MARKETING & REGULATORY PROGRAMS

HR BROADCAST

Quarter 4 – FY20 Issue

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

"HumanKind. Be Both!"

We have found ourselves in a situation unlike anything we have experienced before. The normal way of doing things seems to have disappeared. Many social events and traditions have been canceled. People must maintain distance to protect each other, so we are staying close to home, even working from home for many of us. But I want us to remember there is still much that is good all around us. Throughout the history of mankind, when very bad things have happened, good things still came out of it, and I know that will be true now.

What has helped me navigate these pandemic times is remembering to be "Humankind." **Human.** Allowing myself to be imperfect while still working to bring out the best in myself and those around me. **Kind.** Having compassion and taking a few extra moments to be understanding. We need to be both human and kind in this pandemic.

This new role has been a dream of mine for a long time, but not being able to meet this wonderful team or our customers face-to-face was not something I had ever considered. The restrictions that have been imposed are necessary, but I regret not being able to travel and meet all of you and see our mission at work – nothing I ever wanted.

While there are things I would have never anticipated, there are great instances of being HumanKind that I see happening all over. For example, having the chance for all of us to meet with the APHIS Administrator and Associate Administrators twice a week has been an unexpected opportunity. It is clear to me they really care about our personal welfare and about our loved ones – they are the perfect example of the HumanKind principle.

These days, I choose to focus on the HumanKind actions I see every day, especially here in APHIS and AMS. I see people caring about each other and about our personal and work family's safety. I also see a dedicated cadre of talented individuals who work to fulfill the USDA mission, done as one USDA family, for the betterment of all Americans and the world.

But I also want us to remember we all experience things differently. We do not have to be strong and stoic at all times, putting on a brave face – it's okay to get help in these unprecedented times. We are the best of who we are when we are considerate and patient, and when we take care of ourselves and each other; and the Human Resources Division is here to help. We will continue to share updates with guidance to assist you in navigating your flexibilities with work schedules, workplace accommodations, and other issues. We will also continue to develop seminars to support you in caring for yourself, focusing on the wide variety of issues you and your family may be facing in these unprecedented times.

In closing, I want to circle back to the idea of being HumanKind. Be both – to others, and even more importantly, to yourself! We are all in this together.

HR is here to help. Check out some of our resources here:
The Center for Training and Organization Development (CTOD)
Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Work Life Wellness

Terri Meighan
Terri Meighan, HR Director

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

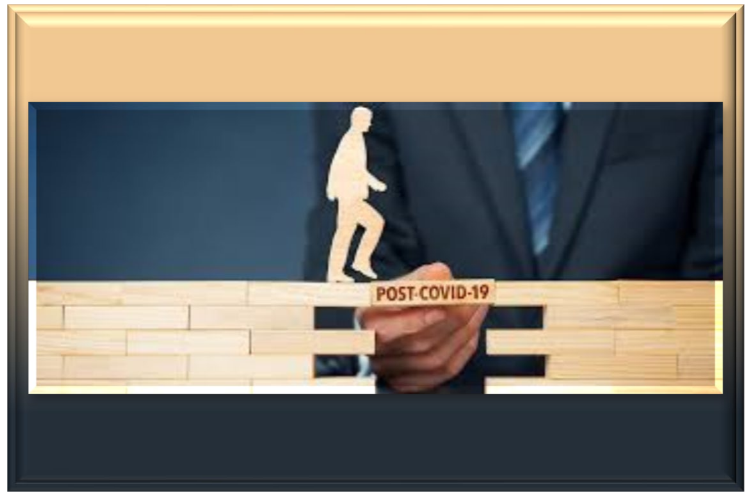
APHIS ONLY

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 301-851-2884 or at Christina.S.Furnkranz@usda.gov

HR's LEADERSHIP MOMENT AND DEFINING THE "NEW NORMAL" HOW THE PANDEMIC LEADS TO A BETTER WORKPLACE

By **Monica Breidenbach** (*Monica.Breidenbach@usda.gov, 612-336-3431*)
and **David Zingler** (David.L.Zingler@usda.gov, 612-336-3297)

Like most of us, I spent the spring in a quarantine haze. Netflix. Check my phone. Repeat. Suddenly, I stumbled on something that broke the monotony; a YouTube video called 'Explaining the Pandemic to my Past Self' by Julie Nolke. It explored the fanciful possibility of warning yourself, and the world, about 2020. After all, who had heard of social distancing or owned a mask? Who could have imagined there once was a king in Oklahoma who presided over hundreds of tigers? Fast-forward to summer and COVID has imprinted itself on the nation's psyche and we've adapted in more ways than we could have ever imagined.



COVID-19 can be a catalyst for change; the opportunity to discuss the lessons we've learned and are still learning. This experience tapped into our humanity. Can we translate that humanity into better employee programs that make the USDA more desirable to new generations of workers? What lasting and beneficial changes and policies can improve our communication and empathy?

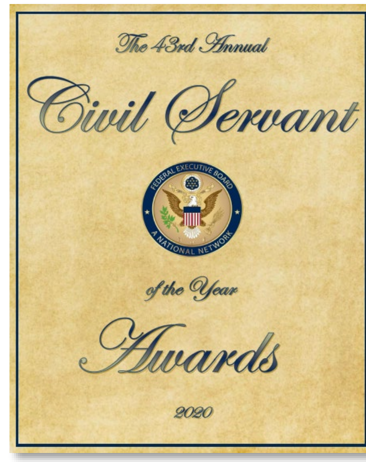
A recent Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) report found that 68% of employers will adopt broader, more flexible work from home policies. Have we come to appreciate the lunches with co-workers, or will we advocate more than ever for a hybrid of remote/in-office HR policies to better balance our work and personal lives? What else do we want in a future workplace? How can we develop new HR policies to prepare us for the next crisis? This is HRs' historical moment to usher in a new era of workplace practices and employee-driven initiatives.

As an Agency we have undoubtedly demonstrated that we are resilient, but how do we persist over time and against external threats? Do we aspire to become more resilient to combat future disruptions or should we seek to transform into something different? From a public administration perspective, the policy window is wide open and there is potential for real change to take shape. While COVID still threatens our daily norms, other disruptions linger on the horizon. In the late 1990s, a retirement tsunami was predicted. Up to 30% of the Government's civilian work force will be eligible to retire by 2022. How do we take what we've learned over the past several months and apply it to that and other challenges in the future?

A former supervisor once told me that people were driven by their egos and insecurities. I argued that we are driven by our hopes and fears. Fear has been in focus recently. The fear of losing a job, losing a loved one, fear of the unknown. Instead of succumbing to that fear, let's turn to hope. We can emerge from 2020 with an elevated communal spirit and a sense of curiosity about new ideas. There's no way to know what the new normal will resemble, or when it will arrive. Perhaps what we do next will define future generations of civil servants in which we can look back and celebrate resilience, hope, and ingenuity. We can be that voice of change.

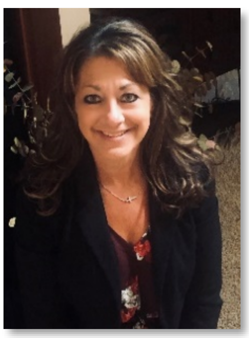
FY2020 CIVIL SERVANT OF THE YEAR RECIPIENTS FROM HRD

By **Nancy Bradford** (*Nancy.L.Bradford@usda.gov, 612-336-3391*)



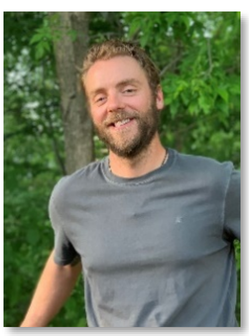
Each spring, the Federal Executive Board (FEB) in Minneapolis, MN, honors Federal employees who exceed customer expectations, implement creative problem solving, drive positive change, or demonstrate impactful leadership as Civil Servants of the Year. Although the ceremony was canceled this year due to the coronavirus, the Human Resources Division wants to highlight the accomplishments of our 2020 recipients. Please join us in congratulating Mandy Olson, Supervisory Human Resources Specialist in the Classification Section who was nominated and is a finalist in the Leadership category and Jared Sammon, Human Resources Specialist in the Systems and Reporting Branch who was nominated in the Excellence beyond Expectations category.

Mandy Olson



Mandy inherited an understaffed Human Resources Operations (HRO) Classification team and used her superior technical knowledge and natural leadership skills to inspire the team. Always setting an example, Mandy pitched in herself and her infectious enthusiasm motivated the staff to classify position descriptions, code personnel actions, and complete reorganizations in a timely and efficient manner. HRO is constantly under demanding deadlines and Mandy instills a sense of urgency, while also keeping a grounded perspective that fosters a healthy work/life balance. Mandy has also impacted the next generation of HRO employees; taking a key role in hiring and training student interns. Her open-door policy has allowed them the same level of comfort and belonging the rest of us enjoy.

