Approximately 25 climate change experts gathered at Resources for the Future in Washington, D.C. on January 11, 2016 to brainstorm on how to improve federal competence in coordinating the implementation of climate change-related policies across the many White House offices and federal agencies involved. The discussion was conducted under Chatham House rules. This outline captures some of the points raised during the course of the workshop.

Overview/Intro to Workshop

**Broadest frame:**

How improve the Executive Branch’s performance in efficiently implementing major, cross-cutting policy imperatives?

- What are key ingredients to effective, coordinated execution within the Executive Branch?
  - Role of WH? Cabinet agencies?
  - What architectures work in different contexts to optimize efficient, coordinated implementation efforts?
- How incorporate these learnings into an effective game plan to promote the effective delivery of governmental services?

**Workshop’s frame:**

- How improve the Executive Branch’s performance in effectively addressing climate change implementation challenges?
- What’s our advice for the next President? How make the most of his or her fresh start?

**Examples of Types of Climate Change Implementation Issues:**

- Reducing GHG emissions from existing sources.
  - Coordinating regulatory programs; coordinating voluntary programs
• Promoting clean energy.
  o Coordinating R&D efforts; coordinating deployment efforts – permitting, financing, voluntary programs.
• Promoting energy efficiency.
• Addressing climate impacts.
  o Coordinating resilience-related programs/activities; coordinating information aggregation/dissemination.
  o Matching up domestic implementation with int’l commitments/opportunities.

Potential Methodology for Evaluating these Issues:

1. Share relevant organizational experiences.
2. Identify ingredients for (failure and) potential success.
3. Consider application to climate change context.
4. Identify recommendations for our next President.

Identify Ingredients for Potential Success

• White House; Cabinet Agencies.
  o Inherent organizational strengths/weaknesses.
    ▪ Convening power; expertise/bandwidth/budget/jurisdiction.
    ▪ Accountability; metrics.
    ▪ Talent/personalities.
  o One size doesn’t fit all: need to match implementation issues with appropriate architecture.
• Congress; other key stakeholders.

Develop Recommendations

 o White House: How organize climate change effort; who should be in charge?
  o Role of CEQ, OMB, DPC, NSC, NEC, OSTP?
 o Cabinet agencies: “Green/Carbon Cabinet”?
  o Consider any cabinet agency reorgs (internal or external)?
  o How/where should Cabinet leaders interact with WH?
  o How create effective inter-agency implementation teams?
 o WH/Cabinet relationship
  o Develop organizational guidelines/criteria/templates for implementing cross-cutting climate change issues.
  o Repurpose Presidential Management Council’s mission/responsibilities?
 o Potential Options Might Include:
  o Accountability placed with high level official(s) that have the capacity & stroke to get the job done; bias toward agencies for implementation issues.
  o Confirm/clarify support responsibilities (e.g., WH budget, coordination assistance, etc.)
  o Identify metrics, deliverables at outset.
o Adopt proven management techniques (e.g., McKinsey & Co.).
  o Avoid default E.O. formula (e.g., multiple WH offices “in charge of” implementation Task Forces, Working Groups, etc.).
  o Imbue professionalism, respect for chain of command, deference.
  o Be ready on “Day 1”
    o Provide early clarity on existing WH/interagency climate change initiatives & WH/Cabinet approach, more generally.
    o Consider congressional strategy/proposals.

Key Discussion Points Raised During the Workshop

Who should have the lead in the WH to effectively help to manage the climate change agenda?

