



DIRECTOR'S

C As the Human Resources Division Director, I am pleased to share our new Mission, Vision, and Value statements. At a recent Town Hall meeting, I asked all employees to participate in an exercise to develop the Division's core values, the very essence of what we expect to be as an HR servicing organization. A cross functional workgroup reviewed the responses from our HRD employees and refined those responses into our Mission, Vision, and Value statements on page 2. I am extremely proud of the contributions made by the HRD employees and know that our Mission, Vision, and Values reflect the great organization our employees help to create each and every day.

As our customers, you are the core of our Mission Statement and we are here to support you.

Continue to page 2

Marsha Wiggins, HRD Director

HRD EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER (EOQ)



HRD-Employee of the Quarter (EOQ) is designed to highlight those individuals, or groups of employees, who exemplify the Division's values of Excellence, Professionalism, Customer Service, and Diversity and Inclusion. Full program details are available at this site: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/eoq.shtml>

Quarterly winners will be chosen from those employees nominated for the award by Customers, Peers, and Supervisors throughout MRP.

If you have any questions concerning the program or process, please direct them to Terry Zietlow at 612-336-3372.

CONGRATULATIONS!

MARTIN GOLD
GARY SHAPIRO
ARTHUR FORD III
EILEEN SULLIVAN

FOR DEMONSTRATED SUPERIOR CUSTOMER SERVICE, IMPROVING LEVELS OF COOPERATION AND OVERCOMING ADVERSE OBSTACLES FOR EFFECTIVE CLOSURE OF A COMPLEX EEOC CASE.



Inside this Issue:

<u>Policy</u>	<u>3-4</u>
<u>HR Info</u>	<u>5-8</u>
<u>Staffing</u>	<u>9-10</u>
<u>Classification</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Leave & Comp</u>	<u>12-13</u>
<u>Personnel Security</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>Benefits Buzz</u>	<u>15-19</u>

HRD's NEW IMAGE!



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 Editor, Christina Furnkranz, at Christina.S.Furnkranz@aphis.usda.gov



HRD's Mission, Vision, and Values

HRD Mission

The mission of MRP Human Resources (HR) Division is to provide quality HR products and services that enhance our customers' ability to fulfill their mission.

HRD Vision

The vision of MRP Human Resources Division is to be an HR center of excellence for our employees, customers, stakeholders and the communities we serve. We continue to seek and implement innovative approaches that are models for the Department and the Government as a whole.

HRD Values

Excellence

HRD Employees earn respect through the knowledge, skills, abilities, integrity, and work ethic we bring to our jobs every day.

- Providing prompt, courteous, knowledgeable, and respectful service
- Following through on commitments made to customers and to each other
- Seeking opportunities for continual learning which enhances our ability to provide excellence

Professionalism

HRD Employees are professional and provide quality and responsive service to our customers and to each other.

- Saying what we mean, meaning what we say, and following through on everything we say we will do
- Respecting the confidentiality entrusted to us
- Treating each other and our customers, fairly and with respect
- Providing accurate and up to date information to our customers and applying rules and regulations consistently

Customer Service

HRD employees believe that our first responsibility is to our customers. We take our commitment to the American public very seriously and believe in delivering the highest quality products and services.

- Anticipating, understanding, and responding to customer needs in a timely and effective manner
- Providing consultative services which offer alternatives and options
- Ensuring that HRD providers are reliable and available to all customers no matter the size of their program or their geographic location

Diversity & Inclusion

HRD employees create an environment that fosters respect, fairness, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

- Embracing cultural differences, acknowledging the dignity of all individuals and maintaining a work environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages and experiences
- Treating each other in a fair and consistent manner and making informed decisions without favoritism or prejudice
- Supporting one another, working cooperatively, respecting each another's views, and striving to create an enjoyable and fun work environment



Upcoming Performance Management Activities in MRP

By *Gwen Montgomery* (Gwen.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2928)



The end of the FY2012 performance cycle is quickly approaching. Per USDA and MRP Directives, managers and supervisors are required to conduct performance evaluations at the end of the cycle for all eligible employees. Below is a summary of the upcoming activities/due dates to be aware of in order to close out the FY2012 performance management cycle. This document also provides information regarding awards and recognition. Managers and supervisors are urged to comply with established deadlines to ensure timely processing of performance appraisals and awards.

Questions regarding Performance Management may be directed to Gwen Montgomery at (301) 851-2928 or via email at Gwen.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov. Questions regarding Awards and Recognition may be directed to Lynn Doetschman at (301) 851-2891 or via email at Lynn.H.Doetschman@aphis.usda.gov.

Note: The information provided in this document does not apply to SES or SL/ST employees. Information regarding performance management and awards and recognition for SES and SL/ST employees can be found on the USDA Executive Resources Division webpage: <http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/exec/index.htm>

ACTIVITY	Accomplished No Later Than:
End of FY 2012 Performance Rating Cycle	9/30/12
Approve FY 2012 Performance Award Recommendation Forms (in order to use FY 2012 Funds, forms must be signed and dated on or before)	9/30/12
Complete and Closeout FY 2012 Performance Ratings	10/30/12
Establish FY 2013 Performance Plans	10/30/12
Submit FY 2012 Summary Ratings to Human Resources Operations- Minneapolis, Processing Section	11/16/12
Submit FY 2012 Performance Award Recommendation Forms to Human Resources Operations-Minneapolis, Processing Section	11/30/12

Timely Submission of Summary Ratings and Awards Recommendations

- Ensures timely processing and input into the NFC system, which allows employees to receive performance awards in a timely fashion.
- Ensures accurate data needed for completion of the Performance Appraisal Assessment Tool (PAAT).