Jared Sammon



Jared brings a positive high energy and a personal touch to all his work. He fulfills most of the 700+ recurring or adhoc report requests received by the HR Systems and Reporting Branch each quarter. He is extremely organized and focused on continuously learning and developing efficient and effective practices to both the routine and adhoc aspects of his work. His true professionalism and genuine care about delivering quality work is noticed by his teammates and customers alike. Jared is proactive and strives to make a positive impact. In FY19, he converted 50+ reports run from the old Disc Operating System into a new web-based version. It resulted in better, faster, more accurate reporting as well as allowing the flexibility for teammates to receive or run reports themselves. He has reduced the time spent producing recurring reports from days to hours. Everyone in our Agency would agree … "If you need something done and done right--you need to go to Jared!"

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 or 844-433-2774 (voice and TTY). https://www.targetcenter.dm.usda.gov/

USA HIRE STANDARD ASSESSMENTS

By **Kitty Weeden** (*Kitty.B.Weeden@usda.gov, 612-336-3289*)

In support of efforts to improve the hiring process, APHIS Human Resources has recently implemented a new assessment tool, USA Hire, to be used in the recruitment process for certain job announcements.

Why is APHIS Human Resources using USA Hire?
When an agency posts a Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) on USA Jobs, an assessment tool is used to measure job-related competencies necessary for the position. Historically, a program Subject Matter Expert has assisted Human Resources in developing a series of self-reporting, multiple choice questions for the assessment.

USA Hire was developed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as an alternative to these traditional, self-reporting multiple choice questions. The USA Hire assessment is interactive, so the format of the questionnaire will be different for applicants and may include progress bars, timed questions, and situational videos. The interactive questions are meant to better measure general job-related competencies that are difficult to capture in the traditional assessments, such as accountability, attention to detail, customer service, decision-making, interpersonal skills, and reasoning.

Please feel free to visit OPM's web page to view sample USA Hire assessment questions:
https://usahire.opm.gov/assess/default/sample/Sample.action

I'm a supervisor; how will I know if I should use a USA Hire assessment?
OPM has developed specific pre-packaged USA Hire assessments for job series common throughout the Federal Government. It is used only for vacancy announcements that are posted on USA Jobs. If your vacancy meets the criteria for using a USA Hire assessment (e.g., available job series/grades), your servicing Staffing Specialist will advise you in the recruitment consultation and give you further information about using the USA Hire assessment in your announcement.

I'm an applicant; how will I know USA Hire is being used?
USA Hire assessments are being used by agencies throughout the Federal Government. The JOA will note that the assessment is being used. We encourage applicants to read the JOA in its entirety to learn more about how to complete a USA Hire assessment.

Continue reading on next page…

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How will the application process be different?
When an applicant initially applies for a position, the process will be the same. Applicants will apply for the position via their USA Jobs account.

After the announcement closes, applicants who meet the minimum qualifications for the position, will be sent an email with instructions and an active link to complete the online USA Hire assessment. Applicants are given 48 hours to complete the online assessment. The assessments may take up to 3 hours to complete.

Applicants' USA Hire scores will be valid for 12 months after completing the initial assessment. If they apply for other JOAs using the same USA Hire assessment in that 12-month time period, they will not be required to retake the USA Hire assessment.

Because applicants cannot retake the USA Hire assessment for 12 months, it is imperative that applicants allow themselves enough time to carefully complete the online assessment.

What if I run into problems completing the USA Hire Assessment?
If you are applying for a JOA and need technical USA Hire assistance (e.g., inability to access the USA Hire assessment link, technical difficulty completing the USA Hire assessment after accessing the link, or applicant user experience questions), you should contact helpdesk@usahire.opm.gov. Technical assistance is available Monday through Friday, 7 AM to 8 PM EST.

Applicants may also request a Reasonable Accommodation for the assessment. The announcement and assessment email will have specific information on how to submit a reasonable accommodation request for the assessment.

For more information - What is USA Hire? YouTube Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaJfNZMG4c4&feature=youtu.be

eTRACKER ENHANCEMENTS EXPECTED IN JULY

By **Nancy Bradford** (*Nancy.L.Bradford@usda.gov, 612-336-3391*)

There are two exciting enhancements scheduled for release in July 2020.

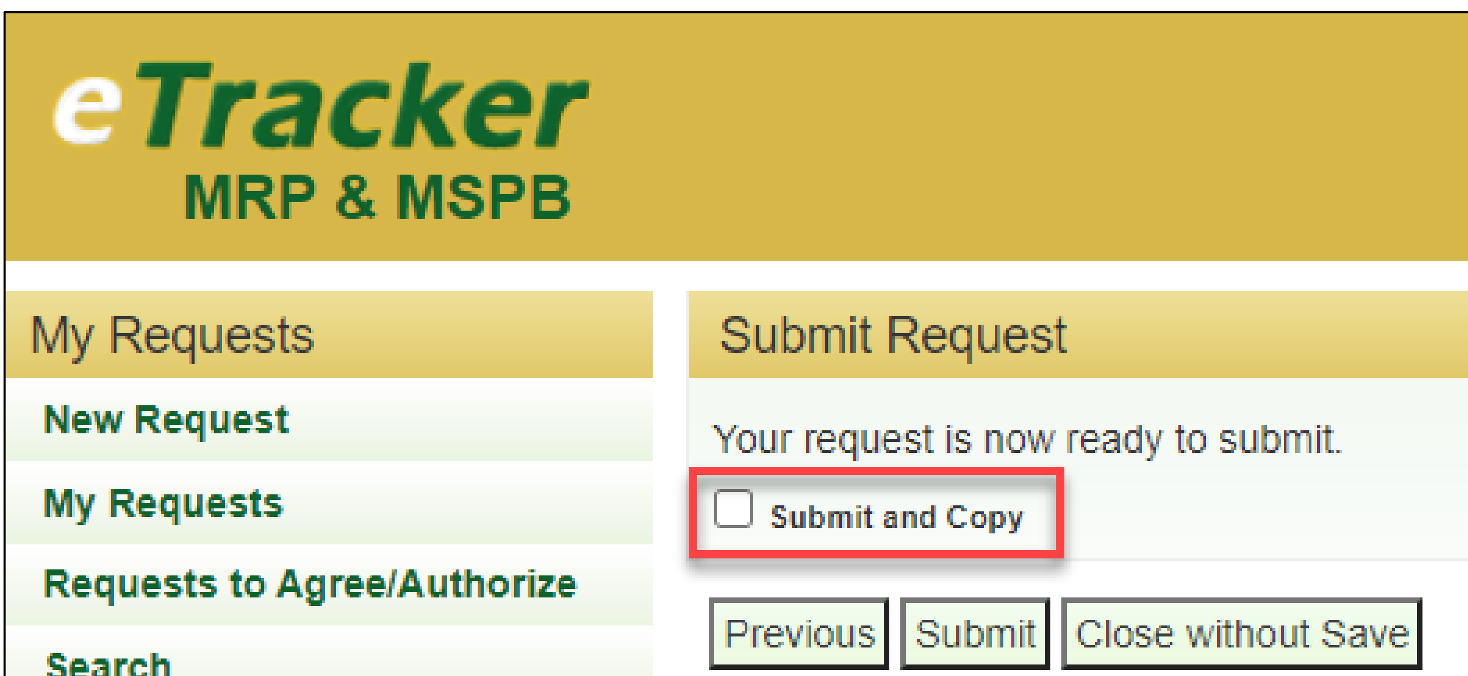
First is the Copy to New feature many of you have asked about. In eTracker, this functionality is called **Submit and Copy** and allows you upon finishing a request to copy it, change the employee's name, and submit. You do have the opportunity to change any of the details within the request if you choose, but everything except the employee's name and any attachments that are carried forward into the new request. Look for the **Submit and Copy** option the next time you complete a request.

Second, we have revamped when and to whom email notifications are sent as well as updating the messages themselves. The subject line will contain information related to the action needed; Authorizers will say "Awaiting your Authorization," Reviewers will say "Awaiting your Concurrence," and Need to Know Contacts "For Information Only."

The message itself will also contain more information in an easier to read layout. Employees initiating a request will receive an email notification when the request is approved by the Authorizer and when the request is completed by Human Resources.

Additionally, reminder notifications will now be sent to Authorizers, Initiators, and Reviewers who do not act on a request within 3 days. These email notifications will continue to be sent until the request is either moved to the next stage or canceled. This should eliminate the problem of 'forgotten' SF52s not making it into HRD for timely processing.

