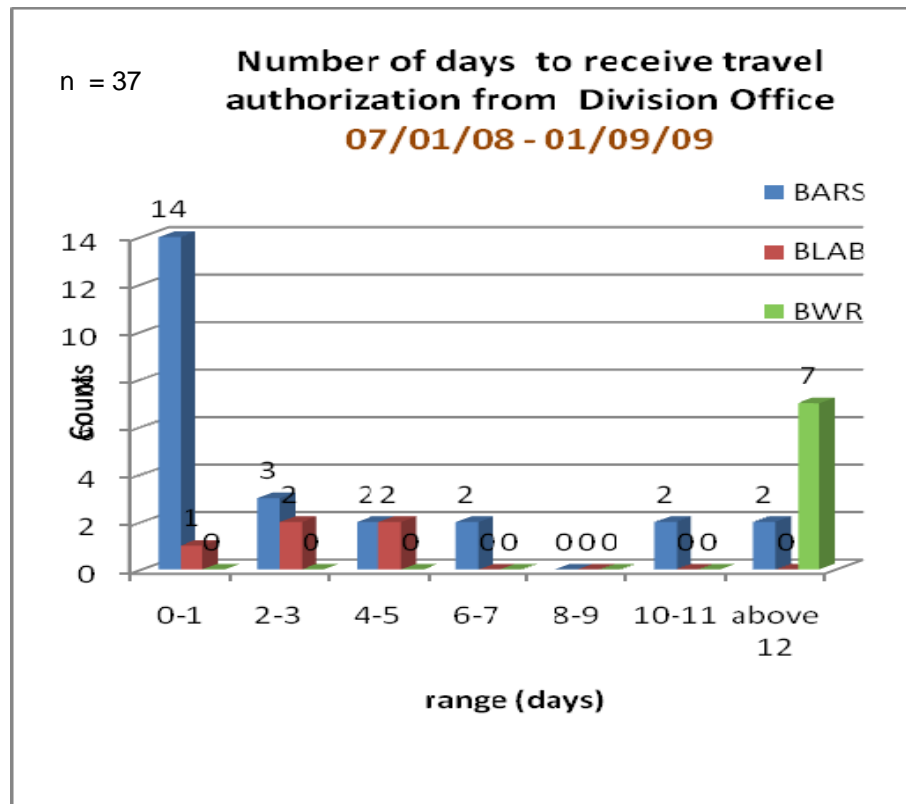
f8 take SAS + BARS together and separate authorization at Bureau level from DO level.  
forkink\_a, 12/23/2009

# Measure: baseline data -2-

07/01/09-01/09/09	Number of days to receive travel authorization from Division Office			
	BARS	BLAB	BWR	Sum
n (number of travelers)	25	5	7	37
% of total	68%	14%	19%	100%
average	3.0	3.0	14.9	5.2
standard deviation	4.1	1.9	0.4	5.8

## Number of days to receive travel authorization from Division Office

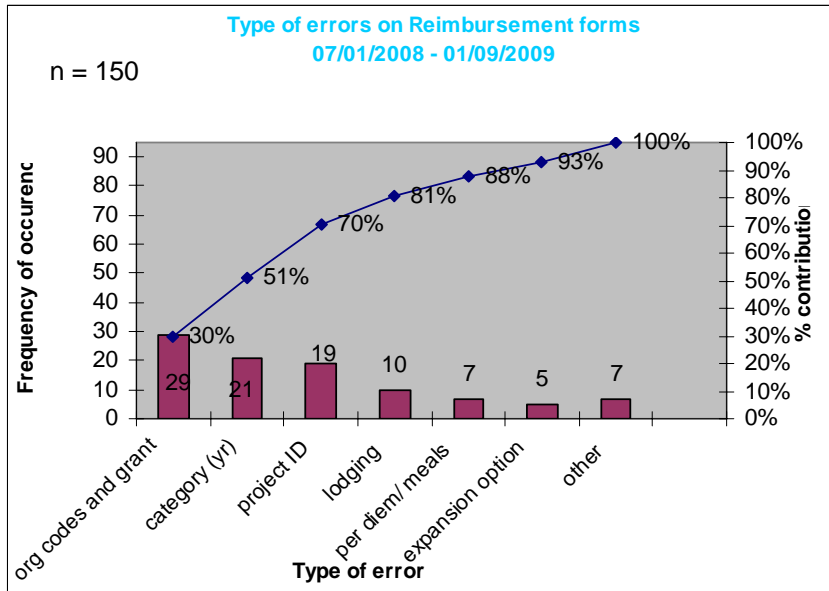
- The Division Office signed 25% of travel authorizations.
- The majority of all travels (70%, n=26 of 37) were authorized by the Division Office within 7 days.
- On average travel was authorized by the Division Office within 5 days. It was estimated that this can be reduced to 1 day (target); gap is approximately 4 days.