• Visible interest/involvement/ prioritization by POTUS/VP is necessary to marshal the WH and cabinet horses needed for success.
• Climate change issue is large enough, cross-cutting enough, and with enough impact on the economy that:
  1. Many WH offices have a significant stake in the issue; and
  2. It will be important that one of the WH “top dogs” has overall responsibility for it, providing air cover for the head of whatever WH office is given the lead. (e.g., John Podesta model; de facto czar, but not labeled as such).
• In terms of which WH office should have the lead for climate change, opinions varied:
  o The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Domestic Policy Council (DPC) have been co-managing the issue in the Obama Administration. In the Bush Administration, the National Economic Council (NEC) was the lead for the issue.
  o Some participants were uneasy about CEQ as the lead, due to questions about CEQ’s heft and the concern about pigeon-holing climate change issues as environmental (only).
  o Others were skeptical about the DPC as the lead, due to questions about its heft and because the issue is not traditionally in its corner.
  o Some favored having the NEC as the lead, given the importance of clean energy/climate change to the overall economy.
  o There was significant discussion regarding the appropriate role for OMB. Most viewed OMB has the wrong place for policy development. It is well-situated, however, to address financial support needs and performance reviews.
• General consensus was that it was less important where the “home” is for climate change among the WH offices, than that the POTUS identify it as a priority --
aided by one of his/her top dogs to provide air cover-- and that whichever WH office has the lead, it be led by an individual who is a strong leader and collaborator – and who will, and is empowered to, make decisions. “We just need someone in charge and who will make decisions,” was a common refrain.

- Can’t have implementation initiatives that are “led by” multiple WH offices. E.g., initiatives with led by multiple WH offices dilutes responsibility and accountability.
- In terms of connecting with outside stakeholders, it is important to have clear point of engagement, clear purpose of dialogue, and accountability. Unfocused, ad hoc efforts will not work with companies and other outside constituencies.
- Major problem in WH structure: endless meetings because too many staffers are involved in too many issues in too many ways. Need to avoid the WH “free for all.” If offices are told what to do clearly by higher-ups, they will behave.
- The “czar” term is not helpful, although leadership and accountability are needed. There should be sensitivity to Congressional (and other) concerns about the apparent “power” invested in “czars.”

- Whoever is in charge of the climate change policy in the WH, it is important that the WH communications and outreach functions are integrated into the process from the outset. Comms and outreach have very important roles to play, given the broad scope of climate change issues.

**What is the mission of the WH office that is put in charge of climate change?**

- What do we want the WH office to accomplish?
  - Should it be primarily a policy development shop?
  - What is its role in terms of ensuring appropriate implementation of policy decisions throughout the federal bureaucracy?
  - Should oversight of *mitigation* (reduced emissions) be split from *climate impacts* (adaptation/resilience) because different players/interests are involved? Note: adaptation has been a stepchild; no one appears to have overall responsibility over this important issue area.

- What is the breadth of the WH office’s mission?
  - Should the WH office be charged with fostering “disruptive innovation” that goes beyond the boundaries of legal obligations? For example, will the WH focus be constrained by legal/jurisdictional lines, or will it dial in the corporate community and other private sector interests that fall outside the scope of governmental authority? (Workshop participants voiced a
strong, broadly held view that the Administration’s climate change approach should not be tied to jurisdictional boundaries.)

- WH insularity is a major concern. In clean energy, important developments are occurring in the private sector. The Administration needs to be working with corporate and NGO leaders to identify paths forward.
  - WH leader needs to lean into the issue and be pro-active and resist the WH’s reactive mindset.
  - Crises will distract leaders from larger priorities. (e.g., Deepwater Horizon oil spill). Some suggested that different WH teams be involved in handling crises versus addressing longer-term policy priorities. Others questioned the practicality of such line drawing.

How mesh the international and domestic sides of climate change?

- This will be a challenge that needs to be addressed up front. The National Security Council (NSC) traditionally does not have much expertise on (or, arguably, sensitivity to) environmental issues and it will be important to have a key cross-walk between the WH lead on climate change and the NSC, given the connectivity between the international and domestic climate change agendas.

How deal with “people” issues in terms of leadership, cooperation, competence, in the WH, and in the agencies?

- Recruitment of the “right” people in key jobs in the WH and in the cabinet agencies is critically important. Need people who can work together well and have good “horizontal” connectivity. Also need folks who can effectively deploy career employees.
  - Note: Recruitment is not something that the transition process historically does well. Transitions often are dominated by political considerations, without appropriate attention given to governance needs, leading to relatively random appointments and predictably mixed results.

