Knowledge Sharing Initiative at NASA  
Transfer Wisdom Workshops  
By Denise Lee

Dr. Edward Hoffman, Director of APPL, and Dr. Alexander Laufer, University of Maryland, teamed up several years ago to build a knowledge-sharing community among NASA project managers. This included organizing national forums and workshops at the individual NASA Centers around the country, and by producing a storytelling magazine published on the APPL website. In the last year, the APPL Knowledge Sharing Initiative (KSI) has expanded to include another important piece, Transfer Wisdom Workshops (TWW). These are one-day workshops held at the NASA Centers. The goal of the TWW is to establish local communities of practice focused around project management. The workshops function as a type of kick-off meeting for these fledgling communities of practice by introducing knowledge sharing philosophies such as reflection, storytelling, and relationship building. Subsequent support from APPL’s KSI team helps to sustain the communities at the Centers.

For many years, NASA, like other Federal Agencies, has experienced a hiring freeze, which is just now starting to thaw. As a result, a graphic representation of the NASA workforce today probably looks like the humps on a camel’s back, with an aging population of experienced project managers on one side and a young inexperienced population on the other. The TWW uses stories to bridge that gap by building understanding and sharing knowledge between emerging project leaders and the senior project leaders who are approaching retirement. The stories are selected from *ASK Magazine*, APPL’s storytelling publication. *ASK* features experienced project leaders sharing stories with the NASA project management community. All the stories are focused on lessons learned and how to implement them. The stories address topics such as mentoring, project reviews, challenging the status quo, and adaptation and risk. The workshop focuses on encouraging conversation and dialog between the participants and the facilitators. TWW participants are encouraged to compare and contrast how the stories relate to their projects. Participants share their own stories and this builds relationships and plants the seeds for local knowledge-sharing communities of practice.

The planning for a TWW begins several months prior to the scheduling of the actual workshop. The KSI team visits the Center to meet directly with senior project leadership. The purpose of these meetings is to explain the KSI and its components and how it can assist their project management community. The KSI team then asks the project manager to identify emerging project leaders. By asking the project leaders for referrals, the KSI team ensure that it has accurately targeted the right participants. By the end of the trip, there is a list of prospective participants for the workshop. All invitees receive a personalized invitation followed by a phone call inviting them to the workshop. The KSI team never sends invitations to a general list of names because one of the policies of this initiative is to treat each person as an individual.

Thus far, TWW’s have been held at Marshall Space Flight Center, Glenn Research Center, Goddard Space Flight Center, Ames Research Center, Johnson Space Center, and Kennedy Space Center. A comment from a participant on this format exemplifies how well these workshops have been received: “Hearing from other individuals with similar functions helps to expand my view of the role of a good project leader,” and “This course was excellent. I think the approach to using ‘Stories to Cover a Lesson Learned’ is great.”

The KSI team plans to continue to provide NASA’s project management community with the best possible opportunity to share knowledge. The reality of implementing this type of initiative is that it takes time, but the need has never been more immediate. Knowledge sharing and relationship building within and across NASA Centers is now being reinforced by the new NASA Administrator Sean O’Keefe in his new strategic plan, including a commitment to “One NASA,” rather than many Centers distinguished by their own cultures.