The PAAT is a comprehensive questionnaire designed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) which measures the effectiveness of performance appraisal programs. MRP PAAT(s) are submitted to the Department for review and consolidation into the USDA PAAT which is forwarded to OPM for final review/scoring.

Continue to page 8



Upcoming Performance Management Act

Continued from page 7

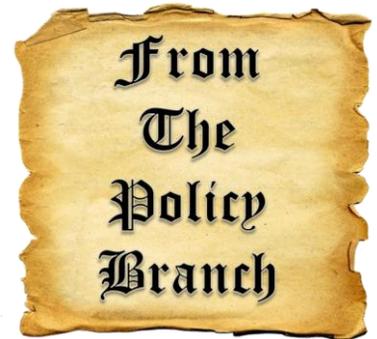
Additional Awards & Recognition Information

The USDA Departmental Regulation, MRP Directive, and other awards & recognition references are available on the MRP Human Resources web site:

<http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/awards.shtml>

Managers and supervisors, as awards recommending individuals and approving officials, are reminded of their responsibility for ensuring that awards are cost effective and within the award limits established by the program. For more information on ensuring that awards in your program do not exceed limits based on OPM/OMB requirements to reduce award spending, contact your program's Administrative Officer or Resource Management office.

MRP is committed to maintaining an effective performance management system. The cooperation of the programs regarding timely submission of performance ratings and awards recommendations will help achieve this goal and help meet the requirements set by the Department and OPM.



Caution on Multiple Awards

As programs are preparing their end of the year awards, HRD would like to pass on this reminder per recent memorandum on awards restrictions from USDA's Office of HR Management:

"You must also exercise caution where multiple awards (e.g., a performance award and an extra effort award) are paid out in close proximity to one another, where the combined sum of the awards would exceed \$5,500. Under no circumstances should it appear the Secretary's approval requirement is being circumvented. **The awards justifications must clearly demonstrate the awards are for entirely separate accomplishments, which in this example would mean the achievement for which the award is being granted may not be part of the justification for the performance rating."**

Although this caution is mentioned in the context of awards totaling more than \$5,500, programs are reminded of the spirit of the guidance, which is that the amount of any award (or combination of awards) may not exceed the value of the contribution being recognized.

7/18/12 memo from OHRM:

In addition, please remember DR-4040-451-1 stipulates that:

- Spot Awards are limited to \$750
- Non-SES/SL/ST awards over \$5,500 must be submitted through the Under/Assistant Secretary or Staff Office Head to the Director, OHRM, for the Secretary's approval
- All awards for SES must be approved by the Secretary
- All performance awards for SL/ST must be approved by the Secretary.



MRPBS Summer Intern Program

By *Inez DeCoteau*, MBSCAC Chair, (*Inez.J.DeCoteau@aphis.usda.gov*, 612.336.3217)

Nearly 30 students from colleges and universities around the country are spending the summer learning about USDA, APHIS, and the work done in support of APHIS as interns with Marketing & Regulatory Business Services (MRPBS). Working from different locations around the country, 27 students are assisting MRPBS in various divisions including Administrative Services, Investigative and Enforcement Services (IES), Financial Management, Human Resources, and Information Technology.

It is the second summer for the highly-successful MRPBS summer intern program, championed by MRPBS Deputy Administrator, Joanne Munno. Again this year, the diversity and wide-ranging interests of the students employed is thanks to the Minneapolis Business Site Cultural Awareness Committee (MBSCAC), as well as adjunct committee members. Members of the summer intern committee, as well as MRPBS supervisors and representatives from local special emphasis committees around the country, canvassed nearly 100 organizations and institutions in search of high-caliber students interested in learning about, and working for, the Federal Government.

More than 460 students applied for the 2012 MRPBS opportunities. Those selected possessed the aptitude needed for success, including a customer service orientation, problems solving skills and the ability to interact and get along with other people. Some students traveled significant distances to work with MRPBS; a student from Puerto Rico is working in Minneapolis and a student from North Carolina is working in Ft. Collins. In addition to learning about MRPBS through the performance of their day-to-day work, many students are learning about APHIS and the great work done throughout the agency through presentations given by program experts or via on-site visits to experience work in action. The interns have learned about the mission and work of Animal Care from Dr. Cathy Hovancsak; Dr. Sherry Shaw provided an overview of Veterinary Services; and William Reinberg explained the work and mission of Investigative and Enforcement Services (IES). In addition, students participated in a mock IES investigation, which may have generated a couple future candidates for investigator positions! Finally, students traveled to the Minneapolis airport to observe the work of PPQ and how PPQ work intersects with the work of IES, Wildlife Services and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).



The last few remaining weeks of the summer found the students concentrating on their daily work, working with their mentors or coaches and preparing for their internship close-out briefings, in which they describe the work they performed and what they learned. It was also their opportunity to provide feedback on the program and offer suggestions for improvement. Those suggestions will be taken into consideration during the planning of the 2013 program. Planning for next summer's program will begin in the fall.



EXIT Survey

By **Nancy Varichak**,

(Nancy.C.Varichak@aphis.usda.gov, 612.336.3323)



As part of USDA's ongoing Cultural Transformation effort, significant emphasis has been placed in APHIS on gathering employee opinions through listening sessions, APHIS web sites, the APHIS Portal, the

Employee Viewpoint Survey and various other methods. Information is also needed from employees who leave the agency and because of that, a web-based process has been developed 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 the agency.

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

The following procedures should be followed: Supervisors or assigned designees should instruct the departing employee to contact the Exit Survey Coordinator in order to obtain the username and password to access the exit interview website. If the departing employee does not have internet capabilities he/she can request a hard copy by contacting the Exit Survey Coordinator.

