

**SPECIAL
AGREEMENT
CHECKS
(SAC)
INSTRUCTIONS**

-2007-

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SPECIAL AGREEMENT CHECKS (SAC) INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1 – Beginning Recruitment Process

Human Resources Specialist – will work with the supervisor to determine the sensitivity code of the position. Any placement into a position with a sensitivity code higher than “Non-Sensitive/Low Risk” will normally require a pre-employment Special Agreements Checks (SAC).

- 1. For placements into “Public Trust” positions not requiring access within a BSL-3 facility, a pre-employment SAC will be required unless** (1) the selectee is a current USDA employee and (2) there is a record of National Agency Check with Inquiry (NACI) or higher level of investigation on the selectee. If both of these items are in order, the offer can be finalized. The candidate should be advised that a comprehensive background investigation will be initiated.
- 2. For placements into positions requiring access to a BSL-3 facility, a pre-employment SAC will be required unless** there is a record of a current background investigation at the appropriate level on the selectee. If a background investigation has been completed, the “clearance” must be transferred to USDA before the entrance-on-duty date may be finalized.

Verification can be ascertained via OPF, e-OPF or by contacting the previous agency. Once you have confirmed an investigation has been completed on the selectee, notify your designated Personnel Security Specialist with the date the investigation was completed. However, do not proceed until the Personnel Security Specialist has confirmed the information. Once confirmation is received, you can proceed with the hiring process. (See - Appendix A).

Human Resources Specialist – will annotate the AD-332 with the appropriate “Position Sensitivity” statement and code:

- Annotate front side of AD-332, “block 32” with the appropriate “Position Sensitivity” statement (e.g. Non-sensitive/Low Risk, Moderate Risk, etc.).
- Annotate back side of AD-332, “block 4” with the appropriate “Position Sensitivity” code. (Appendix A).

Human Resources Specialist – will annotate the vacancy announcement with the following statement:

- “As a condition of employment, this position requires the selectee to undergo a pre-employment check and a full background investigation. Any offer made is considered a tentative job offer pending the outcome of the pre-employment

check. Retention in the position is based upon a favorable adjudication of the background investigation as well as any other required security checks”.

Step 2 – Selection Made

Coordinator – will obtain a copy of the selectee’s resume or OF-612 from the “Certificate of Eligibles” before returning the certificate and applications to the Human Resources Specialist. A copy of the resume or OF-612 should be set aside so that it can be submitted at a later date with all of the other forms to make a complete security package.

Coordinator – will obtain an OF-306 “Declaration of Federal Employment” from the selectee and immediately fax a copy to the Human Resources Specialist for review.

Human Resources Specialist - will review the OF-306 for suitability determination. If suitability is favorable, the Human Resources Specialist will initial and date the OF-306 and provide a copy to the designated Personnel Security Specialist. If the OF-306 reveals unfavorable information, the Human Resources Specialist will defer to the appropriate Employee Relations Specialist for further suitability determination. If the OF-306 is determined favorable by the Employee Relations Specialist you can proceed. If not found favorable, the SAC process will **STOP**. Either way the human resources specialist will contact the coordinator as soon as possible with the OF-306 determination.

Coordinator – will keep the original OF-306 and submit with the complete security package.

Human Resources Specialist – will prepare and send the official offer letter to the selectee. (Appendix D)

Coordinator – will send a pre-employment background investigation letter to the selectee with appropriate security forms. (Appendix B)

Coordinator – will e-mail the following information to the designated Personnel Security Specialist:

Selectee’s:

- Full Name (*Last, First, Middle Initial*)
- Social Security Number
- Date of Birth
- Place of Birth (*City & State*)
- E-mail Address
- Phone Number
- Account Number (*Investigation Fees*)

Personnel Security Specialist – will e-mail instructions to the selectee on how to access “e-QIP” and complete the on-line form. (Appendix C)

Designated Personnel Security Specialist

Cynthia Blagmon	Northern Plains Area, Pacific West Area, South Atlantic Area, Southern Plains Area, Mid South Area, NASS, ERS, and North Atlantic Area (Plum Island only)
Lajuan Davis	CSREES; Headquarters, NAL, Beltsville Area, Mid West Area, North Atlantic Area (except Plum Island)

Step 3 – Selectee Returns Investigation Forms

Coordinator - will ensure that all the investigation forms are returned and fully completed. He/She will mail all the forms to the Personnel Security Office along with the pre-employment background investigation memo (Appendix E). Security forms must be mailed via Federal Express to:

USDA, HRO Personnel Security Staff
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1145B
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-5103

Coordinator - will notify the Human Resources Specialist via e-mail that the SAC package has been forwarded to the Personnel Security Office.