More information about these enhancements is available in the eTracker document library. Look for the July 2020 release notes document. https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/sites/aphis-svc-ctod/eTracker/Forms/AllItems.aspx



GUIDANCE FOR PATHWAYS INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

By **Geeriee Lewis** (*Geeriee.B.Lewis@usda.gov, 301-851-2870*)
and **Jacqueline Miles** (Jacqueline.M.Miles@usda.gov, 612-336-3362)

The Pathways Program is a streamlined developmental program tailored to promote employment opportunities for students and recent graduates in the Federal workforce. Program requirements under the Pathways Internship Program for continuation and successful completion of the program are a must. It is important to adhere to **ALL** program requirements in order to remain an active Pathways participant. All Pathways Interns are required to provide their official/unofficial college transcripts and proof of enrollment to the MRPBS-HRD-Recruitment Branch twice a year.

If a program wishes to retain a Pathways Intern serving on an appointment with a not-to-exceed (NTE) date, an SF-52 (Request for Personnel Action) requesting an **extension** or **conversion** of appointment must be submitted to Human Resources Operations (HRO). The appointment must be extended prior to the current NTE date by at least 2 weeks before it expires through eTracker to HRO, Minneapolis for processing. HRO posts lists of NTE dates by quarter for temporary appointments on the MRP-HRD Data Resource Center SharePoint site which is accessible by key personnel in each program. As an alternative, NTE dates can be included when pulling position organization listings (POL) from the NFC Reporting Center. If you have an Intern you do not wish to retain, please notify Jacqueline Miles at Jacqueline.M.Miles@usda.gov or Geeriee.B.Lewis@usda.gov as soon as possible.

Pathways Guidance for Managers and Interns is as follows:

Guidance for Managers

- Pathways Interns with a not-to-exceed (NTE) date cannot occupy a position with promotion potential.
- Pathways Interns may be noncompetitively converted to a term, career-conditional, or a career position in the Federal Government, but only when the job opportunity announcement includes a condition of employment that the intern may be noncompetitively converted through the Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA). Supervisors of Pathways Interns must contact Human Resources, Staffing Division, at least 1 month prior to the possible noncompetitive conversion. **(Please note: conversions are not mandatory, but are at the discretion of the hiring agency.)**
- Pathways Interns must meet the qualification standards for the positions to which they may be converted.
- Pathways Interns must complete all conversion requirements prior to graduation. Following graduation, Pathways Interns have a 120-day window of time during which they may continue to work as students and/or await conversion and/or search for a position.
- The Department's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) recommends that the student's supervisor assign a mentor to the Pathways Intern.

Guidance for Students/Interns

Pathways Interns are required to:

- Provide proof of their academic status;
- Provide their official transcripts (spring) and unofficial transcripts (fall);
- Provide proof of enrollment twice a year;
- Maintain good academic standing, as defined by the educational institutions that they are attending;
- Complete their Participant Agreement and obtain signatures from their supervisor and the HR official;
- Remain students as long as they are employed under the Internship Program by their agencies;
- Perform their jobs successfully; and
- Meet any other agency-specific requirements outlined in their Participant Agreements.

In addition to these requirements, OPM recommends that any Pathways Intern appointed for longer than 90 days be placed on an Individual Development Plan (IDP) to create and track his/her career planning, professional development, and training activities.

For more information about Pathways policy and guidance please access:
https://www.opm.gov/.../reference-materials/pathways-programs-handbook.pdf

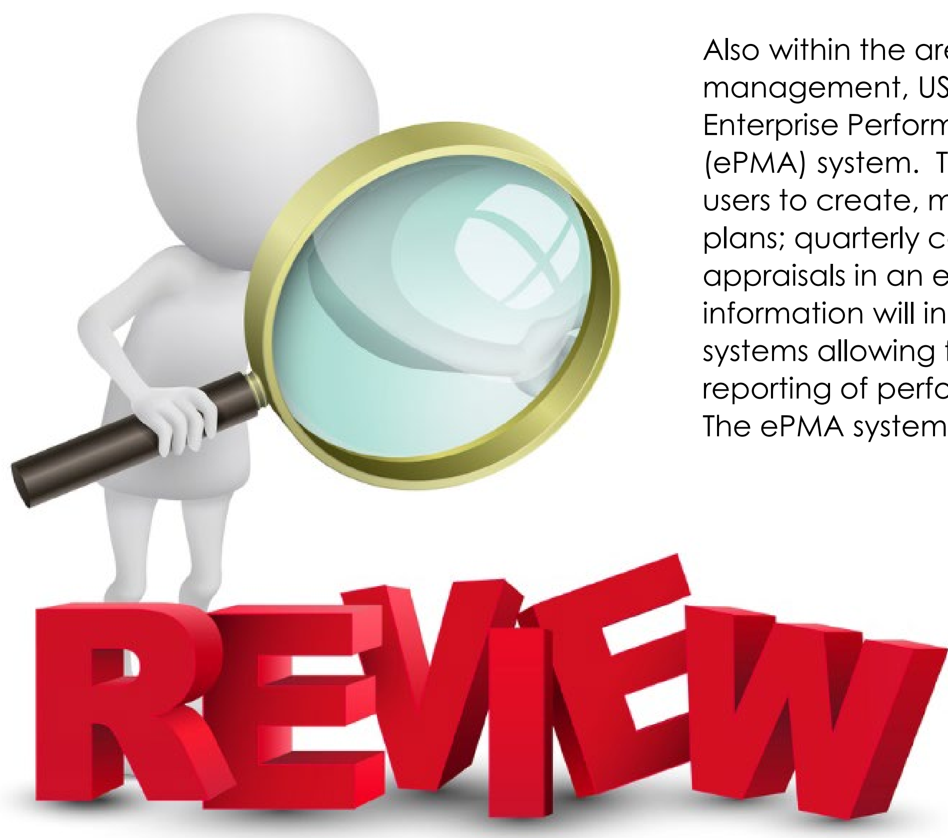
GOODBYE FY2020, HELLO FY2021!

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

The FY2021 performance year is upon us and brings major changes in the area of performance management and awards. The USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) has released the new Employee Performance and Awards Department Regulation (DR) (DR-4040-430). The DR was published on June 24, 2020 and goes into effect October 1, 2020 for the FY2021 performance year. Per the new DR, all non-executive employees will be covered under a new 2-tier performance evaluation system. Bargaining unit employees must refer to their collective bargaining agreements for further information.

Performance Management Changes

The 2-tier system, commonly known as Pass/Fail, will evaluate employee performance based on established Fully Successful performance standards, resulting in the issuance of a Fully Successful or Unacceptable performance rating. FY2021 performance plans will affect the transition to the 2-tier system resulting in the removal of Exceeds Fully Successful performance standards and terminology associated with the former 5-tier system.



Also within the area of performance management, USDA has implemented the Enterprise Performance Management Application (ePMA) system. This electronic system will allow users to create, modify and track performance plans; quarterly conversations; and performance appraisals in an electronic platform. This information will interface with other HR information systems allowing for real time preparation and reporting of performance management activities. The ePMA system will go live on October 1, 2020.

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Awards Changes

Along with changes in performance management, the awards program has been modified in order to focus on ongoing employee contributions to USDA's mission, rather than on employee ratings, and to give recognition throughout the year instead of waiting until end-of-year ratings are completed. The intention is to make the recognition more meaningful to employees by giving it closer to the time contributions occur.

Traditional Performance Awards and Quality-Step Increases (QSIs) will still be able to be given to recognize/close out FY 2020 performance, but beginning FY 2021, most recognition will be in the form of Achievement Awards. Achievement Awards are kind of a "rebranding" of Extra Effort awards and can be given in time-off or monetary form. An administrative streamlining is that Spot Awards will not exist - but the same amounts can be given as Achievement Awards. QSIs will still be available in the new award program, but with more eligibility criteria and levels of review.

Something new in the area of Time-Off Awards (TOAs) - if you have ever received one, you may remember that they expire within 26 pay periods if you don't use them. Under the new award policy, instead of expiring, employees will be able to carry over 80 hours of TOAs at the end of the leave year (anything in excess of that will be forfeited). You will also be able to take those hours with you if you move to another agency within USDA.

More information

OHRM has developed an AgLearn course to introduce the new 2-tier performance evaluation system. This course is mandatory for all employees covered under the DR. The MRP Human Resources Division also developed and conducted live webinar sessions over the past few weeks to expand on the AgLearn course and provide participants with the opportunity to ask questions regarding the new performance evaluation system. The webinar sessions were recorded and are available for future reference. Webinar sessions will also be conducted for users of the new ePMA system prior to the 'go live' date.

Guidance regarding the closeout of the FY2020 performance year, link to the new DR and recorded webinars, and other resources are available on the MRP Performance Management web page. For questions regarding performance management, you may contact Gwen Montgomery at (301) 851-2928 or Gwen.Montgomery@usda.gov. For questions regarding awards policy, you may contact Lynn Doetschman at (301) 851-2891 or Lynn.H.Doetschman@usda.gov. For questions regarding the ePMA system, you may contact Nancy Bradford at (612) 336-3391 or Nancy.L.Bradford@usda.gov.

