

Marketing & Regulatory Programs HR BROADCAST

Quarter 1 – FY 2017 Issue

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Dear Colleagues:

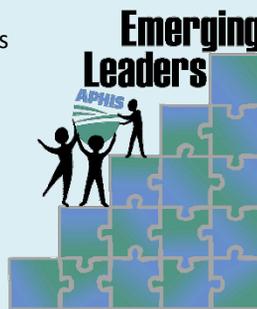
Hopefully, by now you have heard about the creation of the Recruitment and Hiring MAC and Project Management Teams led by Chris Zakarka, APHIS' Deputy Administrator for Policy and Program Development. These groups were formed because leadership recognizes we have a critical need to focus on workforce stability, succession planning, and staff diversity.

The goal of these efforts is to provide Agency hiring managers with additional and more efficient approaches to filling vacancies. Examples include the recent posting of a nationwide vacancy announcement for entry-level Veterinary Medical Officers (VMOs) that enables hiring managers from California to Maine to use the same announcement to hire qualified veterinarians as well as a new developmental opportunity that will utilize the Pathways Program to train a cohort of biological science students with the goal of converting them to permanent employees. These approaches, along with other initiatives underway, are vital to the long-term stability of our organization. Please see pages 6-8 of this Broadcast issue for questions and answers on APHIS' Consolidated Announcement for Entry-Level VMOs.

Another critical component to long-term stability is supporting and preparing our future leaders. As you may have heard from Administrator Kevin Shea during town halls, or other outreach efforts, we expect a significant portion of APHIS supervisors and Senior Leaders to retire over the next 3-5 years. While the loss of this experience and institutional knowledge will be a challenge for us, we are fortunate to have a number of motivated individuals who have taken the initiative to establish groups like the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) to help us identify and develop future APHIS leaders to fill critical headquarters and field vacancies in the years ahead.

The ELP is a grassroots organization promoting professional networking and numerous other events focused on leadership and career development. A small group of staff-level employees in Riverdale founded the ELP in 2014 after recognizing the need for an informal organization where motivated, engaged employees at all levels could come together to network, increase their knowledge of the Agency, and work collectively to advance their careers. The ELP has successfully planned and hosted the annual Leadership Development Day, an informational series on the Administrator's Top 10 Goals, and several smaller networking events in the Riverdale area. In 2 years, the organization's membership has grown from 4 to 150 individuals, and the group is really just getting started.

As it enters its third year of existence, the ELP continues to expand its horizons helping APHIS identify active, engaged leaders nationwide by establishing field chapters. The goal is for these chapters to be founded and led by local employees. To assist those who are interested, the ELP has put together a helpful "start-up kit" that contains everything field employees need to establish their own chapter. The kits are available on the [ELP page](#) on the My APHIS Portal. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact the group: emerging.leaders.field.liaison@aphis.usda.gov.



Promoting professional development

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We hope that the HR Broadcast is meeting your needs and communicating topics of interest, but if there are items you would like to see included in future issues, please contact our HR Broadcast Layout Editor, Christina Furnkranz, at Christina.S.Furnkranz@aphis.usda.gov

**HAPPY
NEW
FISCAL
YEAR
17**

Quarter 1 – FY 2017 Issue

Director's Corner continued from page 1...

Alongside the projects underway through the Recruitment and Hiring MAC and the efforts of the ELP, substantial work continues to provide APHIS employees with access to quality employee development and training opportunities. APHIS Senior Leadership provides incredible support for the training and development options offered by the Center for Training and Organizational Development (CTOD), PPQ's Professional Development Center (PDC) and Veterinary Services' Professional Development Services. APHIS Leadership also supports employee participation in external training such as the executive leadership programs offered by the Federal Executive Institute (FEI), Harvard University, and the Brookings Institution. In addition to APHIS leadership support, the USDA



Virtual University, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and numerous other governmental and non-governmental entities offer training programs. If you are interested in preparing yourself for future leadership roles, or looking to develop new skills in your current position, I encourage you to work with your supervisor to outline your personal development strategy through the creation of an Individual Development Plan (IDP). For today's workforce, training and developmental opportunities abound, and an IDP can help you and your supervisor identify the best choices to help you achieve your career goals. A good place for both of you to start your research is the CTOD [Career Development Center \(CDC\)](#) where you'll find many training and development suggestions organized in an easy to use format.