Step 4 – Notification of Favorable Adjudication

Personnel Security Specialist – will notify the designated coordinator and the Human Resources Specialist when the SAC has been favorably adjudicated.

Human Resources Specialist - will notify the selectee via telephone that their SAC has been favorably adjudicated and determine an Entrance on Duty (EOD) date.

-APPENDIX A-
POSITION SENSITIVITY DESIGNATION MATRIX

Position Sensitivity Codes:

First Digit

- 1 Non-Sensitive/Low Risk
- 2 Non-Critical Sensitive
- 3 Critical Sensitive
- 4 Special Sensitive
- 5 Moderate Risk
- 6 High Risk

Second Digit

- C Computer-ADP
- N Non-Computer-AD

Third Digit

- N No, Does not require drug testing
- Y Yes, is designated for incumbent testing
- A Yes, Is designated for incumbent and applicant Testing
- U Undesignated
- C Yes, Requires commercial motor vehicle operator's license

Position Sensitivity Identifiers:

Non-sensitive/Low Risk – Other positions not meeting the criteria described in the OPM definition of high or moderate risk and the potential for impact on the integrity and efficiency of the service is limited.

- Low risk positions may include those located at a facility with select agents if the incumbent does not enter the laboratory unescorted or serve as an escort to visitors.
- Low risk IT positions (NAL) include those responsible for disseminating research findings electronically to the public. These positions differ from ARS OCIO IT positions which are responsible for sensitive information, not all of which is available to the public.

Moderate Risk – Investigation Level LBI or MBI

- If not coded for national security or code 6, managers and those who develop/implement agency policy. These include but are not limited to Division Directors, Office Heads, Staff Directors, Senior Policy Advisors, and positions classified in pay category SLs (primarily ARS NPLs).

- If not coded for national security, National Program Leaders in ARS who have responsibilities involving exotic agents, select agents, germplasm programs, seed banks, biocontrol agents, and/or narcotic programs.
- If not coded for national security or code 6, ARS Assistant Area Directors, Center Directors and Assistant Center Directors, Research Leaders, Location Leaders, Institute or Laboratory Directors.
- ARS Research Scientists, Support Scientists, technicians, LAO's and any others including administrative support employee with unrestricted access to BSL-3 facilities, exotic or highly contagious biological agents, select agents, or major gene banks (Ames, Geneva, Griffin and Pullman). Note: Contractor and non USDA employees or others with unrestricted access to the facilities listed will also be subject to an investigation.
- Technology Transfer Staff involved in the review of and recommendations on licenses, patents, and CRADAs including patent advisors, legal instrument examiners and patent assistants.
- If not coded for national security, Branch Chiefs in ARS OCIO as well as senior specialists with responsibilities in cybersecurity, infrastructure, network administration, and individuals with privileged access to systems.
- Records Manager for the REE Agencies.
- ARS Area IT Specialists.
- Branch Chief, Acquisition Branch and Section Heads, Procurement Sections in the Acquisitions and Property Division. Note: Contract review boards are used extensively in this Division. These boards review every contraction action which provides sufficient checks and balances of the activities of the other contract specialists within this Division.
- All contract specialist positions in Facilities Division due to their level of contracting warrant (unlimited) and autonomy of actions.
- HQ and Area Real Estate Warrant Officers
- Grants and Agreements Specialists (Extramural Agreements Division) and Area Grants and Agreements Specialists who serve as Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) with authorization to enter into, administer, and terminate agreements. Note: these individuals sign agreements which commits the organization to a long-term course of action.
- Financial management positions including individuals serving as Accounting Officer or having oversight responsibilities for operational accounting (fund control) including and or having audit liaison responsibilities for one or more REE agencies.
- ARS Area Health and Safety Managers in Areas without BSL-3 or select agent facilities.
- ARS Area Supervisory Procurement Analysts. Note: Although Procurement and Property Management Review and CARE reviews are conducted on a cyclical basis, these positions operate with considerable autonomy.
- ARS Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Privacy Act (PA) Coordinators.
- Associate Directors (NAL). These positions operate with considerable autonomy.
- Administrative Officer (NAL).

High Risk – Investigation Level BI

- If not coded for national security, positions in Pay Plan ES, due to high authority and autonomy.
- If not coded for national security, ARS Location Leaders, Research Leaders and Facilities Managers in BSL-3 facilities or facilities with select agents.
- Positions requiring carrying firearms.
- Aircraft pilots.