From The Policy Branch

SCHEDULING USE OR LOSE ANNUAL LEAVE

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

The pandemic has caused many of us to cancel vacation travel plans and instead opt for a "staycation." A staycation is a perfect way to rest, relax, rejuvenate with your family, and use your use or lose annual leave. Please schedule your use/lose annual leave as the Office of Personnel Management is currently indicating that the existing restoration rules will apply. Here are some important MRP policy points to keep in mind:

- The 2020 leave year ends on January 02, 2021 (pay period 26).
- Use or lose annual leave must be scheduled by November 21, 2020, the end of pay period 23, 2020. Leave must either be scheduled electronically or in writing (e.g., email or WebTA). If the leave is not properly scheduled and 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, 2021.

Remember to pay particular attention to your leave balances and work closely with your supervisor to schedule and use any use/lose annual leave.

The 2020 Annual Reminder Concerning Use or Lose Annual Leave has also been posted to assist you. And lastly, if you have any questions, contact your servicing Leave and Compensation Team Specialist or me.

LEAVE USAGE ORDER

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

The MRP Directive and Human Resources Desk Guide Subchapter 4630, Absence and Leave, Section B – Annual Leave, has guidance on the order of leave usage. Employees must use leave in the following order:

1. Use or lose annual leave,
2. Restored leave, if any (including leave restored as a result of the 2018/19 furlough)
3. Compensatory time off in lieu of overtime pay,
4. Compensatory time off for travel,
5. Time-off award, and
6. Any other accrued time, e.g., credit hours, annual leave.

Always use sick leave as appropriate. Using use or lose annual leave first prevents leave loss at the end of the leave year. If you began the 2020 leave year with a 240-hour balance, then that means that you are already in a use/lose situation. You should use the projected use/lose annual leave first. If you choose to use earned time off in a different order and it results in the loss of annual leave at the end of the leave year, then leave restoration will not be an option and the leave will be permanently lost.

Please remember that if you had up to 56 hours of annual leave restored due to the 2018/19 furlough, then you must use the restored leave by the end of the 2021 leave year. The 2021 leave year ends on January 1, 2022. If the leave is not used by then, it will be permanently lost.

Your RMS/AO staffs have been advised of the policy and are available to answer questions as well as HRO, Minneapolis. As you are planning your summer vacation, please remember the leave usage order policy.

From The Policy Branch

EMERGENCY PAID SICK LEAVE ACT (EPSLA)

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

The Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, grants employees up to 80 hours of paid sick leave for certain COVID-19 related reasons. EPSLA is effective April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. It may be used retroactively for Leave Without Pay (LWOP) and paid leave. Substituting EPSLA for paid leave creates financial implications that you need to consider before applying it retroactively. Employees may use EPSLA when they are:

- Subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;
- Advised to self-quarantine by a health care provider due to COVID-19;
- Experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and seeking a medical diagnosis;
- Caring for an individual who is subject to a local quarantine or isolation order;
- Caring for an individual who was advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to COVID-19; or
- Caring for their child when their school or daycare is closed (including the provider is unavailable) because of COVID-19 related reasons.

Full-time employees are entitled to up to 80 hours of EPSLA leave, while part-time employees are eligible for up to the number of hours they are scheduled to work, on average, in a 2-week period. Intermittent employees are eligible based on the prior 6-month average. The 80-hour limit (as well as the part-time and intermittent employee limits) is per employee, not per situation. Employees are to follow existing leave requesting procedures for using EPSLA. (If using WebTA, then the transaction codes [TC] may be found in the "Time Worked" section of WebTA.)

EPSLA used for one's self is paid out at an employee's hourly rate of pay but is capped with a $511 daily limit and a total limit of $5,110. EPSLA used for family reasons is paid out at 2/3 of an employee's hourly rate of pay and is also capped with a $200 daily pay limit and a total of $2,000 total. Additionally, the overall pay caps of $511 daily and $5110 aggregate still apply.

HRD also has an online EPSLA course within AgLearn that you can take at any time. Stay safe and stay healthy by remembering to follow CDC guidelines on social distancing, washing hands, wearing masks, and other protective measures you can take.

APPLYING FOR MERIT PROMOTION ANNOUNCEMENTS (Part 2)

By **Gary Rakow** (*Gary.A.Rakow@usda.gov, 612-336-3461*)

Welcome to Part 2 of an HR informational guide for applying to merit promotion announcements. In last quarter's installment in the HR Broadcast, I covered some introductory information about being prepared for that opportunity and submitting appropriate documentation that is required for a merit promotion announcement. In this installment, I will cover guidance on Requirements, Areas of Consideration (AOC), and Eligibilities.

Merit promotion or "status" announcements differ greatly from general announcements that are open to the public. Announcements that are open to the public allow all citizens to apply regardless of whether they are a current employee or not. Status announcements are so named because applicants must meet certain status requirements to be eligible for the vacancy. A common question we receive from applicants is "How do I know if I am an eligible current Federal employee with status?" One easy way to find out the answer to this question is to look at a current SF-50 (Notification of Personnel Action). In the Tenure block (block 24), status applicants will have a "1" or a "2" along with the Position Occupied block (block 34), which should be "1" for competitive service. If you do not meet these criteria, you are not eligible to apply as a "Current Federal Employee," but you may qualify for other eligibilities; hence, the importance of reading and fully understanding each vacancy announcement.

Requirements: All merit promotion announcements will have a time-in-grade requirement for all current Federal employees. This is explained by the statement in the qualifications section of the announcement; "TIME-IN-GRADE: Current Federal employees applying for a promotion opportunity must meet the time-in-grade requirement of 52 weeks of service at the next lower grade level in the normal line of progression for the position being filled." There is additional guidance for reinstatement of eligible former Federal employees who also must meet this requirement if reinstatement is an eligibility option. If an applicant for a merit promotion opportunity does not have the required 52 weeks' time-in-grade, the applicant will be found ineligible for further consideration during the rating process. This also applies to applicants that do not provide documentation to support their claim. One situation that often gets overlooked is when an applicant is currently at a grade that is lower than what is required to be eligible (the next lower grade level of the position) but has previously served at the required grade for eligibility. In this situation, the applicant must provide an additional SF-50 to support having previously served at the grade level for eligibility. If this is not provided, the applicant will not be eligible for further consideration.

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Eligibility: This is where we briefly touch on eligibilities. Each vacancy announcement includes a detailed description of who can apply. The "Clarification from the Agency" statement found in the "This job is open to" box is a blue-shaded block found in the upper right-hand corner of a vacancy announcement providing the specific details of who may apply to the announcement.

Announcement eligibility details will vary from posting to posting based on several factors such as the specific position, the desired target audience of the hiring manager and/or program, regulatory and policy considerations, and the Area of Consideration (which will be explained shortly) to name a few. During the online application process, there is an applicant questionnaire that must be completed along with the vacancy assessment, and the submission of required documents. In the applicant questionnaire, the applicant must correctly answer the eligibility questions. How you answer these questions determines whether you are eligible for further consideration to the vacancy, so it is imperative to read each eligibility question carefully, answering "Yes" to the appropriate question(s). All "Yes" answers will be verified during the rating process with the supporting documentation provided. If an application does not have documentation submitted at the time of application to support the eligibilities selected, the applicant will be found not eligible and will not proceed further in the review process. Not submitting the proper supporting documentation is the most common reason an applicant is determined to be ineligible and not referred to a hiring manager.

Area of Consideration: The Area of Consideration may be limited to AMS or APHIS employees or expanded to include all USDA employees. Positions may also be open to all Federal employees. In addition, applications may be accepted from former employees eligible for reinstatement and individuals eligible for appointment under special hiring authorities, e.g., veterans and people with disabilities. Areas of Consideration also have a geographic component. AMS announcements may be open to applicants in the local commuting area or nationwide. All APHIS announcements must be advertised nationwide. If the announcement is limited to applicants in the local commuting area, only current competitive employees who are in the commuting area of the vacancy's location may apply. The local commuting area restriction does not apply to those eligible under special hiring authorities or other non-competitive applicants.

As you can see, the world of merit promotion vacancy announcements can be complicated. Do not be intimidated; there is help available. Do your homework beforehand, be prepared with an updated resume and required documents, and carefully read the vacancy announcements for all the specific details. You may also contact your program's servicing HR Specialist or HR Assistant with questions. Also, all vacancy announcements include contact information for an Applicant Help Desk that can provide assistance with the application process.

If you require a reasonable accommodation, modified procedures can be implemented based on your situation.