I wish you all the best as you make use of these various resources and initiatives to help you effectively manage your APHIS career.

Michael Watson

Director, Human Resources Division, USDA-APHIS-MRPBS





Shh! Maintaining Confidentiality in the EEO Process

By *Zachary White* (Zachary.L.Wright@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2876)

All federal employees have the right to file an EEO complaint when they believe an Agency action may be the product of a basis of discrimination covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In addition, all federal employees have a right to file a claim of retaliation where they believe they have been subjected to an Agency action because of their participation in the EEO process or opposition to a discriminatory practice.

The Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) places great emphasis on the process through which claims of discrimination and retaliation are investigated, whether by an EEOC investigator or before an EEOC Administrative Judge. Importantly, all participants, including the involved management official(s), any potential witnesses, and the employee, should keep the substance of their interactions with the EEO process confidential. This restriction of confidentiality applies to all facets of the employee-employer relationship, including any discussion of the merits of an employee's or a co-worker's EEO complaint and the discussion of a witness' expected testimony to an EEO investigator, at a deposition, or at a hearing before an Administrative Judge.

Managers and employees who discuss the merits of an EEO complaint or the anticipated testimony of a witness in a complaint potentially risk their own credibility when called to present testimony in a particular matter, creating potential liability for the Agency. For example, in *Quinn v. United States Postal Service*, EEOC App. No. 05900546 (1990), the EEOC found a supervisor engaged in witness intimidation where, two weeks prior to the hearing, he spoke to a potential witness and stated his desire not to testify and stated he hoped the case would not affect his and the employee's working relationship. See also *Baker v. Dep't of Army*, EEOC App. No. 05900391 (1990) (finding that a high ranking military officer's coaching of a potential witness constituted witness interference and led to a finding of discrimination against the Agency). In an extreme example, the EEOC found the testimony of Agency witnesses was not entitled to any credibility where the Agency's representative instructed witnesses how to testify, provided scripts to Agency witnesses, and replaced witnesses who refused to testify according to the script with witnesses who would comply. *Cole v. Dep't of the Navy*, EEOC App. No. 07A20057 (2003).

Given the pitfalls that come with the EEO process and the EEOC's insistence on confidentiality, best practices for managers include not discussing the specifics or merits of an employee's EEO complaint with anyone not involved in the relevant EEO process who does not have an official reason to know, including the employee's co-workers. Even though upper level management may have a need to know of an EEO complaint in order to approve potential settlements, it is wise to limit or to avoid such discussion with or among higher-level management officials, especially if the employee's medical conditions are an issue in the case or the case involves reasonable accommodation issues.

However, it is permissible to discuss a particular EEO complaint with the assigned Agency representative, or when a particular person has been designated as a resolving official, or with the Agency's EEO department. Any manager who has questions regarding the EEO process and his/her responsibilities may contact USDA's Office of General Counsel, Civil Rights, Labor & Employment Law Policy Section, MRPBS Human Resources Division, Hearing and Appeals Branch, or your Agency's EEO office.

CONFIDENTIAL



Work Life Wellness Program: Managing Holiday Stress

By *Tara Coker* (Tara.L.Coker@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2883)



Have you ever wondered how to have a hassle-free holiday season? Here are some tips that may make it a bit easier to enjoy the holiday season without feeling stressed out.