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**f10** take SAS + BARS together and separate authorization at Bureau level from DO level.  
forkink\_a, 12/23/2009

# Measure: baseline data -3-



## Number of errors on forms

- The majority of errors (77%) on the travel forms are incorrect org codes/ grants, category not listed and incorrect ID.
- Of the total number of forms filled out (n = 150) 65% (97) showed errors.
- 69 errors were reported by BWR, 4 by BARS, and none by BLAB. Please note that not all errors might have been reported.
- The target is to reduce the number of errors as much as possible.

# SIPOC\*

<b>Process Owner:</b> Drew Bartlett	<b>Key Performance Measures:</b> 1. Number of days to authorization at Bureau level 2. Number of days to authorization at Division level 3. Number of errors or corrections		<b>Customer Requirements:</b> •Minimize errors (0) •Fast travel authorization (within 1 day)
<b>Suppliers:</b> •Traveler •Support Staff •Management for signatures •Security desk (vehicle sign out) •Travel agency	<b>Key Process Steps</b>		
	Prepare the Request	Authorization	
	<b>Process Sub-steps</b>		
	1. Gather information (perform cost analysis) 2. Fill out travel authorization form	1. Route papers for signatures and approval. 2. Receive travel authorization.	<b>Customers:</b> •Traveler •Administrative Assistant (=AA) or Support Staff (SS) •Authorizer
<b>Inputs/Enablers:</b> •Travel information (i.e. maps) •Travel authorization forms •Voucher forms •P-card •DEP directives and guidance documents (i.e. travel Directive 610, 300)	<b>Key Players for Each Process Step</b>		<b>Outputs:</b> •Travel Authorization
	•Traveler • AA	•Traveler •AA •Supervisors •Management	
	<b>Support Staff Needed (Enablers)</b>		
	AA, Authorizer, Security Desk, P-card reviewer, Information Technology Program, Legal		

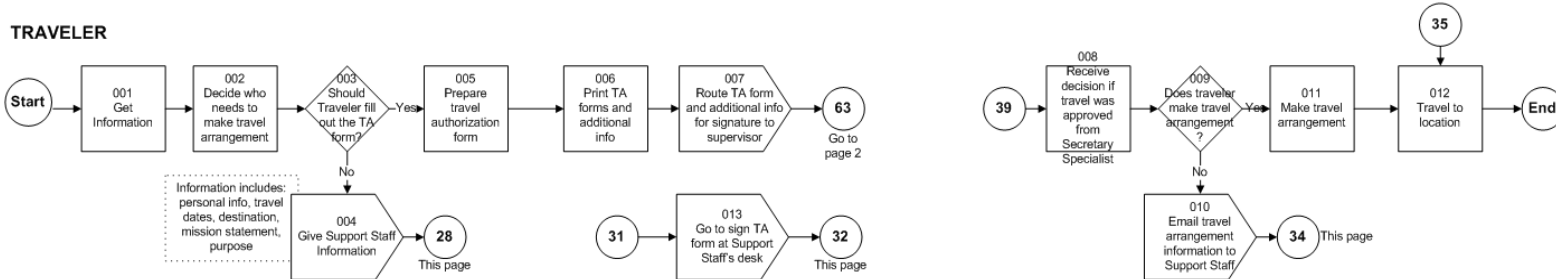
\*SIPOC = Supplier in Process Out to Customer. The SIPOC is used to identify the key process steps and key players.