RECRUITMENT INCENTIVES

By **Jason Scott** (*Jason.L.Scott@usda.gov, 612-336-3339*)

Recruitment incentives are a means of attracting applicants who would otherwise decline a Federal position at the standard rate and grade being offered. But there is more to consider when deciding on this course of action. If it becomes necessary for you to offer a recruitment incentive, then you will want to consider the following options and reasons. Keep these considerations in mind before asking your servicing Staffing Specialist to assist you. And remember that it is your responsibility to use Federal funds appropriately. A common requirement you will see in appropriate situations for granting incentives is that the position is either hard to fill and/or the applicant has unique skills. These unique skills should be above and beyond the standard requirements for qualifying for any given position. An applicant who meets the eligibility and qualification requirements for a position may be a good selection, but not always a candidate for an incentive. The standard pay and benefits for Federal positions are meant to be appropriate and fair for all selectees who are qualified, well qualified, and even best qualified. Incentives should be driven by the needs of the Government, not the request of the prospective employee.

Superior Qualifications and Special Needs Pay Setting Authority:

- To attract applicants with superior or unique qualifications and to help agencies be competitive.
- Not intended for the sole reason of matching a candidate’s existing rate of pay (current salary or competing job offer).
- Must be the first Federal appointment for a prospective employee, or he/she must be returning from a break in Federal service of at least 90 consecutive calendar days (there are exceptions.)
- Superior Qualifications Authority (SQA) appointments are for journeyman grades only (the Full Performance Level (FPL) of a position).
- SQA requests for positions being filled below the FPL must be approved by the USDA Office of Human Resources Management.
- Approval must be obtained prior to the employee entering on duty.

Recruitment Incentive (bonus):

- Can be up to 25 percent of the annual basic pay multiplied by the length of the service agreement.
- Position is documented as difficult to fill with a high-quality candidate.
- The first appointment to the Federal service or appointment of a former employee following a break in service of at least 90 days (a few additional exceptions).
- The employee must sign a service agreement agreeing to work for the agency for a minimum of 6 months and a maximum of 4 years.
- Approval must be obtained prior to the employee entering on duty.

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Relocation Incentive:

- Can be up to 25 percent of the annual basic pay multiplied by the length of the service agreement.
- Position is documented as difficult to fill with a high-quality candidate.
- It may be paid to a current employee who must relocate to accept a position.
- Approval must be obtained prior to the employee entering on duty.
- Cannot be paid until employee establishes a residence in the new location.
- The employee must sign a service agreement agreeing to work for the agency and maintain a residence in the new geographic area for the duration of the service agreement.

Annual Leave Service Credit for Prior Employment Outside of Federal Civilian Service:

- The first appointment to the Federal service or appointment of a former employee following a break in service of at least 90 days.
- In order to grant the service credit, the skills and experience gained from the prior employment or active duty military service must be essential to the new position, directly related to the duties of the position to which being appointed.
- Must make a written determination that the use of this authority is necessary in order to achieve an important agency mission or performance goal.
- Approval must be obtained prior to the employee entering on duty.

Repayment of Student Loans:

- Position is documented as difficult to fill.
- Must determine in writing, that without offering the loan repayment incentive, you will encounter difficulty in either filling the position with a highly qualified candidate or retaining a highly qualified employee.
- The unusually high or unique qualifications of the employee or the existence of a special need of the agency, or documented extent to which the employee's departure would affect the agency.
- Determine if Equal Employment Opportunity goals will be met or improved by your determination.
- The employee must sign a service agreement to work for the agency for 3 years.

If you have any questions regarding this process, please contact your servicing staffing specialist. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/contact_us/hrd/hrd

More information on these incentives can be found here:

- HR Desk Guide 4500: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/forms_publications/hr_desk_guide/hrdg_4500/4500_toc
- HR Desk Guide 4537: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/forms_publications/hr_desk_guide/hrdg_4537/4537_toc

OneUSDA INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

By **Shirley Bryant** (*Shirley.B.Bryant@usda.gov, 202-799-7028*)

The OneUSDA Internship Program was announced in December 2018 by Secretary Purdue in an effort to provide Intern Opportunities as a part of the Federal Pathways Program. It provides students a way to explore a potential career in the Federal Government while gaining work experience in Agriculture, Natural Resources, Rural Development, and/or other administrative related areas.

It is a comprehensive developmental program intended to provide students with experience in a dynamic work environment that will enhance their educational goals and shape their career choices. An internship with USDA will involve various components of on-the-job experience, mentorship, and training tailored to the student's education, experience, and interests. The aim is to find young talent with a diverse background across all 50 states and help them begin their careers as an intern with USDA.

Benefits of the OneUSDA Internship Program

For Students: Gain Valuable Professional Experience: Whether focused on a dream career path or exploring other options, internship experience is valuable on a resume and in the classroom. Summer internships help keep the mind sharp while school is out of session, all while giving practical insight into how coursework may apply to a career path. Students also learn what people with similar degrees do for a living. Working alongside experienced individuals who have chosen a similar career path (and the opportunity to learn from their successes and mistakes) will provide valuable professional experience. Additionally, the work experience will prepare the students to enter the workforce after graduation. A better understanding of the day-to-day responsibilities of a job in your field will help lead to success.

For Hiring Managers: You will gain new perspectives on organizational nuisances, ease of use with technology, and help with projects or tasks that you're struggling to complete. Additionally, this is an opportunity to gain USDA brand advocates and it's a partnership that could lead to something more. Recruitment for the OneUSDA Internship Program typically begins late fall, with hiring managers expressing an interest in participating in the program. The internship job opportunity announcement is easier than ever for college students to find and apply for. After choosing the geographic region of preference and the career path that best matches the area of study and professional aspirations at https://www.usda.gov/internships, students simply follow the web links to https://www.usajobs.gov/ to set up an account, then follow the prompts to apply for the internship.

Basic Requirements for Participation:

- All participants must be 16 years of age at the time of appointment
- Must be in good academic standing with a cumulative GPA of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale
- Be enrolled at least half-time at a qualifying education institution
- Be a US Citizen, or National. Permanent Residents and Foreign Nationals who meet both Immigration and Annual Appropriations Law requirements may also apply

Note: The job opportunity announcement will list other specific qualification requirements as they pertain to a specific position series.

STATE/CITY/COUNTY TAX CHANGES

By **Kris Wagner** (*Kristine.L.Wagner@usda.gov, 612-336-3317*)

Have you moved and/or changed your duty station recently? If so, you may need to adjust some payroll and benefits information. These changes may include tax withholdings, mailing address, direct deposit, and your Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB). These adjustments and more can be made online through the Employee Personnel Page (EPP) at the following link: https://www.nfc.usda.gov/EPPS/index.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fepps%2f

Please note: Questions regarding your personal choices for tax withholdings should be discussed with a tax professional.

In addition, if your mailing address changes and you participate in FEHB you will need to contact your health insurance carrier directly and provide them with the new mailing address. Updating your information in EPP will not flow to your health insurance carrier.

Please feel free to contact your servicing HR provider with questions: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/HRD/Contact_Us

BENEFITS INFORMATION

By **Brian Fleming** (*Brian.B.Fleming@usda.gov, 612-336-3621*) and **Claudia Nochebueno** (*Claudia.P.Nochebueno@usda.gov, 612-336-3464*)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Benefits Team has received additional questions from employees about employee benefits. So we thought we would take some time to address some of the frequently asked questions that we have received from employees. If you have any additional questions regarding your benefits, please contact your servicing benefits provider.

What is Federal Employee's Group Life Insurance (FEGLI)?

It is life insurance for eligible Federal employees. New employees are automatically enrolled in Basic Coverage. As a new employee, you can elect Optional coverage within 60 days after your appointment. After this and because there is no regular Open Season, certain changes or events called Qualifying Life Events allow enrollment for Optional coverage or employees can request additional insurance by completing the SF-2822 (Request for Insurance form.) As a current Federal employee, you can waive all coverage or decrease coverage at any time.

Helpful links to reference:

- Link to the SF-2817, FEGLI form: http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2817.pdf.
- Link to help you see the different options you have for coverage: http://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/insurance-overview/life-insurance-overview.pdf
- Use the FEGLI calculator to determine the coverage and cost of the different options. Here's a link to the calculator: http://www.opm.gov/insure/life/

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Designations of Beneficiaries

You should review your designation of beneficiary forms periodically to ensure they reflect your current intentions and information. It will have no effect on payment of Federal benefits. However, a court order, if present, does take precedence over the designation.

It is only necessary to complete a Designation of Beneficiary form when you want to override a previously filed designation, or if none are on file and you do not want to follow the **normal order of precedence**, which is:

- To the **widow or widower**.
- If none of the above, to the **child or children**, with the share of any deceased child distributed among the descendants of that child.
- If none of the above, to the **parents** in equal shares or the entire amount to the surviving parent.
- If none of the above, to the **duly appointed executor or administrator of the estate**.
- If none of the above, to the **other next of kin** who are entitled under the laws of the domicile of the insured at the date of death.