Additional information on the Exit Survey is available in the Human Resources Desk Guide, Subchapter 4250 at: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4250/index.shtml

APHIS Administrative Notice 11-4 (5-11-11)

This Notice applies to all APHIS employees. It establishes the requirement(s) for those who choose to use signature blocks in email.

The part of an email message that contains the sender's contact information must include the following information:

- (1) Name
- (2) Job Title
- (3) Organization
- (4) Office Address
- (5) Phone Number
- (6) Email Address

While official APHIS/USDA website links may also be included in the signature block, slogans, and/or quotes by celebrities, etc., are **NOT** permitted.

Inquiries regarding this Notice should be directed to the APHIS Information Systems Security Program Manager at 301-851-2551.

This notice may be accessed on the Internet at: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/library/admin_notices/pdf/APHIS_11_4.pdf



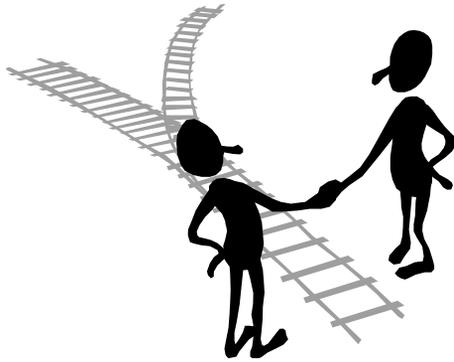
Technology At Work

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



Collaborative Resolution Program – Mediation Services Frequently Asked Questions

By **Don Donnell**, (Donald.H.Donnell@aphis.usda.gov, 515.337.7238)



Do you have a concern about your working relationship with a coworker, your supervisor, or a person who reports to you? Would you like to improve your working relationship with the other person, but you are not sure about how to initiate the discussion?

Workplace mediation services offered by the APHIS Collaborative Resolution (CR) Program are available to all APHIS employees to help employees discuss concerns about working relationships, workplace communication, or almost any other workplace concern not involving allegations of illegal discrimination under Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws and regulations. Mediation services for EEO related concerns should be directed to the APHIS Office of Civil Rights, Diversity and Inclusion.

What is mediation?

Mediation is a voluntary, confidential, and structured process in which a neutral third party (mediator) assists two (or more) parties as they have a conversation about the matters that concern them. The mediator helps the parties communicate in a constructive manner to identify the underlying issues related to their concerns. As the parties develop a better understanding and appreciation of the issues, they improve their ability to work together to develop a resolution. The mediator supports the parties through every step of the process and will assist them in preparing a mediation agreement, should the parties desire a written agreement at the conclusion of the mediation session.

How does mediation differ from arbitration or litigation?

Unlike an arbitrator or a judge, a mediator does not decide who is right or wrong, or impose a decision on the parties. Rather, the mediator supports the parties in their efforts to reach a resolution that meets their respective needs. The CR Program staff mediators believe that the parties, with the assistance of a mediator, are fully capable of developing resolutions that will best meet their needs and resolve their concerns.

What does the statement, “mediation is a voluntary process” mean?

While all employees are encouraged to make use of the mediation process to resolve disputes and conflicts, participation in mediation is voluntary for non-supervisory employees. Supervisors and managers, however, are expected to participate in mediation when requested by an employee.

What about confidentiality provisions in connection with mediation?

The mediator does not disclose to any other persons information that is shared in confidence by any party who participates in the mediation process. The only exceptions to confidentiality are violence, threats of violence, or criminal activity.

How does the mediation process work?

Mediation is a **multi-stage process** designed to meet the needs of the parties. It begins with **introductions**, followed by the **mediator’s opening remarks** to explain how the mediation process works. Following the

Continue to page 6



Collaborative Resolution Program – Mediation Services -Frequently Asked Questions

Continued from page 5

mediator's opening remarks, **each party is afforded an opportunity to:** state the issues and concerns from his or her perspective; describe the personal impact that the issues are having on him or her; and indicate what he or she hopes to accomplish as a result of the mediation. The party who initiated the mediation will usually be asked to offer his/her remarks first.

After the initial statements have been presented, the mediator works with the parties in establishing a common understanding of the issues and concerns that have been identified. This is accomplished through **joint discussion with the parties**. Sometimes it is also beneficial during session for the mediator to meet separately with each of the parties; this is referred to as a **caucus**. Any information provided to the mediator by a party during caucus will be kept confidential and will not be shared with the other party. Throughout the mediation process, the **mediator works with the parties as they identify options**, or steps, they may each take to resolve the identified issues and concerns. If the parties reach a mutually acceptable resolution, the **mediator assists the parties by preparing a written agreement** for their review and signature. Should the mediation not result in an agreement, the mediator reviews progress made and advises the parties of other options that may be available to them for addressing their concerns.

For what types of matters is mediation appropriate?

Mediation is appropriate for any situation or dispute where the parties believe that a negotiated solution is the best way to meet their respective needs. Mediation can be the right approach in those situations where:

- communication between the parties has broken down or terminated;
- there are intense feelings and emotions;
- the parties would like to use a confidential process to resolve their concerns;
- the parties are willing to make a good-faith effort to resolve their differences; and,
- the parties want timely resolution of their concerns.

For what types of matters is mediation not appropriate?

Mediation is not appropriate for the following types of situations:

- the parties are not willing to take responsibility for their contribution to the dispute or conflict;
- a formal decision or precedent is desired; and,
- the parties are looking for an outcome that will determine a winner and a loser.

How do I go about requesting a mediation session, and who contacts the other party?

Any employee may contact the CR Program Staff at 301-851-2950 (or by email at CRP@aphis.usda.gov) at any time to request a mediation, or additional information about the process.

What are the benefits of the mediation process?