# Understand the process

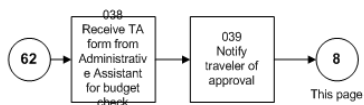
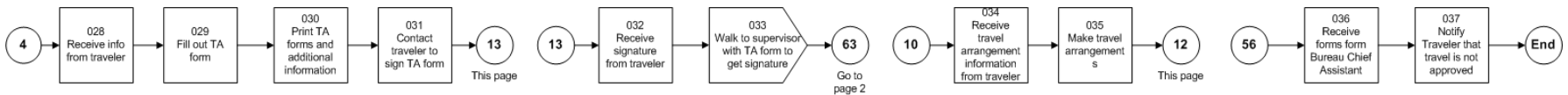
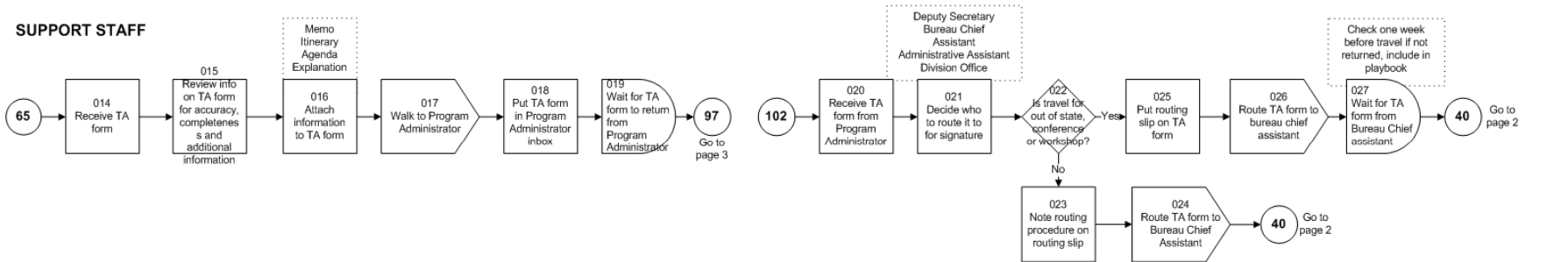
## DEAR travel authorization process

Pg 1

### TRAVELER



### SUPPORT STAFF



#### LEGEND

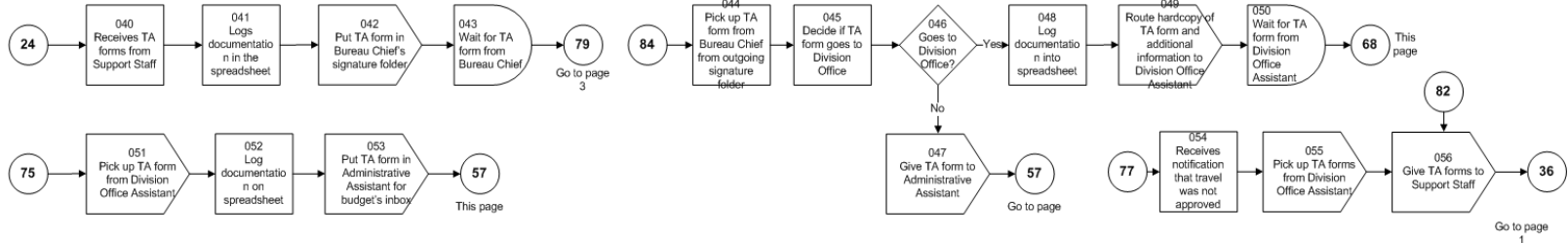
TA = Travel Authorization  
 TR = Travel Authorization  
 SS = Support Staff  
 PA = Program Administrator  
 BC = Bureau Chief  
 DO = Division Office  
 AA = Administrative Assistant  
 EO = Expansion Option  
 TRF = Travel Reimbursement Form  
 BCA = Bureau Chief Assistant