- ❖ Manage holiday stress by getting organized early. Make and use a “to-do” list. Be careful not to overcommit your time or your money. Use down time to your advantage. Simplify tasks as much as possible, and don’t be afraid to ask for help. Most importantly, enjoy time with your loved ones.
- ❖ Holiday travel can be a hassle. Make travel plans early. Allow plenty of travel time and anticipate traffic jams.
- ❖ Don’t let holiday shopping and gift-giving take away your holiday spirit. Shop early, and wrap gifts as you buy them. Write out holiday cards in advance, and mail presents and cards early. Be creative and stay within your budget.
- ❖ Take care of yourself, getting plenty of sleep. Strive to be healthy by sticking to your normal diet and exercise routines. Eat well. (Ok, let’s be realistic... you can have the goodies, just in moderation.)
- ❖ And remember it’s perfectly alright to simply say “no”. The holidays aren’t just about going to parties, gift-giving, and receiving. All of which are great, but, it’s also a time to reflect and relax and just enjoy the magic of the holiday season.

Learn to recognize your stress signals and try to alleviate contributors. If stress turns into severe anxiety and/or depression, seek professional help immediately. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a professional counseling and referral service that can help employees with personal and professional problems such as emotional, family, marital, alcohol, or drug use/abuse, relationship problems, and other issues. It is free, confidential within the limits of the law, and voluntary. EAP is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and they can be reached at 1-800-222-0364.

Source: “Managing Holiday Stress.” Copyright LifeCare, Inc.



Technology At Work

Persons with disabilities who need program information in alternate formats (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY).



Employee Exit Survey

By **Patricia Flower** (Patricia.A.Flower@aphis.usda.gov, 202-799-7082)

As part of USDA's ongoing Cultural Transformation effort, significant emphasis has been placed within MRP on gathering employee opinions through listening sessions, websites and portals, the Employee Viewpoint Survey, and various other methods. Information is also needed from employees who leave the MRP agencies, and because of that, a web-based process is in place for individuals to complete an online exit survey. The exit survey gives employees the opportunity to communicate their reasons for leaving, perceptions of the work environment, and overall satisfaction with their agency.



In order to ensure that departing employees are notified of the exit survey, HRD has an exit survey coordinator to facilitate the process. Pat Flower of the Human Resources Division, HR Systems and Reporting Branch, is the exit survey coordinator and can be reached at 202-799-7082, or by email at Patricia.A.Flower@aphis.usda.gov.

The following procedures should be followed: supervisors, administrative officers, assigned designees, or departing employees should contact the exit survey coordinator to obtain the link to the exit survey website. If the departing employee does not have internet capabilities, a hard copy also can be requested from the exit survey coordinator.

Scheduling Use or Lose Annual Leave

By **Nella Roberts** (Nella.Roberts@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2910)

While the end of the leave year is not yet here, it is fast approaching! Now is the time to plan ahead and schedule your use/lose annual leave. Here are some important policy points to keep in mind:

- The 2016 leave year ends on January 07, 2017 (pay period 26).
- Use or lose annual leave must be scheduled by November 26, 2016, the end of pay period 23. Leave must either be scheduled electronically, (email or WebTA), or in writing. If the leave is not properly scheduled and it is lost at the end of the leave year, it cannot be considered for restoration because it did not meet the scheduling requirement.
- Follow the recommended leave usage order. Choosing to do otherwise means lost leave will not be restored.
- While the leave must be scheduled by the end of pay period 23, you have until the end of pay period 26 to use it.
- Lost leave may not be considered for restoration until pay period 1, 2017.

Remember to pay particular attention to your leave balances and work closely with your supervisor to schedule and use any use/lose annual leave. And lastly, if you have any questions, contact your servicing Leave and Compensation Team Specialist or me.

From
The
Policy
Branch

Important Dates
Don't Forget...





APHIS Employees ONLY



Questions and Answers:

Consolidated Announcement for Entry-Level Veterinary Medical Officers (VMOs)

By *Kathy Slaga* (*Kathleen.M.Slaga@aphis.usda.gov*, 612-336-3354)

Q. What is a consolidated announcement?

A. A consolidated announcement enables an agency to fill multiple positions with a single vacancy announcement. The vacancy announcement can include several duty locations across multiple States as long as the occupation and grade levels are the same.



Q. Why is APHIS moving to a consolidated announcement for entry-level VMOs?

A. APHIS has a large volume of vacancies for VMOs and cannot fill these positions as quickly as needed using single vacancy announcements.

