

IRWA'S NEWEST AGENCY MEMBER: THE GSA

BY KATE SHIRLEY

IRWA's latest federal partnership is with the General Services Administration, an agency many people haven't heard of, and even those who have may not know exactly what it does. The GSA has a long and illustrious history, beginning in 1949, when U.S. President Harry Truman recognized a need within the federal government for increased oversight of its administrative activities, and tasked a commission with creating a federal agency to meet those needs. In addition to its administrative duties, which include human resources management, historic monument preservation, building construction and maintenance and the provision of supplies, vehicles and communication technology to federal employees, the GSA is in charge of all the real estate acquisition, disposal and real property asset management for the U.S. government. Since the federal government is the largest single owner of real property in the country, this is no small task. The GSA operates under an annual budget of over \$26 billion with over 11,000 employees to conduct its considerable duties.

The GSA's Office of Real Property Utilization and Disposal handles all the property needs of the federal government. This office leverages surplus federal property to maximize benefits to taxpayers, by assisting state or local governments, public institutions or non-profits in acquiring the extra property at a substantially discounted price and then converting it to a productive or tax-generating use to benefit the local community and promote public health.

Property considered to be surplus to the needs of the federal government may be undeveloped land, empty warehouses or office buildings, military facilities, and

even single or multi-family residences. There are many ways the GSA can convey this property for use as a public benefit, including leasing a building at a low cost to a non-profit that provides a public service, such as assistance to the homeless, a shelter for battered women, or to a local government for use as a park or recreational area. Property can also be conveyed for transportation uses such as interstate highway construction, maintenance, upgrades and as a source for materials, if requested by the Secretary of Transportation. When these methods of disposal are not appropriate given the property type, the Office will also work to dispose of the property by selling it to private individuals or companies through a competitive bid process.

Real property management is another important component of the GSA's administrative duties. The Public Buildings Service arm of the GSA maintains the more than \$500 billion worth of property assets, including the acquisition and management of 9,600 owned and leased buildings and \$362 million square feet of workspace needed for the roughly 1.1 million federal employees that keep the U.S. government running smoothly. The GSA works to improve federal asset management through effective real estate management strategies, valuation services, and by encouraging responsible acquisition, leasing, utilization and property disposal practices throughout the federal government.

The GSA has also taken proactive steps to mitigate the negative environmental and health effects of its activities by incorporating eco-friendly practices into its policies and procedures. Currently, 24 buildings maintained by the federal government have earned LEED ratings.



The GSA's first project was to oversee the complete gutting and renovation of the White House in 1949.

The GSA also now incorporates environmentally-conscious building methods through sustainable design practices such as green roofs, under floor air distribution, light shelves, sustainable landscaping, minimizing the use of non-renewable energy sources and encouraging recycling. Thanks to these initiatives, the GSA has managed to reduce energy consumption by almost 20 percent against the 1985 baseline. The GSA is also a founding member of the Brownfield National Partnership, and works to identify brownfield sites that are optimal for reuse or redevelopment, both of which can benefit local communities in many ways. These efforts have resulted not only in considerable environmental benefits, but have also effectively reduced the federal government's energy costs while providing a safe and healthy work environment for government employees.

In August 2010, the GSA joined IRWA as an Agency Member with an initial enrollment of 30 employees and a commitment to hold an onsite course at one of their facilities in the next 12 months. They have also agreed to participate in IRWA's 2011 Federal Agency Update and will plan sessions that pertain to the expanding opportunities with government projects available to the private sector.