

DA Listening Post Minutes
March 31, 2010

Question 1: e-Neo – Does HRD keep statistics, is there a way to track use, do we know how Areas have implemented it?

Answer: Yes. OCIO generates web trend reports that reflect the usage statistics for each AFM Division's website. The usage statistics can also be extracted & provided for each individual webpage. The web trend reports provide key metrics for each webpage such as Visits, Page Views and Average Time Viewed, etc. The report also reflect patterns/trends in graph form. The Area IT Specialists also have access to these reports and can generate them upon request from the Location. As far as the implementation of eNEO for the Areas, when HRD released eNEO on October 19, 2007 we notified all employees and recommended that the website be used for all new employees as well as current employees for information about benefits and responsibilities associated with being a federal employee. Additionally, HRD incorporated the eNEO link into the "notification of selection" letter for all new ARS employees coming on board with the recommendation that they access the website to obtain benefit information.

Question 2: Overpayments to employees – we have a few issues with bills from NFC to employees for repayment of salary/ward/bonus overpayments. Are the bills sent to HRD and then forwarded to the employee or are they being sent directly to the employee?

Answer: The mechanism in which the employees receive the bills are based on the type of bill that has been generated. Any *Notice of Intent to Offset Salary (Form 1100)* that HRD generates via Special Payroll Processing System (SPPS) or Payroll Action Request (AD-343) for an active employee is mailed directly to the agency and the agency then completes the Agency Contact portion and it is mailed to the location contact. Any Bills generated for separated employees or for non-salary related debts (i.e., travel) employees are billed the same way; however NFC will generate *Bill for Collection (NFC 631)* and it is mailed directly to the employee.

One Location had several employees overpaid, by time employees received bills, collection had started. They wanted to make 1 lump sum payment. Is it possible to tie to Employee Personnel Page to communicate outstanding debt?

NFC's position is that employees should be checking their E&L Statements. HRD will be checking into the suggestion.

Question 3: Status of Generic Purchasing Agent PD and standards.

Answer: A memo from HRD went out to the Area Directors on March 23 with instructions on implementation. HRD requested that all SF-52s be submitted to HQs by end of April.

Question 4: When do we use the MOU as described in the new P&P 705?

Answer: The MOU is used to set out in very broad and general terms a plan for the parties to coordinate their efforts on projects of mutual interest. The following criteria must be met: (1) specific areas of research projects are identified, (2) the parties' duties and/or responsibilities are defined in very broad and general terms, and (3) there is no commitment or exchange of resources (i.e., monetary resources, materials/supplies, equipment, salaries, etc.) by either party.

The MOU cannot be used to document cooperative relationships between ARS and other parties, when the terms of the agreement outline specific duties and responsibilities, which commit or exchange ARS resources. The Non-Funded Cooperative Agreement must be utilized to document cooperative relationships between ARS and other parties when these conditions exist.

Question 5: When is the next National AO Conference?

Answer: We are currently trying to gain approval to hold a conference targeted for Spring of 2011

Question 6: Is it possible to delegate Approving Official duties in Access Online to lessen the paperwork burden to our scientific community?

http://www.dm.usda.gov/procurement/ccsc/CoordinatorsPCardProgramGuide_V7.pdf

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"It is USDA policy that the AO is the individual with oversight and approval responsibility for purchase card activity of cardholders under his or her purview. USDA prefers that the AO is the cardholder's supervisor-of-record; however, other individuals may be appointed. The appointment of an AO that is not the cardholder's supervisor-of-record does not absolve the supervisor-of-record of the responsibility over the cardholder's job performance and purchase card transaction activity. Agencies may appoint individuals other than the supervisor-of-record under the following criteria: (1) Must be the same or higher grade than assigned purchase cardholder; (2) Must be in the same program or regional/area/office as the cardholder; and (3) Must satisfy mandatory AO training requirements. A written justification explaining why a change in AO is required shall be submitted to the LAPC for review and recommendation for decision by the APC. The APC

will forward the final decision to the LAPC for file retention. However, it is REE policy that the supervisor-of-record is the cardholder's AO.

Answer: Thank you for your comment and information. This matter is currently under review and being discussed at HQs.

Question 7: What is the impact of the Secretary's message on reorganization/transformation of USDA?