The Designation of Beneficiary forms, if completed, must be witnessed and mailed, not faxed because the Human Resources Benefits Team must have the original form. Also, please be careful when completing the form. You cannot use white-out or make cross-outs on the forms. Here are the links to these forms:

- Unpaid Compensation (covers any money owed to you by the agency): http://opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/SF1152.pdf
- FEGLI (life insurance): http://opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2823.pdf
- FERS (retirement contributions): http://opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/SF3102.pdf
- **Please note:** The original Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) designation form must be sent to TSP, not to the HR Benefits Team. There is an address for TSP on the form. https://www.tsp.gov/PDF/formspubs/tsp-3.pdf

What are our health insurance providers doing for Federal employees?

Many insurance providers are expanding their coverage to include testing and doctor visits for COVID-19, adjusting copays and coinsurance in certain situations, waiving early refill limits on 30-day prescriptions for maintenance medication prescriptions ahead of their normal fill schedule, and urging employees to take advantage or their 90-day prescription benefits for maintenance medications, etc. For more information on what changes your insurance provider is putting into place due to COVID-19, please visit their website or call their customer service hotline. Links to insurance providers' websites or customer service numbers can be found on OPM's website.

THE UNIFORMED SERVICES EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT OF 1994 (USERRA)

By **Carolyn Ekstrand** (*Carolyn.Ekstrand@usda.gov, 970-494-7367*)

USERRA is used for all uniformed service members who are called to active duty in accordance with 38 U.S.C. 4301-4355. 5 CFR 353 covers restoration to duty from uniformed service or compensable injury. USERRA prevents employment discrimination based on military service which includes past, current, and future military service. This ensures reemployments rights with employers for veterans, reservists, and National Guard Bureau Members, and denies retaliation against employee from employer based on military service. It protects members who are called up for uniformed service against discrimination and provides for their restoration to civilian employment when they complete their active military time. If members have a complaint, they can go to the Department of Labor (DOL) who has been directed by OPM to oversee this type of complaint for Federal Departments. Service members also have the right to appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board if they disagree with a decision from the DOL.

Federal executive agency employees covered by this Act include the US Postal Service, Postal Rate Commission, any Non-Appropriated Fund instrument of the U.S., military departments, and any other intelligence agency determined by the President. This covers every U.S. employer both in the U.S. and overseas.

There are specific eligibilities for USERRA coverage including those who left their job for military service and provided notice before service, who meet the 5-year rule, have character of service that qualifies, and who report back in a timely manner.

USERRA prohibits discrimination on initial hiring, promotions, retention, and provides entitlement to seniority related benefits. The employee can be quickly reemployed if the service is less than 31 days and the employee reports back on the first regular scheduled workday following release from service and an 8-hour allowance provided for safe transportation back to the employee's residence. If the service has been more than 30 days but less than 180, the employee must submit for reemployment within 14 days. If the service has been more than 180 days, the employee must submit for reemployment no later than 90 days after the end of his/her service.

There are employer obligations which must also be met. The employer must let the employee know his/her USERRA rights after the employee notifies the employer of his/her call to active duty. The employer must let the employee go. In the Federal service, we treat this as LWOP. The employer must let the employee use any accrued leave during the time in service if the employee so desires. The employer must reemploy according to the timelines listed above. The employer must return the employee to the position he/she would have been in as if he/she were continuously employed.

Employees who are being called to active duty should reach out to their Servicing Benefits Specialist to learn how their benefits will be impacted. Employees may have decisions to make regarding their benefits (i.e., continuation of health insurance, etc.) and they may be required to pay a military deposit in order to receive retirement credit for the period that they were called to active duty.

Other time limits that must be adhered to are included in the references.

Time spent in service counts for seniority and length of service, WGI, completion of probationary periods, career tenure, retirement, leave rate accrual, and severance pay.

Here are some other sites worth investigating:

- When are employees eligible for an additional 22 days of military leave
- OPM FAQs 5 Days of Excused Absence
- OPM FERs Info.
- OPM FAQs Reservist Differential

THE LEAVE AND COMPENSATION TEAM AND TIMEKEEPER TIPS

By **Kris Wagner** (*Kristine.L.Wagner@usda.gov, 612-336-3317*)

Have you ever wondered who you should contact within Leave & Compensation with questions? Below is the breakdown of Leave & Compensation responsibilities.

Civilian Pay Technician Responsibilities

- Answer questions from employees about Earning and Leave Statements and W-2s. Also provides copies of Earning and Leave Statements and W-2s when requested.
- Process leave audits for current employees and answer questions from timekeepers regarding completion of leave audits.
- Assist employees who did not receive their paychecks.
- Complete pay adjustments.
- Send bills to employees and respond to questions regarding the bills.
- Answer questions from employees, timekeepers, and supervisors about completing timesheets in webTA.
- Responsible for the missing T&A reports each pay period: contacts employees, timekeepers, and supervisors as needed to ensure the T&A's are successfully submitted.
- Process garnishments received for employees. Respond to inquiries regarding the garnishments.

Specialist Responsibilities

- Responsible for the requests to waive salary overpayment.
- Answer questions from employees, supervisors, and timekeepers about Leave, Tours of Duty, and Premium Pay.
- Administer the Leave Transfer Program.
- Answer questions about Military Leave and process Reservist Differential Payments.
- Answer questions from employees, timekeepers, and supervisors about completing timesheets in webTA.
- Provide guidance/assistance to Civilian Pay Technician as needed with more complex pay and leave issues/errors.

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Earning and Leave Statement (ELS)

Did you know that you can access your ELS and much more from your Employee Personal Page (EPP)? The National Finance Center (NFC) has made an enhancement to allow employees with non-government email addresses to access EPP. Employees are encouraged to check their ELS on a regular basis to ensure the accuracy of their paycheck.

If employees have trouble logging into their EPP, they can contact their servicing Processing Assistant.

To view a demo on how to access this EPP site, click here. Follow the prompts on the "Sample Page" to see how the Two-Step Authentication Process works. After you have logged in, you can click on the different options to see what each screen looks like in EPP.

Leave Audit Tips

- What form should I use?
  - HRO-717 form
- Include the employee's full legal name:
  - No nicknames
  - Include suffixes (i.e., Jr, II)
- Include the last 4 digits of the employee's Social Security Number.
- Verify the leave audit reflects the correct leave year.
- When completing the leave audit, please be sure that you are using ¼ hour increments; e.g., 0.25, 0.50 and 0.75 and not the 15-minute increments that webTA uses.
- Make sure the leave audit is completed through the current pay period worked.
- Sign and date the leave audit.
- Completed leave audits should be sent to the shared mailbox (HR.Leave.Audits@usda.gov) for processing. When the leave audit has processed, you will receive confirmation.

All these tips can be found on our website https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/HRD/Leave_Compensation_Team/lc-timekeeper-tips.

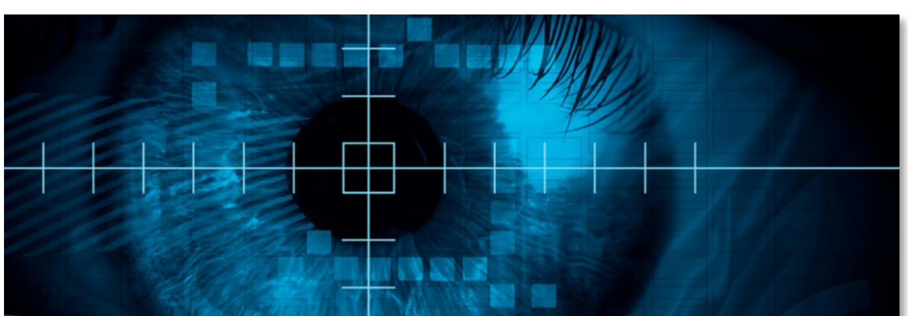
THE SPECIAL AGENCY CHECK (SAC)

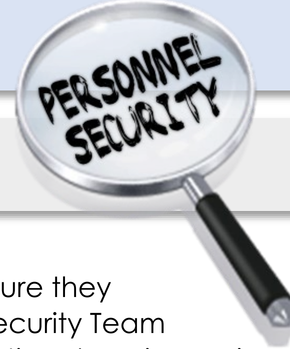
By **Steve Crescini** *(Steven.A.Crescini@usda.gov, 612-336-3285)*

One of the foundations of Personnel Security documents is the Special Agency Check (SAC), also known as the "fingerprint check," that is required of any person working for or supporting the Federal Government per Executive Order 10450. The SAC is required for obtaining a LincPass, submitting a Background Investigation, and an element of Suitability for those considering employment with the Federal Government. It is part of the FBI database and highlights any arrests in a person's past that, depending on the seriousness of offense, may impact their eligibility for employment.