- Mediation is an informal process that can be used as a first step in improving communication, solving problems, and rebuilding trust and cooperation in the workplace.
- Mediation allows the parties to maintain control over the outcome of the process and resolve their concerns in a way that best meets their respective needs.
- Most mediation sessions can usually be completed in a few hours.

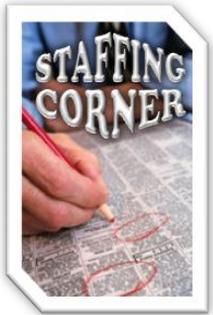


Additional information regarding the CR Program is available on the following website
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpb/hr/hrd_collaborative_resolutions.shtml.



Pathways Programs

By *Eric Williams* (Eric.J.Williams@aphis.usda.gov, 612.336.3370)



The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recently published final regulations on the Pathways Programs, a new federal hiring program that provides students and recent graduates with Federal internship and career opportunities. Pathways consist of the following three programs:



Internship Program - The Internship Program is for current students.

It replaces the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). The Internship Program provides students in high schools, colleges, trade schools and other qualifying educational institutions with paid opportunities to work in agencies and explore Federal careers while completing their education. To find out more about the Internship Program, go to the [Program Fact Sheets](#) webpage.

Recent Graduates Program - The Recent Graduates Program provides developmental experiences in the Federal Government. It was established to replace the former Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP). The Recent Graduates Program is intended to promote possible careers in the Federal government to individuals who have recently graduated from qualifying educational institutions or programs. To be eligible, applicants must apply within two years of degree or certificate completion. Eligible veterans will have up to six years after degree or certificate completion to apply. For more information about the Recent Graduates Program, go to the [Program Fact Sheets](#) webpage.

Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program - The PMF Program is the Federal Government's premier leadership development program for advanced degree candidates. The Pathways Programs regulations expand the eligibility window for PMF applicants, making it more "student friendly" by aligning it with academic calendars and allowing those who have received a qualifying advanced degree within the preceding two years to participate. To find out more about the changes to the PMF Program, go to the [Program Fact Sheets](#) webpage.

Continue to page 8



Pathways Programs

Continued from page 7

The Pathways Programs are similar to the former STEP, SCEP, and PMF programs. However, there are some key differences. Notable differences include:

- All USDA Pathways Programs job opportunities must be posted through USAJOBS and in the USDA Student Application Portal;
- Veterans' preference applies to all three programs; and
- All individuals hired under Pathways must sign a USDA Pathways participant agreement.



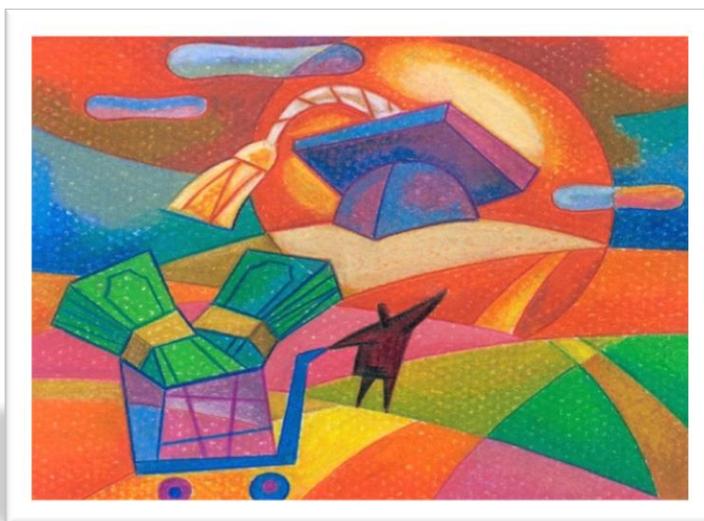
The above changes were made to ensure that the Pathways hiring process is uniform, transparent and fair to veterans.

The final regulations implementing the Pathways Programs were effective July 10, 2012. The regulations give agencies a six month transition period--from July 10, 2012 to January 6, 2013--to convert current STEP, SCEP, and PMF appointees to new appointments under the Pathways Programs. If you wish to retain a current STEP, SCEP or PMF employee beyond January 6, 2013, your servicing Staffing Specialist will work with you to provide you with the available options for doing so.

USDA's Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM) and MRP's Human Resources Division (HRD) are taking several steps to educate MRP managers on the new Pathways Programs. Specific steps include:

- HRD distributed and presented a summary of the Pathways Programs at recent APHIS,
- AMS and GIPSA Administrative Officer (AO) Meetings; HRD Staffing Specialists provided
- MRP managers and AOs with written guidance on the Pathways Programs; OHRM recently
- conducted webinars on the Pathways Programs for USDA managers; and HRD Staffing Specialists are working closely with MRP managers to discuss the available options for converting current STEP, SCEP and PMF employees to new appointments under Pathways.

Please feel free to contact your servicing Staffing Specialist for additional information on the Pathways Programs.



Data Element Changes

By **Faith Dietz** (Faith.K.Dietz@aphis.usda.gov, 612-336-3332)



You may have received an e-mail from the electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF) system that says “DOCUMENT: SF 50 - NOTIFICATION OF PERSONNEL ACTION NATURE OF ACTION: CHANGE IN DATA ELEMENT”

What exactly does that mean?

The Data Element changes are documented changes in personnel data that can occur as the result of an agency program or OPM review. The changes are generally one of the following: Agency code, Bargaining Unit Status (BUS), FLSA category, Occupational code, Personnel Office Identifier (POI), Position occupied, Position sensitivity code, or Official title code.



*Note: when these changes occur, they do not affect your salary or grade level.

Data element changes **do not** include Promotions, Reassignments, and other personnel actions that may change the position, duty station, grade, or salary information.

Since these changes do not happen to all employees, if you receive one of these notifications and have questions about the changes, please contact Faith Dietz, Classification Assistant, at 612-336-3332 or faith.k.dietz@aphis.usda.gov.