Answer: Continuous Process Improvement is top priority for our new Secretary of Agriculture. As indicated by Secretary Vilsack, successful transformation will include: new IT initiatives, an inclusive workplace environment where employees are empowered to reach their full potential, expanded outreach efforts, systems of accountability that encourage employees to achieve high standards of performance and customer service, and succession planning. ARS employees are encouraged to partake in the video conferences/town hall meetings that the Secretary has scheduled. These are exciting times to be working for USDA; "The People's Department". This won't be easy, however, we are confident of the strengths of our current workforce to bring ideas and solutions to these new initiatives. ARS is an agency of problem solvers who will discover new ways to provide better services to our customers and our employees.

Question 8: Status of EAD Electronic Official Files for ARIS/AIMS? Does this include RSA?

Answer: The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OICO) is currently developing a prototype for EAD. This prototype will assist with the large paper files and consolidate relevant file information into an electronic database. A lot of old paper files have emails, and other correspondence that isn't necessary to maintain. Once the prototype is completed, EAD will complete a beta test, which will include the Areas and locations. All agreement types will be included in the initiative.

Question 9: How long does someone have access to their Electronic Official Personnel File (eOPF) after they are terminated, retired or apply for another federal position?

Answer: Employees have access to eOPF for 90 days after separating from the agency. However, once AgLearn receives the separation action on the NFC feed, the eAuth ID and password (which you need for eOPF) are inactivated.

Question 10: Any updates on how to handle our Temporary 1 year appointments with regards to HSPD-12? Will there be any exemptions for the linc pass card if they don't require computer network access or building access outside of regular hours?

Answer: The HSPD-12 workforce committee continues to interact with the Department on how to handle ID badges for temporary 1 year appointments. For now, it is business as usual with temporary badges, until we are able to gather more information to make an informed decision on how to move forward with temporary badges for students, contractors, and non-citizens. We continue to make strides in the race against deadlines with our permanent federal employee ID badges (enrollment, adjudication and activation). Your Sponsor at your Area Office is a great resource for identifying status of your ID Badge. A new HSPD-12 corner on the AFM website will be coming soon. This will include status updates of how to address questions and concerns from A-Z about HSPD-12. There was also a DAD conference call held with Jim Bradley on Tuesday, April 27. Mr. Bradley indicated that the implementation of NEIS is currently on hold for ARS until more guidance and answers to questions are received from the Department

Question 11: Explain new organizational structure and purpose of combining OTT and Agreements?

Answer: This past December, Dr. Knipling announced his intention to create a new office structure at the ARS Headquarters level which will consist of three offices under a new Associate Administrator for Partnerships and Innovation; 1) Office of Technology Partnerships (currently the Office of Technology Transfer); 2) Office of Research Agreements Policy and Management (currently the AFM, Extramural Agreements Division (including Area Agreement Specialists/Assistants); and, 3) a new office for Cooperative Interactions and Grantsmanship; the primary purpose of which is to proactively identify and seek external partnership and funding opportunities and match them with ARS research projects and scientists. Additionally, there have been many discussions during the past 12 months focused on increasing external funding for ARS. The Administrators Council (AC) along with the Administrative and Financial Management Council (AFMC) have been looking at ways to leverage and scale what many ARS scientists are already doing to attract external funding. This new office will support this objective. Dr. Richard J. (Rick) Brenner is proposed to serve as the Associate Administrator, and will be responsible for oversight and management of the three offices mentioned above. A formal reorganization package has been prepared for review and approval by the Acting Under Secretary, REE.

Question 12: Please update on status of Federal Career Internship Program (FCIP). Do we have to wait to convert if they met all of the requirements?

A union recently filed a claim regarding the conversion of the FCIPs to permanent positions and the Federal Labor Relations Authority FLRA may issue an injunction as a result. Due to the uncertainty of the program, we have been advised by the Department to move quickly to convert employees under FCIP appointments to permanent positions as soon as they meet all the conversion eligibility requirements. Do AOs have to wait to convert FCIPs if they have completed all the requirements before the 2 years if up?

Answer: HRD sent out a memo discussing Federal Career Internship Program. **To clarify:**
– a CIP employee must complete the 2-yr intern appt before being converted. All current FCIP's are grandfathered in, and this matter is still under discussion at the Department and OPM. So, until we receive official notice, it is business as usual.