The SAC can be obtained several ways within APHIS and AMS. A person can have his/her fingerprints scanned via a LiveScan machine in one of the various hubs throughout the United States (Riverdale, MD; Washington DC; Raleigh, NC; Ames, IA; Ft. Collins, CO; and Minneapolis, MN). If a person isn't located near one of the hubs above, then it is common for a person to go to his/her local law enforcement agency with two fingerprint cards (SF-87 December 2017 edition) and have his/her prints done with the ink blotter. Once that is done, the cards get sent to Personnel Security in Minneapolis, MN, to be scanned and filed. Another way to obtain the SAC is though the USAccess system for those that have submitted the SAC previously and obtained a LincPass. If both actions are met, we are able to pull the SAC from the system, which is an efficient alternative. In most of the cases above, once the request for the SAC is submitted, the results of the SAC are returned within 48 – 72 hours.

Once you obtain the SAC, the document is only good for 120 days, so if you are initiated for a background investigation and take the full allotment of days to complete it, it is possible that another SAC may be requested due to the 120-day limitation. Fortunately, this is a rare occurrence as most complete the eQIP Background Investigation within the allotted time. Again, the SAC is a requirement, so if you are a Federal or non-Federal person employed or supporting the Federal Government, you have had the SAC completed and cleared prior to onboarding within your respective program. It should be noted that during the current threat of COVID-19 and the closing of workspaces and law enforcement agencies, the current requirement for a SAC for onboarding is currently waived, but those onboarded during this unique time that fall under the waiver will be expected to submit the SAC when normalcy returns to the processing and obtaining of SACs.





BACKGROUND REINVESTIGATIONS

By **Steve Crescini** *(Steven.A.Crescini@usda.gov, 612-336-3285)*

Every fiscal year (FY), the Personnel Security Team initiates hundreds of background investigations (BI) for new hires to APHIS and AMS during the onboarding process to ensure they have the required BI for their respective positions. Also during each FY, the Personnel Security Team conducts background reinvestigations for those employees who have had an investigation done in previous years and are due as is required for each investigation level. Prior to each FY, the Personnel Security Team will pull a reinvestigation report for the upcoming FY and break it down into quarters to ensure every effort is made to initiate the reinvestigation before the current investigation expires. Reinvestigations can range in the hundreds and all programs are impacted across APHIS and AMS.

When the reinvestigation report is pulled, the Personnel Security Team will verify the Position Sensitivity Code (PSC) is still the same as the one currently listed. If so, the Personnel Security Team will proceed to initiate the employee in the system, and then send an email to the employee with guidance on how to proceed. However, if the PSC does not match the report, the Personnel Security Team will contact the Classification Team for verification. Once Classification confirms the most current PSC, the Personnel Security Team will initiate the employee in the system (this applies to non-Federal persons as well).

If you are the recipient of a background investigation notification from the Personnel Security Team, you will be asked to provide forms associated with the BI. The types of forms may vary by the PSC levels and are identified on the MRPBS website under the Personnel Security web page regarding investigations. The blank forms are provided in the email from the Personnel Security Team for the employee's convenience.

The various BI levels are:

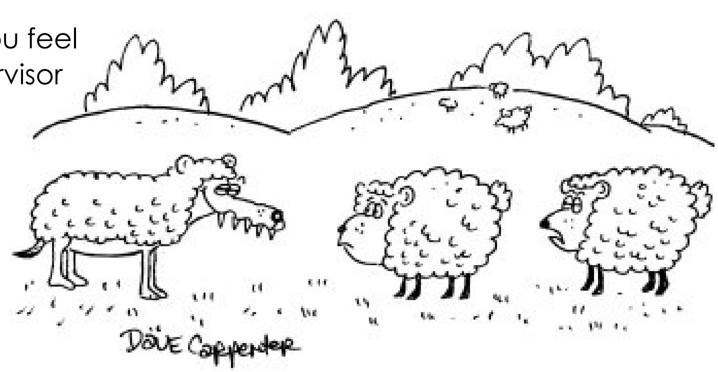
-Non-Sensitive, Low Risk Positions (LR): Positions which involve duties and responsibilities of limited relation to an agency or program mission, so the potential for impact on the integrity and efficiency of the service is limited.

-Public Trust Positions: Positions at the moderate or high-risk levels are normally referred to as "Public Trust" positions. Such positions may involve policy making, major program responsibility, public safety and health, law enforcement duties, and operation or control of financial records, with a significant risk for causing damage or realizing personal gain.

-National Security Positions: Positions whose activities, duties, and responsibilities involve the nation's war and defense plans, foreign policy, or access to classified information. All positions with National Security duties and responsibilities must have a sensitivity level designation to ensure the appropriate level of investigative screening is done to comply with Executive Order (E.O.)10450 and E.O.12968.

If you receive a BI reinvestigation notification and you feel that the PSC is incorrect, please work with your supervisor and your Classification service provider to confirm. The reinvestigation process is relatively simple and a requirement, so if you have any questions, please feel free to contact your program's Personnel Security service provider.

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/PSS_Program_Assignments.pdf



"Who did the background check on him?"

HELPFUL HINTS WHEN ADMINISTERING HARD COPY FINGERPRINT CARDS

By **Steve Crescini** *(Steven.A.Crescini@usda.gov, 612-336-3285)*

A couple of years ago, Personnel Security put out an article on guidelines to assist when filling out the fingerprint cards (SF-87). Recently, there have been a series of submission of SF-87 cards with common errors, so I am providing an update to that previous version. The submission of hard copy fingerprint cards (SF-87) ***is a requirement*** for all employees upon hire or when periodic reinvestigations are conducted, unless LIVE-SCAN fingerprints can be captured at a USDA MRP location. LIVE SCAN locations used by MRP are in Minneapolis, MN; Ames, IA; Fort Collins; CO, Riverdale, MD; and Washington, DC. If you are not located near one of the LIVE SCAN locations listed above, you can contact your local law enforcement agency to see if they can provide fingerprinting. There was also a recent change in the acceptance of SF-87 cards for non-Federals. Here is current guidance:

Hardcopy Submissions – SF-87 and FD-258 (Fingerprint Card for Contractors Only)
The Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) recommends submission of electronic fingerprints through FTS as it improves efficiency, timeliness of results, and quality of prints. When electronic submissions are not feasible, DCSA will accept a hard card submission using the December 2017 SF-87 for Federal employee/applicant, military, volunteers, as well as contractors. Until further notice, DCSA will continue to accept the FD-258; however, the December 2017 SF-87 may now be used for contractors since the FBI is retaining all prints regardless of which card (form) type is used to submit.

To assist programs with filling out the cards, please see the list below for some additional information regarding each field on the SF-87 card. Please remember, the SF-87 cards must be legible and filled out in their entirety. The current edition of the SF-87 is December 2017. OPM will not accept incomplete cards. **Please note: Two cards must be submitted with the following information typed or printed in black ink.**

- **Last Name, First Name, Middle Name** (use NMN or initial only, if applicable)
- **Signature of person fingerprinted**
- **Residence of person fingerprinted** *(Enter employee's present home address)*
- **Date** *(The official taking the fingerprints should enter the date)*
- **Signature of official taking fingerprints** *(The official taking the fingerprints should sign)*
- **Title and Address** *(The employee title and address)*
- **Position to which appointed** *(Enter employee's job title)*
- **Department, Bureau and Duty Station (City and State)** *i.e., USDA, APHIS, PPQ; Raleigh, NC*
- **Date of Birth (DOB)** *(Indicate MONTH, DAY, and YEAR as xx/xx/xxxx)*
- **Aliases (AKA)**
- **Sex** *(M-Male or F-Female)*
- **Race** *(W-White (include Hispanic); B-Black; I-American Indian/Alaska Native; A-Asian or Pacific Island; U- Unknown; O-other)*
- **Hgt.** *(use three numerals in feet and inches e.g., 510 for five foot ten inches)*
- **Wgt.** *(use three numerals in pounds e.g., 110 for 110 pounds)*
- **Eyes** *(BLK-Black; BLU-Blue; BRO-Brown; GRY-Gray; GRN-Green; HAZ-Hazel)*
- **Hair** *(BAL-Bald; BLK-Black; BLN-Blond; BRO-Brown; GRY-Gray; RED-Red; SDY-Sandy; WHI-White, three letters must be entered)*
- **Place of Birth (POB)** *(Indicate City and State or Country if outside USA)*
- **Scars, Marks, and Tattoos** *(Indicate any scars, marks, and tattoos. If none, write NONE)*
- **Social Security No. (Full number)**

