



U.S. Small Business  
Administration

**Statement of Michael Vallante  
Associate Administrator  
Office of Field Operations  
U.S. Small Business Administration**

**before the  
House Committee on Small Business**

**Hearing on “SBA Management Review: Office of Field Operations”**

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**Statement of Michael A. Vallante**  
**Associate Administrator**  
**U.S. Small Business Administration**

Good morning, and thank you, Chairwoman Velazquez, Ranking Member Chabot, and Members of the Committee for your kind invitation to talk about the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) field operations.

I am here today representing the approximately 690 men and women who work in the SBA field offices around the country. These are the men and women who bring our agency's products, services, and resources to America's small businesses, who in turn create 2 out of every 3 new jobs in our country. Many of you have met and interacted with my colleagues, and I thank all the Members of the Committee for your support of our employees in the field.

As you know, the SBA has a new Administrator, Jovita Carranza, who was appointed by the President and was recently confirmed by the United States Senate. Our field staff in the agency's 68 district offices around the country welcome her leadership and look forward to implementing her priorities.

Today, I would like to share with you what the SBA's Office of Field Operations does for small businesses throughout the country and how we work in coordination with you and your staff.

SBA's field staff are the connections in your districts and throughout the country to the loan products, government contracts, and business counseling services provided by the SBA and our resource partners. Our team in the field answer the phone when your staff and entrepreneurs call their local SBA office. They respond to questions and assist your constituents and small businesses. They participate in town halls, Chamber meetings, international trade and Small Business Saturday events. They train SBA lenders on our policy and procedures, assist socially and economically disadvantaged firms in getting certified, and help small businesses find government contracting opportunities.

Our district offices are led by District Directors and Deputy District Directors who are the front-line management in the field and represent SBA in their community. We have our Lender Relations Specialists, Economic Development Specialists, and Business Opportunity Specialists who focus on compliance, training and outreach. They not only connect with the business community and financial institutions, they work hand in hand with our resource partners at the local level like Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), SCORE, Women's Business Centers, and Veterans Business Outreach Centers. They also are a force multiplier locally, by working in cooperation with local economic development agencies and other state and local resources that are available to help small business.

Many of SBA's field staff have worked at the agency for ten or twenty years, some much longer. In sum, our district employees are the personal touch and the front line to help small businesses start up, scale up, and succeed.

Chairwoman Velázquez, Ranking Member Chabot, and Members of the Committee, this is my first tour of duty in federal government after a career in the private sector and as a small business owner. In my nearly three years at SBA, including the last eight months as the Associate Administrator of Field Operations, I have seen some amazing things that highlight the dedication and impact of our federal workforce.

The first thing I learned is the unbelievable scope and scale of SBA programs and services available to help the small business owners. Here are just some of the SBA services that our dedicated professionals in the field connect entrepreneurs and small businesses to: counseling services, microloans, information about the Emerging Leaders program, exploring opportunities for government contracting, disaster assistance after tragedy, and programs specifically targeted to women, veterans, minorities, and underserved communities.

This is all made possible by our staff in the field offices. They provide the personal touch throughout the country to make sure small businesses have access to the resources they need to start and grow their business. As the Associate Administrator of SBA's Office of Field Operations, I want our field staff out in their communities evangelizing the many services SBA and our resource partners provide.

That leads to the second thing I have learned.

Working for this agency and serving small businesses is an honor, a passion, and a privilege. Many of our District Office employees are fully eligible to retire right now, today. But they continue working because they see how the work that they are engaged in makes a difference in their communities – the places where they grew up, live, are raising their families, and where their kids go to school.

At every single event I have been to where small businesses are honored or given awards, the small business owner gets up and gives the perfunctory thank you to the SBA, or the SBDC, or SCORE and the Women's Business Center. But then they go much further.

They recognize, praise, and thank our SBA staff by name. These businesses are enormously grateful to our employees not just for their knowledge, but for their time, attention, honesty, and for working with them, sometimes for years, to help that business succeed.

SBA field staff provide invaluable support to small businesses. In accordance with the President's Management Agenda, the Office of Field Operations is leading efforts to provide a modern, streamlined, and responsive customer experience for small businesses. SBA is identifying opportunities to more effectively collect customer data and collaborating with internal as well external partners to integrate leading practices in managing customer experience and improving service delivery.

During FY19, a team of field employees worked with HR staff to create new job descriptions that better reflect the core work field employees provide, particularly outreach and marketing in the lending and government contracting programs. This is designed to create more flexibility and better customer service based on what the small business needs.

We are creating a career ladder to help retain staff by giving them more opportunities to grow and advance professionally. We also have changed the way we measure people's performance to enable field staff to focus and tailor the work needed in their districts, and more effectively serve their community.

We have also reviewed GAO and IG findings and implemented those recommendations. When an audit was done of activities with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, we tasked the SBA district offices that have institutions in their regions to pro-actively hold events and tie them into SBA initiatives and programs, like rural economic development, Opportunity Zones, or government contracting. Those districts that don't have HBCU's are instead conducting outreach with vocational, trade, and technical schools, as well as community colleges.

The Office of Field Operations has also developed better, more collaborative working relationships with other SBA program offices, including the Office of International Trade, to help small businesses look beyond our borders for opportunities to expand and grow, particularly with the recent passage of USMCA.

I am honored and blessed to work with SBA's field team who work tirelessly, every single day, to make a difference for our country's 30 million small businesses. And I'm proud to be their advocate today and every day.

Thank you for having me here, for your support of small business and the agency.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.