SF-52 – AM I DOING THIS RIGHT?

By **Faith Dietz** (Faith.K.Dietz@aphis.usda.gov, 612-336-3332)

Have you ever submitted a SF-52 and then said to yourself, “Did I do that correctly?” Or maybe you wondered what information HR wants to see on the form? Did you know that if required information is missing from your submitted SF-52, it can delay the review of the action? Maybe you are new to the SF-52 process and need some assistance. HRD is here to help. Here are some tips to remember when completing and submitting a SF-52:

- Name, Social Security Number (for RECRUIT actions, this will be blank)
- Position Information, including: Position Title, Master Record Number, Pay Plan, Occupational Series Code, Grade, Agency name and 2nd thru 4th etc. org. level name and the org structure code. Selecting Official’s name.
- Attach a copy of the position description (PD). *NOTE: If you are revising a position, notify your Classification Specialist BEFORE you submit the SF-52.*
- Use the Comments section for information that might not be readily known.
- **Remember:** The more information we have, the faster we can get the SF-52 out of Classification and on to Staffing and Processing.

RESOURCES:

- *APHIS Administrative Processes Training - Position Classification* on AgLearn. The training explains the Classification process, including Completing a PATS SF-52, Position Descriptions, AD-332, and e-POL.
- Standard job descriptions can be found at the following link, http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/classification/pds_online.shtml.
- **Need more assistance:** contact Faith Dietz, HR Classification Assistant, 651-336-3332, faith.k.dietz@aphis.usda.gov or your servicing Classification Specialist.



The Returned Funds Report

By *Mary Jo Yasgar* (Mary.J.Yasgar@aphis.usda.gov, 612.336.3331)



Payroll is processed biweekly at the National Finance Center (NFC). As a result, there are numerous reports generated at the NFC. One of those reports, the Returned Funds Report, is of particular interest to the Leave and Compensation Team (LCT). This is an important report that calls for review and action each pay period.

The Returned Funds report is full of monies/funds deducted from employees' salaries, and returned to NFC from various financial institutions. The LCT works with NFC to return monies to MRP employees. To date a grand total of \$17,000 has been returned by LCT. Below are the top 4 reasons why funds are returned to NFC from financial institutions:

1. Incorrect account numbers.
2. Incorrect bank routing numbers.
3. Changes made too late that do not apply to the NFC database for the current pay period.
 - ✓ If using the NFC Employee Personal Page (EPP) to make changes, we recommend all updates to direct deposits and/or allotments be entered no later than the first Tuesday of each pay period. In addition, please review the confirmation page for accuracy.
4. Closed accounts. Accounts closed by either the employees and/or the financial institutions will no longer accept funds sent from NFC.
 - ✓ The NFC database will continue to deduct and transmit the funds to the closed account until NFC receives updated account information. Changes may be made by completing the Standard Form 1199A, or by entering a change in the NFC EPP.



Link to the NFC EPP: <https://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/eplogin.aspx>

Link to the Standard Form 1199A: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/library/forms/pdf/sf1199a.pdf>

The LCT Technicians will email notifications to employees informing them the funds have been returned. Please check your Earnings and Leave Statement (ELS) each pay period. Your ELS will tell you exactly how much you were paid, what was deducted, and where your money was sent. If anything needs changing, please do so by using the NFC EPP.

If you have any questions regarding returned funds you may contact the LCT Civilian Pay Technicians for assistance. http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/lct.pdf



Compensatory Time Off for Travel (CTOT) Points

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



All GS, GM, AD and WG employees are eligible to earn Compensatory Time Off for Travel (CTOT) when travel occurs outside of duty hours and when pay may not otherwise be received. When your job requires travel, make sure you first talk with your supervisor about your schedule. Discuss the expected work hours and travel requirements. Together, determine if it will be necessary to adjust your work schedule, if the reason for your travel is or is not administratively controllable (administratively controllable means that the government has control or input regarding when the event occurs that creates the need to travel) and if it is possible to travel during regular working hours. If you find that you cannot travel during regular working hours and the reason for the travel is not administratively controllable then you are entitled to CTOT. Generally, the CTOT cannot include any normal commute time when beginning or ending your travel. Also, calculate your travel time beginning in the time zone in which you started your day, i.e., if you started in Fort Collins, it will be Mountain Time. When traveling by air, any travel delays are **not** included as part of the CTOT entitlement. Only include the scheduled layover time or the required waiting period before departure is covered. Finally, meal times are included in CTOT calculation.



Some important points to keep in mind about CTOT:

- It is earned and used in 15 minute increments.
- It must be used within 26 pay periods. If not, it is lost. The time is never paid out.
- If you travel on a holiday during corresponding duty hours, you are not entitled to CTOT. You are already receiving eight (8) hours of administrative leave (TC 66) for the holiday. Travel time occurring outside of your duty hours is eligible for CTOT.
- CTOT does not transfer with you if you leave USDA.

For additional information on CTOT, see:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4550/4550sece_suba.shtml#ctot

Scheduling Use or Lose Annual Leave

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

While the end of the leave is not yet here, it is approaching and will be here before you know it! Now is a good time to plan ahead and schedule your use/lose annual leave. Use or lose annual leave must be scheduled by December 1, 2012 (the end of pay period 24). While leave must be scheduled by the end of pay period 24, you have until January 12, 2013, to use it because there are 27 pay periods in the 2012 leave year. Leave must either be scheduled electronically, i.e., email or WebTA, or in writing, e.g., memo or OPM Form 71. If the leave is not properly scheduled and it is lost at the end of the leave year, it cannot be restored because it did not meet the scheduling requirement.