Q. What is the benefit of this approach?

A. Moving to a consolidated vacancy announcement for entry-level VMOs eliminates the need to produce an announcement each time a vacancy occurs. This will allow APHIS to fill vacancies more quickly.

Q. Who developed the standardized process for entry-level VMOs?

A. Animal Care (AC), Veterinary Services (VS), and Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services' Human Resources Division (HRD) collaborated closely to develop the standardized process. Working together, they created a position description and job opportunity announcement that meets the unique needs of each program while also allowing the Agency to reap the benefits of using a consolidated announcement.

Q. How will the entry-level VMO consolidated announcement process work?

A. APHIS will post an announcement indicating that multiple positions may be filled at multiple duty locations. The announcement will allow applicants to select one or more locations of interest, by State, and will also give them the opportunity to indicate whether they prefer to work for AC, VS, or both programs. HRD will highlight locations with current vacancies in the consolidated announcement. However, applications will be accepted for any location listed in the announcement because the intent is to establish a standing list of qualified candidates who can be referred to hiring managers any time a vacancy occurs throughout the country. Once the announcement closes, HRD will review the applications for basic qualifications. When a hiring manager submits a Request for Personnel Action (Form SF-52) to HRD for an entry-level VMO in a duty location that was included in the announcement, a certificate will be issued containing candidates who qualify and have indicated their preference to work in that location and for that program.

Q. How often will APHIS post a consolidated job opportunity announcement for entry-level VMOs?

A. APHIS will post a consolidated, entry-level VMO announcement 3 or 4 times per year based on Agency need. This will allow APHIS to continually refresh the applicant pool. Interested individuals will need to apply/re-apply when each announcement is posted to indicate their continued interest in working for the Agency.

Q. When will the first consolidated announcement be posted?

A. The first consolidated announcement for entry-level VMOs was posted to USAJobs on October 17, 2016, and will be open for 2 weeks. The announcement will close on October 31, 2016.

Q. How long will applicants who meet the basic qualifications be eligible for consideration?

A. Applications from qualified candidates will be valid for up to 120 days from the date the job opens.

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Q. What will the consolidated job opportunity announcement include?

A. The vacancy announcement will include, but is not limited to, the following information:

- Locations the applicant can select from:
 - All 50 States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico with the following explanation: *“The intent of this job posting is to collect applications and establish a list of eligible, qualified candidates that can be referred to fill potential vacant positions in the next 90-120 days. It is difficult to predict if or when a specific State or location will have a vacancy, but we encourage you to apply as vacancies may become available.”*
- Current vacancies at the time of the announcement—program, city, and State, if known.
- Program areas the applicant is interested in: AC, VS, or both programs. Applicants will be able to indicate program preference when they apply to the vacancy announcement, but they will be considered for all open positions that meet their location requirements regardless of whether they indicate AC or VS. A link will be provided to take interested candidates to each program’s website.
- Examples of duties that cover VMO work in APHIS.
- Notification that relocation payments are not authorized.
- A listing of required documents (resume, proof of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree or equivalent, DD-214, if claiming Veterans’ Preference) candidates must submit to be considered for entry-level VMO vacancies.
- Options for qualifications (because APHIS has direct hire authority for VMOs, assessment questions are not necessary and are not included in the announcement).
 - GS-11 – DVM or equivalent.
 - GS-12 – DVM or equivalent plus Master’s Degree, successful completion of 2 years of an internship, residency program, or fellowship training program, or 1 year of professional veterinary medical experience.

Q. What does a selecting official need to do when hiring an entry-level VMO using the consolidated announcement process?

A. When a vacancy occurs in either AC or VS, selecting officials and their administrative staff will submit an SF-52, with the requested action to “recruit APHIS VMO.” The SF-52 should indicate duty location, work schedule, and any special instructions, along with information typically provided on a recruit SF-52. HRD will issue a selection certificate containing qualified applicants who are willing to work in the State where the vacancy is located. Selection certificates will be issued and extended in 15-day increments, until the selection process nears the 80-day hiring timeframe. Selections must be made in accordance with the 80-day hiring standard. Certificates returned to HRD without a selection cannot be re-issued until 90 days have passed from the date the initial certificate was issued for that location.