Non-critical Sensitive – Confidential or Secret Clearance

- Physical Security Specialist, ARS Homeland Security Office.
- ARS Deputy Chief Information Officer and Information Technology Specialists as designated. Typically, the designated employees attend meetings where classified information is discussed or deal with computer forensics, continuing of operations systems, classified systems, and sensitive databases such as the National Pathogen Inventory and Noncitizen Tracking System.
- Facilities Division Engineers and Facilities Division Contract Specialists with responsibilities for BSL-3 facilities, facilities with select agents, and major gene banks (Ft. Collins, Geneva, Pullman, Griffin, and Ames).
- Area Administrative Officers, Location Administrative Officers, facilities positions or others whose duties require access to classified reports (i.e., Sandia reports on physical security of BSL-3 facilities or select agent facilities).
- International Program Leaders and Advisors who attend meetings where classified information is discussed; positions with overseas duty stations*, and individuals working in buildings with restricted access (i.e. Ronald Reagan Building-DC).
- Deputy Director, NAL.
- Deputy Area Director – Business Management
- Other positions as designated by Agency Administrator.

* Higher levels of clearance may be required depending on individual responsibilities and specific embassy requirements.

Critical Sensitive – Top Secret/Secret Clearance - Based on organizational location and/or individual responsibilities.

- Area Directors (ARS)
- Associated Area Directors (ARS)
- Director, National Agricultural Library (NAL)
- Chief Information Officer (ARS)
- Director, Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, REE
- Associate Deputy Administrator, Administrative and Financial Management
- Director, Human Resources Division, Administrative and Financial Management

- Director, Facilities Division, Administrative and Financial Management
- Deputy Director, Facilities Division, Administrative and Financial Management
- Program Analyst, ARS Homeland Security
- National Pathogen Inventory Data Base Manager (ARS)
- Human Resources Specialists in the Suitability Unit, ARS Office of Homeland Security
- ARS National Program Leaders (as designated depending on specific duties such as dealing with food safety issues and exotic diseases of plants or animals)

Special Sensitive – Top Secret/SCI Clearance – These positions are typically involved with developing plans and actions for carrying out agency core programs, are privy to internal USDA classified information, and attend meetings with other non-USDA agencies where discussions at the TS-SCI level are conducted.

- Agency Administrator (ARS)
- Administrator's Secretary (ARS)
- Associate Administrators (ARS)
- Deputy Administrators, National Program Staff (ARS)
- Deputy Administrator, Administrative and Financial Management (ARS)
- Director, Budget and Program Management Staff (ARS)
- Assistant Administrator, Office of Technology Transfer and ARS Office of Homeland Security Office, and other designated staff members in the ARS Office of Homeland Security including the Visa Program Specialist (6D2675) who require access to top security facilities and classified IT systems.
- Biosafety/Research Programs Safety Officer (ARS) (6D3697)
- Other positions as designated by the Agency Administrator (including those involved in Continuity of Operations Responsibilities)



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics
Agricultural Research Service

**-APPENDIX B-
E-QIP ACCESS LETTER**

Date

Name

Street Address

City, ST Zip-Code

Dear Mr./Ms. :

The position you have been tentatively selected for requires a pre-employment Special Agreement Checks (SAC). The SAC must be favorably adjudicated before you can start work. To initiate the SAC, you will need to complete the following forms and return them within 5 days of receipt of this letter. Also, be sure to include the security forms associated with e-QIP.

- OFI-86C – Special Agreement Checks (SAC)
- (2) SF-87 – Fingerprint Chart (fingerprints can be taken at your local police station)

Additionally, you are required to complete an electronic on-line investigation form. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has developed a web-based automated system called Electronic Questionnaire for Investigations Processing (e-QIP). The Personnel Security Specialist, will contact you by e-mail and provide you with information to access e-QIP. In order for your e-QIP account to remain active, you must access e-QIP and enter your data within 5 days from receipt of the Personnel Security Specialist's e-mail. If the information is not entered into e-QIP within the specified timeframe, your entrance on duty date may be significantly delayed. If you have any questions regarding this process, please contact the Personnel Security Specialist at 301-504-XXXX.

Please forward all the completed security forms to:

USDA, Agricultural Research Service
Unit/Laboratory Name
Street Address
City, ST Zip Code
Attn: (designated coordinator)



The Special Agreements Checks process is a condition of your employment. The timely submission of these forms is greatly appreciated. The information you provide will be kept confidential. If you have concerns about these requirements, please feel free to call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx. (designated coordinators phone number)

Sincerely,

Name
Title (designated coordinator)

Cc:
Personnel Security Specialist
Human Resources Specialist

(3) Enclosures

-APPENDIX C-
E-QIP ACCESS VIA E-MAIL

Good Morning,

You have been initiated in the Electronic Questionnaire Investigation Process (e-QIP) system. Attached are the e-QIP instructions for your use. Once you have finished entering your information into e-QIP, print, sign and return these forms along with the other security forms mentioned in the SAC letter sent from the location coordinator.