# Understand the process

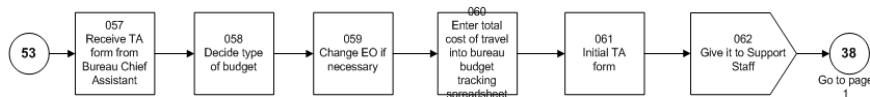
## DEAR travel authorization process

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### BUREAU CHIEF ASSISTANT



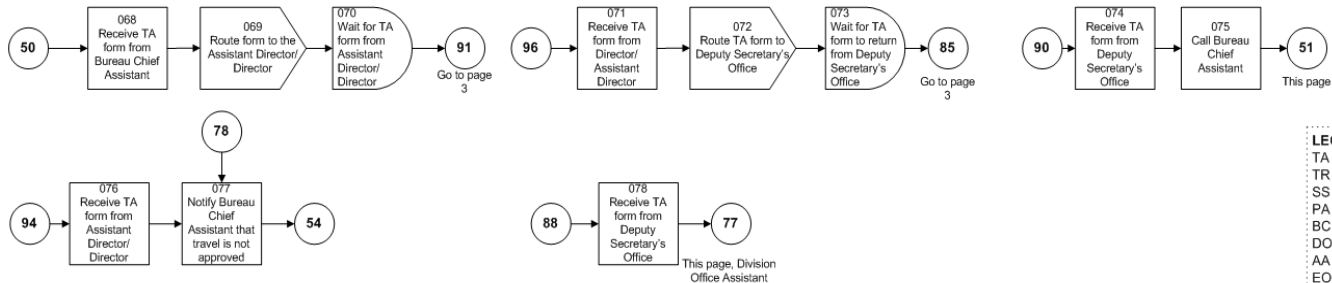
### ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT (FOR BUDGET CHECK)



### SUPERVISOR



### DIVISION OFFICE ASSISTANT



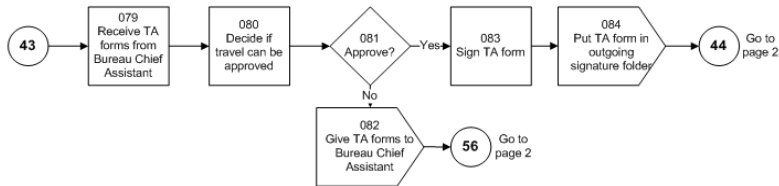
- LEGEND**
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# Understand the process

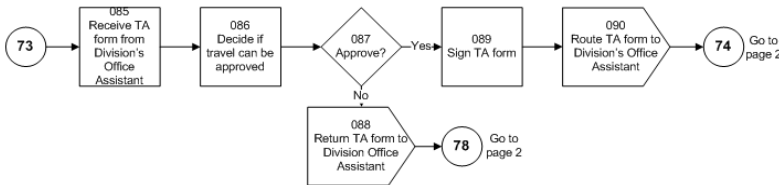
## DEAR travel authorization process

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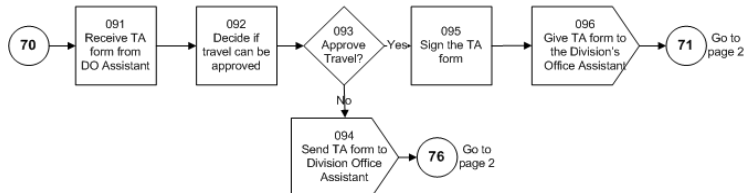
### BUREAU CHIEF



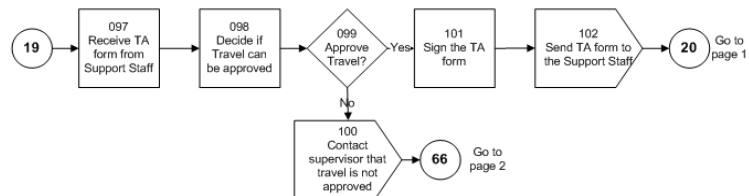
### DEPUTY SECRETARY'S OFFICE



### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/ DIRECTOR



### PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR



#### LEGEND

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# Understand the process

## **Baseline process map summary:**

- 10 players with hand-offs in the TA process
- 6 delays, with staff waiting for responses from others
- 25 transports of documents to other players
- 102 steps total