Work closely with your supervisor to schedule and use any use/lose annual leave. And finally, if you have any questions, contact your servicing Leave and Compensation Team Specialist in HR Operations.





MRPBS-HRD Implements LIVE-SCAN Electronic Fingerprinting Services

By Dru Dukart

(Dru.J.Dukart@aphis.usda.gov, 612-336-3289)



The Personnel Security Section is proud to announce two of the six work stations purchased for MRP electronic fingerprinting services are now operational. Staff

members at both the Minneapolis Business Site and Riverdale office have received training and are transmitting electronic live-scan fingerprints to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). This new process provides the HR Personnel Security staff with an easy way to verify personal identity and criminal history checks within a few days as compared to several weeks or months. The Biometric Software (inVize ID) is a complete background check application that captures fingerprint scans, collects demographic information, and verifies the data with the appropriate background check authority. It features a simple, intuitive interface that makes scanning easy for even the novice operator.

In addition to the Live-Scan, the Minneapolis site has the ability to scan hard copy fingerprint cards and electronically transmit them to OPM for further processing.



Additional Live-Scan electronic services are targeted for installation at Raleigh, NC; Ames, IA, Fort Collins, CO; and Washington, DC.

Access to Your Own Background Investigation Record

By Dru Dukart

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The U.S. Office of Personnel Management's Federal Investigative Services (OPM-FIS) conducts background investigations on Federal applicants, employees, military members, and contractor personnel for suitability and security purposes at the request of all Federal Agencies. These records are maintained in a Privacy Act System of Records. (*The Privacy Act of 1974: Title 5 of the United States Code, Section 552a*) The purpose of the Privacy Act is to regulate the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of personal information. Generally speaking, unless a condition of disclosure is met or the release is covered by a routine use of the agency's System of Records Notice (SORN) for the system, the Privacy Act prohibits the disclosure of records contained in a system of records without the written request or consent of the individual to whom the records pertain.

OPM Background investigations are maintained in the OPM Personnel Investigations Records System, covered by the OPM/Central-9 SORN. For additional information regarding OPM's Privacy Procedures for Personnel Records see 5 CFR 297.

Copies of your own background investigation may be obtained from OPM-FIS by writing to the FIS FOI/PA office. Your request must include the following information: Full name; Date of birth; Social Security Number; Mailing address where information should be mailed; and Handwritten signature Identification of the specific information being sought.

The requests can be sent to OPM-FIS by fax or regular mail as listed below:

Fax to: (724)-794-4590 (not a secure fax)

or Mail to:

FOI/PA office, OPM-FIS
PO Box 618
1137 Branchton Road
Boyers, PA 16018-0618



PREPARING FOR RETIREMENT THROUGHOUT YOUR FEDERAL CAREER - PART THREE - LATE CAREER

By **Laura Frantes** (Laura.L.Frantes@aphis.usda.gov, 612-336-3312)



BENEFITS BUZZ

Now that you are approaching the end of your federal career, it's time to start solidifying your post-employment plans. Do you know the steps you should be taking to safeguard your federal benefits? Do you have a sound, realistic understanding of your financial picture in retirement? Will you need to make changes to your activities, lifestyle, or living arrangements to prepare for retirement? In this final article, we will explain the requirements needed to continue your federal benefits into retirement and explore the aspects of a federal retirement that can help secure a financially sound future as you enter a new stage of your life - retirement!

Let's look at retirement coverage first. As a career federal employee, you were covered under either the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), the Civil Service Retirement System Offset (CSRS Offset), or the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS). After you have performed a minimum of 5 years of full time work covered by CSRS, CSRS Offset, or FERS, you are entitled to retire at age 62. You may be eligible to retire earlier than age 62, if you meet the other age and service requirements. If you are a CSRS or CSRS Offset employee, you may view the age and service requirements needed to retire at the following link <http://www.opm.gov/retire/pre/csrs/eligibility.asp>. Employees covered under FERS can view their age and service requirements at <http://www.opm.gov/retire/pre/fers/eligibility.asp>.

By now, you are probably familiar with the variety of benefits you have had available to you during your federal career; benefits such as the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) and Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) programs. You may not be as familiar with how coverage under these programs can be continued into retirement or to what other benefits you may be entitled to continue in retirement.



When you retire, you will receive a lifetime, monthly payment based on a percentage of your high-three average salary, multiplied by your years of creditable federal service. Annuity formulas are part of retirement law and are different for CSRS and FERS employees. If you are married, you may elect to leave your spouse, or other eligible person, a survivor annuity, a lifetime benefit providing them a portion of your annuity, payable at the time of your death. You may use the tool found at OPM's website to estimate your annuity. When you are within 2 or 3 years of retirement, you may contact your program Benefits Specialist to request a personalized annuity estimate.

Under the FEHB and FEGLI programs, employees may need to take steps well in advance of retirement to ensure their coverage will continue when they retire. To continue FEHB and FEGLI in retirement, two requirements must be met. You must be eligible for an immediate annuity, one that begins within 30 days of your separation from federal employment, and you must have been continuously covered under the applicable FEHB or FEGLI program for the 5 years prior to retirement, or since your first opportunity to enroll, if covered for less than 5 years. Enrollment in *any* FEHB plan during this 5-year period qualifies as continuous enrollment; you do not need to have been enrolled in the same FEHB plan, nor do you need to have been enrolled in the same level of coverage. In other words, you may switch plans or between self-only and self-and-family coverage as long as you remain covered under a FEHB plan. If you are covered under a FEHB plan through a federal spouse's enrollment, this also qualifies for meeting the 5-year requirement. If you are an employee enrolled in TRICARE, you may use your TRICARE coverage to meet the 5-year requirement; however, you must be enrolled in a FEHB plan at the time you retire to continue FEHB into retirement.