- E-QIP certification form
- Authorization of Release of Information
- Medical Release

If you have any questions or concerns regarding e-QIP, please contact me at 301-504-1277 or by e-mail at (generic e-mail will be set up for customers)

3 Attachments



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-APPENDIX D-
OFFICIAL OFFER LETTER

Date

Name
Street Address
City, ST Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms.

I am pleased to notify you of your tentative selection for a position in the (name of agency). This offer is contingent upon the favorable adjudication of a Special Agreement Check (SAC). Retention in the position is contingent upon favorable adjudication of background investigation/security checks.

Position:

Grade and Salary:

Location:

Effective Date: Upon favorable adjudication of your SAC, you will be provided an official start date

Type of Appointment:

After your SAC has been favorably adjudicated and an official start date has been established, you will report at (time) to (contact) at (address), for orientation and completion of appropriate forms. (contact) can be reached at xxx-xxx-xxxx. Your appointment confers retirement coverage, and you will have the opportunity to enroll in the Federal Employees Health Benefits and Group Life Insurance programs. Detailed information concerning your Federal employment benefits may be found at http://opm.gov/insure/health/new_employees.asp and http://www.opm.gov/fers_election/ri_90/f_toc.htm.

(DELETE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS THAT DO NOT APPLY):

(NON SY POSITIONS) As a new permanent employee, you will be subject to a one year probationary/trial period beginning _____.

(SY POSITIONS) As a new permanent employee, you will be subject to a three year probationary period beginning _____ and ending _____. **(If appropriate include)** The starting date of your probationary period is _____ because your previous service as a _____ from _____ to _____ met a portion of the probationary period requirement.



(NON SY OR SY POSITIONS if the probationary requirements have been fully met)

Based on your previous assignment as a _____ from _____ to _____, your one/three year probationary period has been completed.

(OPTIONAL) A recruitment incentive has been authorized for you in the amount of **(ENTER AMOUNT)**. All applicable Federal and State taxes will be deducted from this amount. In order to process the incentive, the enclosed service agreement must be signed, dated, and returned in the envelope addressed to me.

(OPTIONAL) Information regarding travel allowances will be provided by _____ of the (enter Area Office, City, ST, Telephone #). You are considered a (select one of the following and delete others: New Appointee, DEMO New Appointee, or Transferee) pursuant to the travel regulations. Do not incur any travel expenses prior to contact with that office.

The Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996 requires that most Federal payments be made by electronic funds transfer (EFT). **Please complete and bring either Form SF-1199A or FMS-2231 with your account or financial institution information when you report for duty.** (NOTE: Exceptions to this law can be based on hardship. Specifically, waivers for individuals are available if receiving your payment electronically would cause a financial hardship or a hardship because you have a physical or mental disability, or because of geographic, language or a literacy barrier.) These forms can be found electronically at <http://fms.treas.gov/forms.html>.

If position is subject to financial disclosure requirements, include this paragraph and cc the REE Ethics Staff with a copy of the position description.

(OPTIONAL- CODE 4 CONFIDENTIAL FILERS)

Your position meets criteria defined at 5 CFR § 2634.904, and in order to avoid possible conflict-of-interest situations, you will be required to submit an initial and annual OGE Form 450, Confidential Financial Disclosure Report. You must complete the attached OGE Form 450 within 30 days of your effective date and return the form to the REE Ethics Office, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1168, Beltsville, MD 20705-5102. The form can also be downloaded at: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/ethics/ethicsforms.htm>

Within 90 days from the effective date of this appointment, you must complete an initial ethics orientation. With supervisory approval, you are entitled to one hour of official duty time to complete a computer based training module, "New Employee Ethics Orientation." This module is available for your review at: <http://www.usda-ethics.net/training>. You will be directed to a secure site that will record your completion of this module. By nature of this appointment, you will be required to complete annual ethics training. If you have any questions regarding completion of the financial disclosure report or training requirements, please contact the REE Ethics Office on 301-504-1467. Any possible conflict of interest should be resolved prior to your appointment.