# Understand the process

Tasks performed by Bureau Chief Assistant and Administrative Assistant can be performed by Support Staff. This reduces steps, delays and duplication of efforts:

- Reduces number of players from 10 to 8
- Reduces number of delays from 6 to 4
- Reduces number of transports from 25 to 22
- Reduces number of steps from 102 to 96

# Identify and Analyze High Level Issues

Issue	Action/ Solution	Cost	Benefit
Process is not clear: staff does not know travel requirements, guidelines are difficult to follow.	Write a Playbook to standardize the process. Put information in central location on common CERP drive.	30 hours	Ensure minimal training is needed. Reduce process time.
Documents get lost and new documents have to be routed for signature.	Place universal tracking spreadsheet on common drive. Write contact list to help move process along at different stages.	1 hour	People can track where documents are on travel spreadsheet and contact the appropriate person directly.
Staff does not know who needs to sign the papers and papers go to the wrong person.	Add delegation of approval authority when for those instances that people who are needed to sign the papers are Out Of Office.	0.5 hours	Reduce process time and streamline the process.
Higher management does not want to sign papers if lower management has not signed the papers.	Approve and submit forms electronically	0	Reduce process time.

# Solution Matrix

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Solutions	Effectiveness <sup>[1]</sup>	Feasibility <sup>1</sup>	Customer oriented <sup>1</sup>	Short or Long Term <sup>[2]</sup>	Keep?	Priority <sup>[3]</sup>	Schedule	Cost	Benefit	Responsible party
<i>Write Playbook</i>	H	H	H	ST	Yes	5	3 months	5 x 2 x 4 hrs	Reduce process time and streamline process	Kelly Williams, Sara Armour, Frances Moore, Shelley Yaun/ Bonnie Hall & Annet Forkink
<i>Train Staff</i>	H	H	H	ST	Yes	5	3 months	3 x 3	Streamline process	Kelly Williams and Support Staff
<i>Checklist</i>	H	H	H	ST	Yes	5	3 months	3 x 4 hrs	Ensure minimal training	Sara Armour, Frances Moore & Annet Forkink
<i>One central location on Division website for training material</i>	H	H	H	ST	Yes	5	3 months	3 x 1 hrs	Ensure minimal training and reduce process time due to errors	1 person from ITS , Bonnie Hyde & Annet Forkink
<i>Reduce number of signatures</i>	H	L	H	LT	Yes	3	12 months	TBD	Reduce process time	DO (coordinate with Financial Services)
<i>Approve and submit forms electronically</i>	H	L	H	LT	Yes	3	18 months	TBD	Reduce process time	DO (coordinate with Financial Services)
<i>Change forms (simplify)</i>	M	L	H	LT	Yes	2	18 months	TBD	Reduce process time	DO (coordinate with Financial Services)
<i>Monitor</i>	H	H	M	ST + LT	Yes	5	continuously	5 min/ traveler	To monitor progress	Support Staff