Cabinet agencies are needed to implement climate-related policy. Many implementation efforts cut across agency lines. How can the WH/Cabinet relationship be structured to maximize coordination and accountability across affected agencies?

**Step 1: Improve the WH/Cabinet relationship.**

- Cabinet heads should have more regular strategy sessions with top WH leadership. (Example of VP Gore and env/energy cabinet secretaries’ weekly breakfast.)
• WH failure to draw in top level cabinet and sub-cabinet in key climate meetings promotes a major disconnect between WH and agencies. Pathological concern about leaks, FOIA exposure, etc., needs to be dealt with, but not at the expense of robust cabinet engagement in climate policy development and execution.

• National security decision-making model provides more input from affected cabinet agencies. Should that model be considered for domestic climate change issues? Visibility and input by cabinet secretaries into decision-making process is important.

• Consolidation of power in WH has accelerated, post Reagan and Bush I. Now, messy issues are routinely taken into WH. Previously, cabinet secretaries were asked to help manage them. Some of that was because key cabinet secretaries were recognized as being adept at managing difficult issues and being fair to all concerned (“respecting the box”), such as Bill Reilly, Lee Thomas. Also, prior WH Chiefs of Staff, like Jim Baker, pushed issues out to agencies. Additional advantage of having issues managed at the cabinet level: cabinet secretaries have more staff capability than the WH.
  o Note: Quality of individuals willing to serve in the cabinet arguably has been eroded by perception (and, perhaps, reality) that cabinet secretaries’ responsibilities/accountability are limited vis-a-vis WH staff.

• Should be more “transactional” discussions between WH and cabinet: “This is what we want you to do” and “why aren’t you doing x, y, or z?” Surprisingly little of that has been occurring in recent years.

• Develop clear policy blueprints through WH policy process and use them as guides for agency implementation. (e.g., Obama Energy Blueprints; Climate Action Plan).

• Consider appointing someone other than the WH lead to handle disasters to reduce distracting from the full agenda (e.g., Shawn Donovan for Hurricane Sandy; Ron Klain for Ebola).

**Step 2: Look to Cabinet for accountability in implementation of policies, with WH support.**

• Broad consensus that cabinet agencies are often appropriate leads to push forward with the implementation of WH policy decisions.

• More investment in the agencies is merited because their work must go on, regardless of who is elected President and given the swirling politics around climate change. Agencies also have the staff, expertise, budget and bandwidth to follow through on challenging implementation priorities, particularly as compared with WH staff.
• Note: The framing of issues and chain-of-command as being driven by climate change may alienate some in Congress and impact funding and oversight support.

• Agencies might consider having key individual in charge and accountable for climate change matters in each department. Important that information flow is both ways, with agencies keeping WH up-to-date on developments.
  o Recovery Act model of VP-led effort, with single point of contact in agencies and lots of communication, worked well.

• Bush CAFE rulemaking structure required 3 agencies to work together. Each was given veto power as a way to ensure cooperation.

Miscellaneous Additional Points Raised During the Workshop

• The federal contracting community is huge, and needs to be considered with regard to the execution of an Administration’s climate policies. Feds may enhance their impactfulness, for example, if they expect climate-related performance from contractors (e.g., lower carbon footprint).

• Major challenge: how to tap into younger people in the agencies and harness their enthusiasm. Also, need to give attention to serious “burnout” issues affecting among many senior career employees.

• Executive Orders are important. They can/should identify Presidential priorities, provide explicit direction, and establish clear accountability.

• How deal with the “white spaces” and with areas in which federal jurisdiction is limited (e.g., utility sector)?

• Transition process is critical, particularly vis-à-vis early messaging to political hires in agencies. Hiring is random and slow.
  o To assist the transition, the first step is to put together an inventory of all of the activity underway in the WH and the agencies.

• OMB is the place for accountability, metrics; OMB not good at interagency coordination. Bush-era performance standards, including scorecards, are important, needed.
  o Need to rethink OIRA role; should rotate senior OMB career officials.

• Use outside resources better, including universities, think tanks, for issue development, avoiding FACA, etc.
  o Look outside the gov’t for management ideas.