Q. How do I know what position description (PD) to use?

A. There are two standard PDs for the entry-level VMO. If the position you are filling has limited supervisory responsibilities, please ensure you use SJ #6VM004. If the position you are filling does not require the incumbent to perform any supervisory functions, please use SJ #6VM008. To obtain copies of these position descriptions, please contact your program servicing [classification specialist](#). Identifying the appropriate position will help ensure that the coding in the HR systems is accurate.

Q. What happens if candidates are referred to both AC and VS?

A. If AC and VS have a vacancy in the same location and the same candidates are referred to both programs, the selecting officials from the programs will need to work together to interview and hire the applicants appearing on both certificates. HRD will identify cases where a certificate for a particular State is already issued and assist the hiring managers in coordinating their efforts.



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Q. How will certificates be managed?

A. Once AC or VS identifies the need to fill a vacancy and the hiring manager submits the SF-52 as outlined above, HRD will:

- Issue selection certificates by State; if VS is issued a certificate for the State of Texas and then AC identifies a vacancy in Texas, the hiring managers for each program will need to work together to interview and hire. (See question above).
- Issue and extend selection certificates in 15-day increments. Selections must be made within the 80-day hiring timeframes.
- Unused certificates cannot be re-issued until a new announcement is posted, which will be 3-4 times per year based on Agency need.
- Notify all applicants, including the selectee, of their status.
- Return candidate applications not selected to the pool of applicants to be considered for future vacancies.

Selecting officials will:

- Work with their counterparts in AC or VS if sharing a certificate.
- Document and retain notes of all interviews, reference checks, and declinations.
- Make selections within the 80-day hiring timeframe.
- Return selections to HRD via eRecruit. (Selections should be returned to HR via the eRecruit system by the hiring official to whom the certificate was issued.)
- Contact HRD via email to specify the duty location.
- (If sharing a certificate) notify HRD via email to identify which selectee will be assigned to which program.

Q. Is there any information that managers need to provide during the initial interview?

A. Since the consolidated announcements will be open to all States and apply to AC and VS vacancies, hiring managers should confirm a position's location and duties with the applicant. In addition, if the position requires limited supervision, the applicant should also be notified.

Q. What happens after a selection is made?

A. Selecting officials will be copied when a Tentative Selection Letter (TSL) is issued and will be notified when the applicant successfully completes the IT security test. Once that occurs, it is incumbent upon the selecting official to:

- Notify the appropriate IT contact when the selectee passes the test so an email address can be created (a Government email address is critical for new employees to quickly receive eAuthentication rights and sponsorship for LincPass).
- Have the selectee submit his/her fingerprints as part of the conditional selection. The fingerprint forms or electronic fingerprint scans must be received, and the selectee must clear the adjudication process before a final offer can be made.
- Engage with the selectee on the completion of orientation forms for timely submission. Late submission will result in delayed starts. Selectees who clear the background check and who pass the IT security test will be provided a final offer letter confirming their duty location and starting salary. In the final offer letter, the selectee will receive a link to new employee orientation forms, which he/she is to complete and return to HR at least 2 weeks prior to the start date.
- Work with the employee on his/her first day to complete the [I-9 form](#) and [Appointment Affidavit](#) to verify the employee's identity. Both forms, along with copies of the employee's proof of identity, must be submitted to HR within 24 hours of completion.
- Ensure the employee watches his/her work email for a message from HSPD-12Admin, which contains information about LincPass enrollment. Any messages from HSPD-12Admin must be read immediately and the instructions followed in order for the new employee to obtain a LincPass as quickly as possible.

Q. What happens if a candidate declines a position?

A. Instructions for documenting declinations will accompany the selection certificate.

For More Information:
Please contact your [HRD Customer Service Representative](#) or your [servicing staffing specialist](#).