[1] H = High, M = Medium, L=Low

[2] ST = Short Term, LT = Long Term

[3] 1= low priority, 5 = high priority

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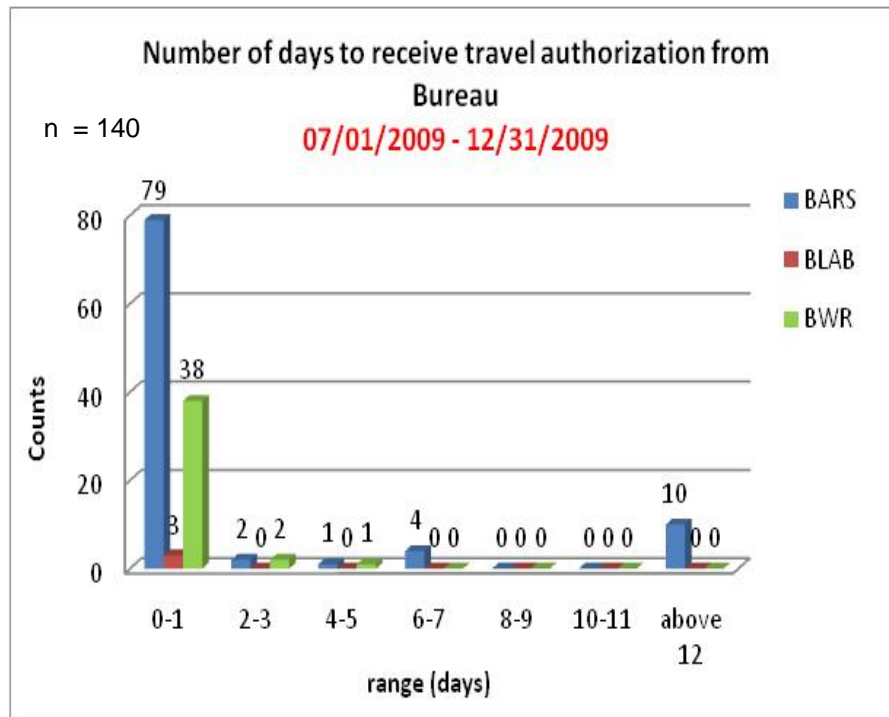
am not sure if we really got to the root cause. Are we standardizeing a bad process or one that maybe should not exist at all.  
forkink\_a, 3/26/2009

# Solutions Schedule

Solutions to be implemented	Schedule	Responsible party
<i>Write Playbook</i>	June 4 and 5 2009	Kelly Williams, Sara Armour, Frances Moore, Shelley Yaun, Bonnie Hall & Annet Forkink
<i>Checklist</i>	June 2009	Sara Armour, Frances Moore & Annet Forkink
<i>One central location on Division website for training material</i>	June 2009	1 person from ITS , Bonnie Hyde & Annet Forkink
<i>Train Staff</i>	June and July 2009	Kelly Williams and Support Staff
<i>Reduce number of signatures after travel restrictions are lifted</i>	12 months	Division Office (coordinate with Financial Services)
<i>Approve and submit forms electronically</i>	18 months	Division Office (coordinate with Financial Services)
<i>Change forms (simplify)</i>	18 months	Division Office (coordinate with Financial Services)
<i>Monitor</i>	continuously	Support Staff

# Results -1-

07/01/09-12/31/09	Number of days to receive travel authorization from Bureau			
	BARS	BLAB	BWR	Sum
n (number of travelers)	96	3	41	140
% of total	69%	2%	29%	100%
average	2.1	0.0	0.4	1.6
standard deviation	4.6	-	1.0	4.0



## Number of days to receive travel authorization from Bureau

- After implementation of a playbook and training staff, the average time to approve Travel Authorization decreased by almost 63% (from 4.2 to 1.6).
- Due to budget shortfalls only very limited travel was possible the first half year of 2009. Data was not tracked during this period.
- Implementation of the playbook (or called “intervention”) started on July 1, 2009 after new travel restrictions were in place.
- Support Staff reported that zero forms were returned due to errors.