(OPTIONAL—CODE 3 PUBLIC FILERS) Your position meets criteria defined at 5 CFR § 2634.202, and in order to avoid possible conflict-of-interest situations, you will be required to submit an initial, annual and termination SF-278, Executive Branch Public Financial Disclosure Report. You must complete the attached SF-278 within 30 days of your effective date and return the form to the USDA Office of Ethics, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 347-W, Washington, DC 20250. The form can also be downloaded at: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/ethics/ethicsforms.htm>

Within 90 days from the effective date of this appointment, you must complete an initial ethics orientation. With supervisory approval, you are entitled to one hour of official duty time to complete a computer based training module, “New Employee Ethics Orientation.” This module is available for your review at: <http://www.usda-ethics.net/training>. You will be directed to a secure site that will record your completion of this module. By nature of this appointment, you will be required to complete annual ethics training. If you have any questions regarding completion of the financial disclosure report, please call 202-720-2251. If you have questions regarding training requirements, please contact the REE Ethics Office on 301-504-1467. Any possible conflict of interest should be resolved prior to your appointment.

INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH FOR ALL OTHER EMPLOYEES:

Within 90 days from the effective date of this appointment, you must complete an initial ethics orientation. With supervisory approval, you are entitled to one hour of official duty time to complete a computer based training module, “New Employee Ethics Orientation.” This module is available for your review at: <http://www.usda-ethics.net/training>. You will be directed to a secure site that will record your completion of this module. If you have any questions regarding completion of the training requirements, please contact the REE Ethics Office on 301-504-1467. Any possible conflict of interest should be resolved prior to your appointment.

If you are unable to report as indicated above, or you have any questions, please call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

We welcome you to the (name of agency).

Sincerely,

NAME OF SPECIALIST
Human Resources Specialist

cc:
LAO (Position or SF-52#)
Supervisor
OPF
Casefile



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics
Agricultural Research Service

-APPENDIX E-
PRE-EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION MEMO

Date

SUBJECT: Pre-employment Background Investigation

TO: Name, Personnel Security Specialist

FROM: Name, Title

Attached are the pre-employment background investigation forms for (name of selectee). Please notify me when the SAC has been favorably adjudicated. My e-mail address is (e-mail address).

- OFI-86C – Special Agreement Checks
- OF-306 – Declaration of Federal Employment
- SF-87 – Fingerprint Chart
- Resume or OF-612
- e-QIP Certification Form
- Authorization of Release of Information
- Medical Release

(7) Enclosures

Cc:
Servicing Personnel Specialist



-APPENDIX F- DEFINITIONS

Special Agreement Checks (SAC)

A special agreement between the Office of Personnel Management's Office of Federal Investigations (OPM/OFI) and a department or agency which provides for OPM/OFI to conduct special specific record checks. These checks include credit and criminal background history.

Coordinator

Individual assigned to managing the investigation process for the location (i.e. Administrative Officer, Program Assistant, Personnel Assistant, etc.).

Electronic Questionnaire for Investigation Processing (e-QIP)

An electronic processing system which is part of an e-government initiative sponsored by the Office of Personnel Management. e-QIP allows selectees to electronically enter, update, and transmit their personal investigative data over a secure Internet connection to their employing agency for review and approval.

Bio-Safety Level (BSL)

A combination of work practices and physical containment requirements designed to reduce the risk of laboratory infection when working with infectious material. The degree of protection recommended is proportional to the risk associated with an agent.

Personnel Security Level (PSL)

Designation assigned to positions that are located at BSL-3 facilities. The designations are commensurate with low, moderate, and high-risk levels of public trust and have similar investigative requirements.

Public Trust

A public trust is a background investigation that is conducted for those who are in positions that are classified as moderate risk or high risk. Public Trust is the potential for moderate to serious impact involving duties of considerable importance to the agency's mission. High Risk has the potential for exceptionally serious impact on the integrity and/or efficiency of the organization's mission.

Investigations for people which have the potential to affect adversely the integrity, efficiency, effectiveness, or delivery of public service, and for certain sensitive positions that do not require access to classified information. These positions require the completion of the Standard Form (SF-85P) Questionnaire. The form requests information back 7 years.

National Security

National security positions are positions that have the potential to cause damage to the national security. These positions are designated non-critical sensitive, critical-sensitive, or special sensitive sensitivity. Many of these positions also require access to classified information at the Confidential, Secret, or Top Secret level. Positions with Top Secret access have the potential for exceptionally grave damage to the national security; Secret access has the potential for serious damage to the national security. These positions require the completion of the Standard Form (SF-86) Questionnaire. The form requests information back 10 years.

National Agency Check and Inquiries (NACI)

A NACI is a non-sensitive background investigation for low-risk public trust positions. The form that is used is the Standard form (SF-85) Questionnaire. The form requests information back 5 years.