Continue to page 16



Preparing for retirement throughout your federal career – part three - late career *Continued from page 15*



Employees, who are enrolled in the Federal Dental and Vision insurance Program (FEDVIP) at the time they retire, are eligible to continue their dental and/or vision insurance into retirement. There is no 5-year coverage requirement for FEDVIP and, if you retire with entitlement to an immediate annuity, you may enroll in FEDVIP during the Benefits Open Season - even if you were not enrolled, or eligible to enroll, as an employee. The FEDVIP program information can be found at the BENFEDS website <https://www.benefeds.com/Portal/jsp/LoginPage.jsp>.

If you are planning to retire and have made an election under Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS), certain restrictions may apply to your Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) if you



retire before the end of the FSAFEDS benefit period. If you have remaining money in a Health Care FSA, or Limited Expense Health Care FSA, you may submit claims for reimbursement, up to your elected amount, for expenses incurred *prior* to your retirement date. Expenses incurred after your retirement date are not eligible for reimbursement. Remaining balances in your Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account may be used to pay for eligible dependent care expenses until the end of the Benefit

Period or until your account balance is depleted, whichever comes first. Once you retire, you are no longer eligible to participate in the FSAFEDS program. More information can be found at <https://www.fsafeds.com/fsafeds/index.asp>.

If you are enrolled in Federal Employees Long Term Care Insurance Program (FLTCIP), your coverage will continue into retirement. Employees, retirees, survivor annuitants and other qualified relatives are eligible to enroll in the FLTCIP at any time. While eligible individuals may apply at any time, there is no guarantee of coverage. Some medical conditions may prevent applicants from receiving coverage. To apply or request additional information on the FLTCIP, please visit <http://www.ltcfeds.com/>.

Now that we have covered which federal benefits can be carried into retirement and the requirements necessary to do so, let's spend a bit of time talking about some financial considerations. As a federal employee working towards a fruitful retirement, you may have some additional sources of federal retirement income besides the annuity earned under the CSRS, CSRS Offset, or FERS. If you have contributed to the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), you are eligible to withdraw your Thrifts Saving Plan (TSP) contributions and their earnings at the time you retire. Until recently, all TSP contributions were withheld on a pre-tax basis. This means that when you withdraw money from the TSP, the amount withdrawn becomes taxable income in the year of withdrawal. While the TSP has several tax publications to help you understand these tax implications, you may wish to consult a tax advisor for assistance in deciding how best to manage your tax liability.

While employees become eligible to withdraw their TSP money at the time they retire, they are not required to do so and may be able to defer their withdrawal election for a time. Under current IRS law, retirees are not required to take a distribution from their TSP account until April 1st of the year following the one in which they turn 70 ½. If a retiree has not filed a withdrawal election prior to this time, the TSP will calculate required minimum distribution based on IRS rules. If you are age 70 ½ and still working as a federal employee, you are not required to take a minimum distribution from your TSP. Instead, you will be required to take the minimum distribution by April 1st of the year following the one in which you retire. In this case, you should be prepared to make your TSP withdrawal election shortly after retirement, if you wish to avoid the required minimum distribution. Reading the TSP withdrawal booklet is an important first step in becoming familiar with the withdrawal options that are available to you.

Continue to page 17

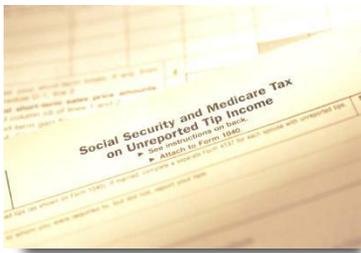


Preparing for retirement throughout your federal career – part three - late career *Continued from page 16*



By learning the basics (What withdrawal options do you have? What types of TSP Life Annuities are available? What is meant by a Joint Life Annuity? How can you change a monthly withdrawal payment?) you will be better informed to make your decision regarding the timing and type of your TSP withdrawal. The [TSP website](#) has additional program information, publications, and calculators for your use prior to making this important financial decision.

Employees that are in FERS, and most CSRS Offset employees, will be eligible for Social Security (SS) benefits at 62. SS benefits are based on an employee's earnings as a federal employee, as well as earnings from non-federal employment. Some CSRS employees may also be eligible for SS benefits based on their earnings from employment outside of the federal government. Although SS benefits can be requested as early as age 62, you should consider whether it is in your interest to begin your benefit this early. Receiving SS benefits prior to your **Full Retirement Age (FRA)** means that you will receive a permanently reduced benefit. Social security benefits



may also be reduced if you are receiving benefits prior to your FRA and earn more than the SS earnings limit during any calendar year. Some retirees need to be aware of potential changes to their federal annuities and/or SS benefits. Offset retirees will have their federal annuity reduced (offset) at age 62, if they are eligible for SS benefits. CSRS and CSRS Offset retirees may have their SS benefit reduced by the Windfall Elimination Provision depending on the number of years of significant earnings they have under the SS system. If you are unsure about your Social Security eligibility, or would like to see what your

projected benefit might be, you may request a SS statement online. For more information about SS benefits, or to contact the SS Administration, please visit <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/>.

Another benefit the SS Administration oversees is the Medicare program. Most federal employees and retirees will be eligible for Medicare when they turn 65 and should enroll at that time. Medicare Part A has no premium cost for most enrollees. If you are a federal employee and enrolled in FEHB at the time you apply for Medicare, your FEHB will be your primary insurance and Medicare your secondary. Upon retirement, Medicare becomes your primary insurance and FEHB, if continued into retirement, becomes secondary. For employees retiring after age 65, you can defer making an election regarding enrollment in Medicare Part B until the time of your retirement. When you retire, you will have a special enrollment period of 8 months following the month in which your employment ends. If you enroll after your special enrollment period ends, you will be subject to higher Part B premiums. Because Medicare Part B requires the payment of a premium, you will need to decide if the additional medical benefits you may receive will be worth the cost of coverage. If you retire prior to age 65, you will need to make your election regarding Part B when you turn 65. For information on Medicare please visit <http://www.ssa.gov/pgm/medicare.htm>. To learn more about the coordination of benefits between FEHB and Medicare in retirement, visit OPM's website at <http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/medicare/index.asp>.