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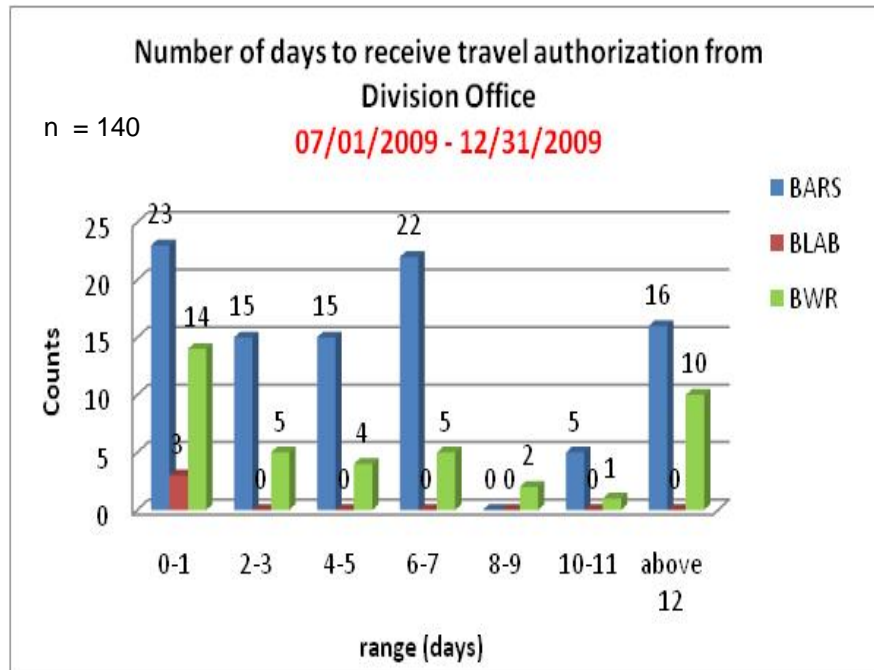
f12 take SAS + BARS together and separate authorization at Bureau level from DO level.  
forkink\_a, 12/23/2009

# Results -2-

07/01/09-12/31/09	Number of days to receive travel authorization from Division Office			
	BARS	BLAB	BWR	Sum
n (number of travelers)	96	3	41	140
% of total	69%	2%	29%	100%
average	5.7	0.0	6.6	6.0
standard deviation	4.8	-	7.4	5.6

## Number of days to receive travel from Division Office

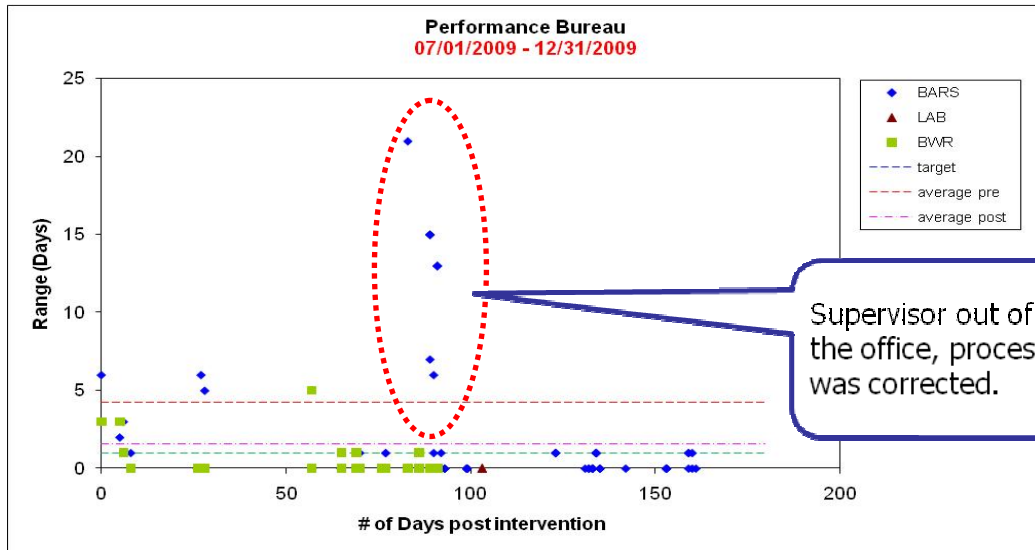
- After July 2009, due to budget shortfalls, approval requests for all travel must now be signed by the Division Office. The data show that the Division Office slows down the Travel Authorization process significantly.