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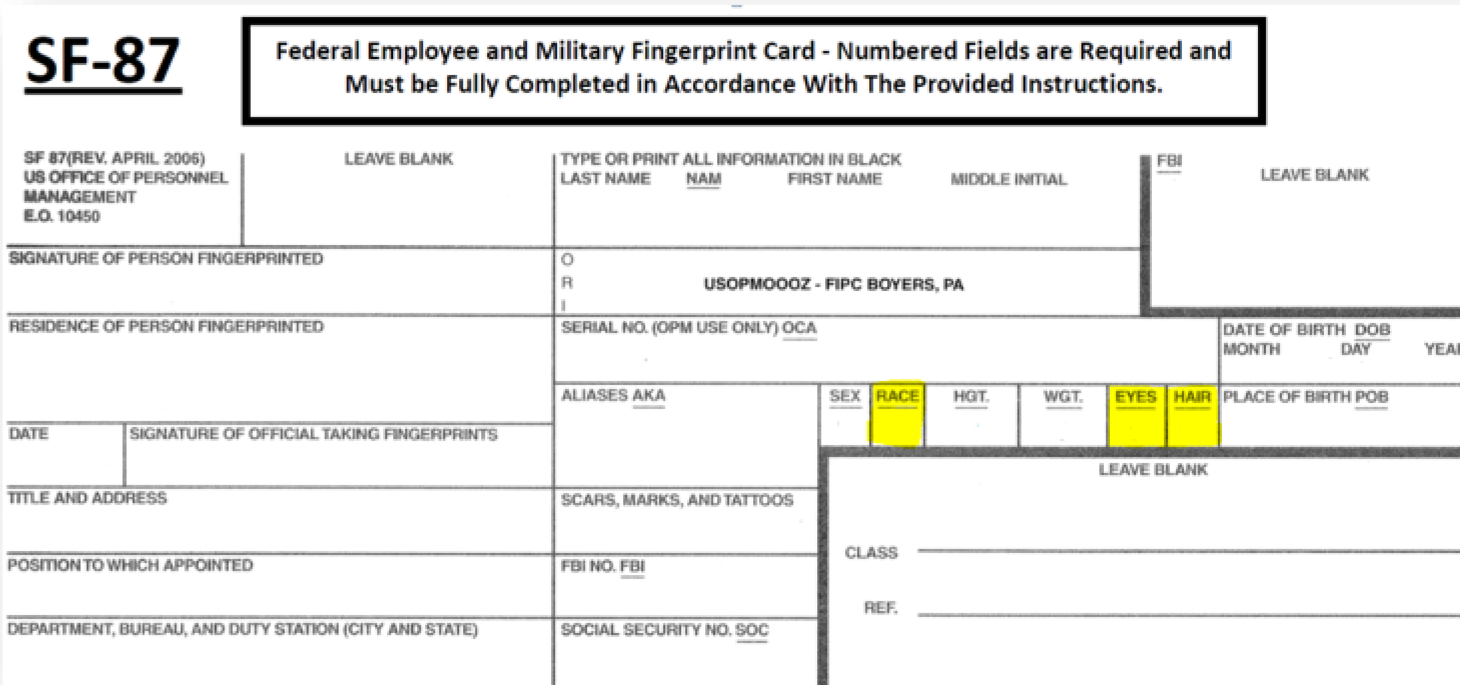
Classifying fingerprints depend on clear impressions for accurate pattern differentiation, ridge counting, whorl tracing, and interpretation of whorl types. Best results are obtained by using a light finger pressure. Too much pressure will produce unclassifiable prints by smudging.

Please contact your Program's Personnel Security service provider with any questions. You can obtain the new cards via the General Services Administration at www.gsaadvantage.gov



SF-87

Federal Employee and Military Fingerprint Card - Numbered Fields are Required and Must be Fully Completed in Accordance With The Provided Instructions.

SF 87(REV. APRIL 2006)
US OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
E.O. 10450

LEAVE BLANK

TYPE OR PRINT ALL INFORMATION IN BLACK
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COACHING

By **Carol Roller** (*Carol.A.Roller@usda.gov, 301-851-2892*)
and **Tracey Dutcher** (Tracey.V.Dutcher@usda.gov, 970-217-2680)

APHIS ONLY

When someone talks about "coaching," we might think back to high school sports teams, or coaches that we admire from college or professional sports teams. Regardless of the sport or level of athlete, these coaches have several things in common. They are there to offer tools and methods to sharpen athletic skills; create a structured approach to improving those skills; and ultimately, challenge the athletes to find their own inner strength, talents, and leadership ability.

Similarly, coaching is embedded in many organizations, including APHIS, as a core component of leadership development and talent management. APHIS' Center for Training and Organization Development (CTOD) manages the APHIS Coaching Program, pairing coaches with current and future leaders within the organization. Until recently, APHIS had a limited number of internal coaches and could not provide coaching to all who could benefit.

In 2018, CTOD recruited a cohort of 19 APHIS employees from across the Agency to train as professional coaches. They would serve as coaches as a collateral duty. This cohort was recently certified in a rigorous coach training program through New Ventures West. These newly certified coaches join the existing CTOD coaches, greatly increasing our overall capacity and ability to reach a broader range of APHIS employees.

Through working with a coach, APHIS employees can benefit when navigating new roles and responsibilities of a new job, preparing for advancement by developing or expanding their skillsets, or working through other challenges with their teams or complex projects.

Over the next few months, CTOD will roll out the expanded APHIS Internal Coaching Program. The goal is to create a positive coaching experience for the clients and a sustainable and successful program for APHIS!

Stay tuned for more information, including a virtual Kick-Off event in September. In the meantime, if you'd like more information about coaching in APHIS, please visit the APHIS Coaching Program SharePoint site or email aphis.coaching@usda.gov.

HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE APHIS CAREER DEVLOPMENT COUNSELING SERVICE?

The APHIS Career Development Counseling Service is for employees who…

- Need a career change
- Need assistance with your resume
- Want to identify transferable skills for a new position
- Need interview tips and techniques
- Want to create a career path
- Are not sure what to put on the IDP

Tanya Briscoe - Career Development Counselor
Tracy Greene - Career Development Counselor
I'eisha Williams - Program Assistant

Contact us:

Career.Counseling.Service@usda.gov

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HOW WILL APHIS DEFINE "POTENTIAL?" HOW WILL WE MEASURE IT AND HOW WILL WE USE IT?

By **Todd Sazdoff** (*Todd.Sazdoff@usda.gov, 612-336-3304*)

In the last issue of the HR Broadcast, we broadly covered the concept of Talent Management (TM); what it is and how APHIS is defining it. One of the unanswered questions from that article was the idea of what potential is and how we measure it. This is crucial because APHIS is putting a stake in the ground stating that potential is a differentiator of talent and will impact your future.

What is potential? Potential is a term used to quantify an individual's readiness for a role of larger scope and/or greater complexity. It is a dynamic measurement meaning it can change from season to season based on a person's aspirations and demonstrated competency. By aspiration, we mean desire. Are you at a place in life where you want a larger role or perhaps where you actually prefer stability? This is one measure of potential that you can clearly see changes over time. The more complex aspect of this is demonstrated competency.

In this area we have a huge advantage in that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has already defined for us what they look for in candidates for the Senior Executive Service. This is defined by the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) and is aligned to our Leadership Competency Model. APHIS will use this model to measure potential as a function of demonstrated competency defined by OPM.

For more information on the alignment of the competencies to the ECQS, please go here: https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/senior-executive-service/executive-core-qualifications/

APHIS is piloting a process that will use the behavioral descriptions in the OPM guidance to define a candidate's competency on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is awareness and 5 is expert. Supervisors will evaluate candidates and be asked to qualify their assessment with examples. Candidates themselves will do a self-assessment and be asked to qualify their responses. Ultimately, these assessments are compiled into a current state of talent potential for an organization. This will allow leaders to identify readiness for larger or more complex roles, specific developmental suggestions for candidates, and a gap analysis of current state compared to succession planning targets.

PPQ and MRPBS are participating in this pilot and their experiences will aid in further developing this process. The pilot will take place at the SES and GS-15 level, with the GS-15s completing the self-assessment and the SESers evaluating their GS-15 candidates.

As mentioned above, one outcome of this process is targeted for the specific development of candidates. We know that feedback is a key part of development, and that development takes place over time. Stepping into supervisor, manager, and executive roles come with a lot of responsibility and a lot of new development opportunities. This process will help supervisors of candidates and candidates themselves identify their areas for improvement and will also provide them with tangible ways to develop in those areas, resulting in increased levels of readiness for executive positions.

This should raise some questions for you! In the meantime, should you have any questions, please contact me or your TMB Program Representative.

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To find your program rep, click here.

In the next edition, we will answer the question: What behaviors align to our desired future state?