As you approach retirement, you have many important decisions to make regarding your federal benefits. Take the time now to learn how your employee benefits will transition into retirement benefits. Make sure you are meeting the requirements to continue important benefits such as FEHB and FEGLI into retirement. Think about enrolling in FLTCIP for yourself and your spouse, before old-age conditions could potentially make you uninsurable. Become familiar with your retirement system. Spend some time using the OPM's annuity calculator and the TSP calculators - tools that can help define your financial picture, both now and in retirement. And, as importantly, think about what type of lifestyle you can afford in retirement. By becoming well informed on the entitlements you have earned during your federal career, making sound financial decisions, and having a realistic expectation of your lifestyle choices, you can enjoy a happy, healthy, and hopefully, wealthy, retirement!



TSP = Tax Smart Planning

By **Barb Watry** (Barb.J.Watry@aphis.usda.gov, 612-336-3301)
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BENEFITS BUZZ

The Roth TSP option has been available since May of 2012. Have you chosen to make contributions to the Roth TSP as part of your retirement financial planning? If so, are you comfortable with your decision? If you're not contributing to a Roth TSP, should you be? Or are you hesitating because you're unsure what actions, if any, you should take?

If you need help making any of these decisions and want to learn more, you should check out the new course available on AgLearn. It's called [Plan Your Savings Strategy with the New TSP](https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/deeplink.do?linkId=ITEM_DETAILS&componentID=USDA%2dDMASON%2d120&componentTypeID=Web+Based&revisionDate=1339776420000). It is an easy way for you to evaluate and decide if you want to use the Traditional TSP, the Roth TSP, or both, as part of your 'tax smart' retirement savings strategy. It includes a simple financial plan that you can use to calculate and compare tax savings on contributions, potential savings growth, and potential future after-tax monthly payments. You will be able to estimate your Federal retirement and other income sources to see if you need to save more towards achieving the financial retirement you desire. This course can be found at: https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/deeplink.do?linkId=ITEM_DETAILS&componentID=USDA%2dDMASON%2d120&componentTypeID=Web+Based&revisionDate=1339776420000



So what is a 'Tax Smart' retirement savings strategy and why is it important? With Roth TSP availability, you can now choose contributing toward a Traditional Tax-deferred TSP, a post-tax Roth TSP or a combination of both. If you're in a lower tax bracket now than you expect to be at retirement, the Roth TSP is a good option. You pay income tax today on money before you contribute it, and there may be no tax on any money, including earnings, when you withdraw it! Earnings on your Roth TSP will be tax-free if 5 years have passed since January 1 of the year you made your first Roth contribution AND you are age 59-1/2, permanently disabled, or deceased.

Are you in a higher tax bracket now than what you expect to be at retirement? Then the tax-deferred Traditional TSP is a good option for you. You pay no tax on the money you contribute today, but you will pay income tax on all money, including earnings, when you withdraw it. If you're not sure, you may wish to use both to benefit from both tax strategies.

How can you make a contribution to your Traditional TSP or to start up a Roth TSP?
There are two ways you can start or change your current TSP contributions.

The most convenient way to make an election is via the Employee Personal Page (EPP) <https://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/index.aspx>. Simply select "TSP" on the menu and click on the "Self Service" button in the upper right hand corner of the screen. You will see your current elections and can change your contributions quickly and easily.

Continue to page 19





You can also make an election by completing the TSP-1 form (version 5/2012) and faxing it to the Benefits Team at 612-336-3545. The form has been modified to include the new Roth TSP option. If you choose to start or change your contributions with the TSP-1, please be aware that your election will cancel all your previous elections for both the Traditional and Roth accounts. This means, for example, that if you are currently contributing 5% to your Traditional account and you now want to start to contribute an additional 2% to the Roth account, you **must** write 5% in block 6 of Section II and 2% in block 8. Here's how you would complete Section II in this example:

II. CHOOSE THE AMOUNT OF YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS <i>Your choice will cancel all previous elections.</i>	To start or change the amount of traditional (pre-tax) or Roth (after-tax) contributions to your TSP account, enter either a whole percentage of your basic pay per pay period or a whole dollar amount per pay period for each type of contribution you elect. (You may choose a percentage for one type of contribution and a dollar amount for the other type of contribution.) Remember: A blank line next to a type of contribution equals 0% or \$0 contributed.			
	6. Traditional (Pre-Tax) Contributions	5	.0%	OR
8. Roth (After-Tax) Contributions	2	.0%	OR	9. \$ _____ .00

Warning: Since a blank line equals zero, if you fail to write 5% in Block 6, your contributions to your Traditional account will stop. We highly recommend entering a figure for both Traditional and Roth accounts whenever you complete this form, even if that amount is zero. This will aid you in thinking of the form as replacing your current elections to both accounts and will insure that we process the form in accordance with your wishes. Your new elections will be effective the pay period after we receive the form. Visit the TSP website for more information at www.tsp.gov.

If you have Roth funds from an eligible plan (Roth 401K, Roth 403B or Roth 457B only), you may be able to have those funds transferred into your Roth TSP account. For forms and information on the Roth TSP, please go to: <https://www.tsp.gov/whatsnew/roth/index.shtml>



If you have any questions, you may contact either your Benefits Specialist your Benefits Assistant at the following: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/benefits.pdf