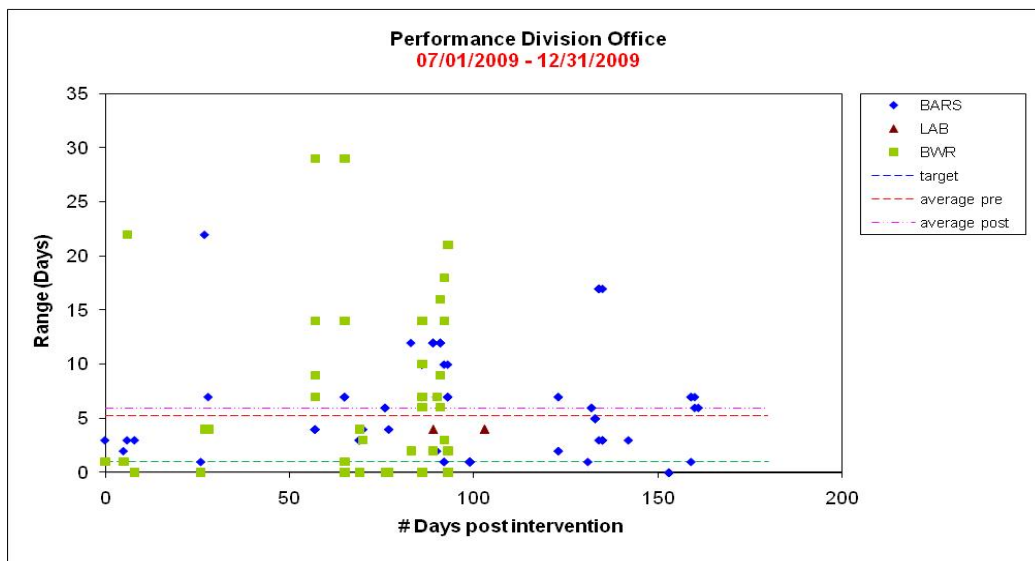
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f14 take SAS + BARS together and separate authorization at Bureau level from DO level.  
forkink\_a, 12/23/2009

# Results -3-



- Post implementation of the playbook, 60% of TAs are signed within 1 day at the Bureau level. At the Division level only 17% is signed within 1 day.
- It would therefore make sense to take the Division Office out of the Travel Authorization process.



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**f16** take SAS + BARS together and separate authorization at Bureau level from DO level.  
forkink\_a, 12/23/2009

# Remaining Issues and Future Plans

<b>Remaining Issue</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<i>Reduce number of signatures</i>	Reduce steps and signatures when budget constraints are lifted; only approve at BC level. This will significantly reduce process time and simplify the TA process but can not be done until budget restrictions get lifted and approval is required from the Division Office. In the mean time focus on streamlining the process within the Division Office.
<i>Approve and submit forms electronically, use software used in the Division of Waste.</i>	This will reduce process time but at the moment there is no budget for this.
<i>Digital signatures</i>	This will reduce process time but needs to be negotiated with Finance and Accounting.

# Summary Results

- **PRE INTERVENTION:** For most of the Bureaus in the Division, the travel authorization process took 4.5 days and was loaded with errors and re-work. The best performer on average acquired authorization 2.5 days earlier than other Bureaus and had 0% errors on the forms versus 62% in other Bureaus.
- **INTERVENTION:** We standardized and documented the best performer's (BLAB) process across the entire Division and trained staff in all sections.
- **POST INTERVENTION:**
  - 1) Average time to get TA approval from the Bureaus was reduced from 4 (SD = 5.8) to 2 (SD= 4) days as of two months post RPI. The process time within the bureaus decreased with 63%. The goal to at least bench mark the best performer (BLAB) was reached. Although this was short of the ultimate goal (1 day process time), this has been accomplished with more stringent travel requirements. Two days of the 3 day gap/ reduction goal has been reached (50%).
  - 2) Average time to get TA approval from the Division Office did not change significantly (average = 5, SD = 5.8). Due to budget shortfalls every TA needs to be approved by the Division Office. This used to be only 25% of the TAs. Instead of being able to reduce the number of signature on the TA, more signatures had to be added. This lengthened the authorization process by almost 3 days. The long term goal is to take the Division Office out of the process.
  - 3) In general, notable improvements were the prevention of errors and re-work, and the associated time and resource savings. More improvements can be expected with other proposed solutions such as electronic data transfer and only signing TAs at the Bureau level once travel restrictions are lifted.