

DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR,
ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL
MANAGEMENT LISTENING POST
JANUARY 2007

1. REHIRING OF RETIRED EMPLOYEES:

The issue of rehiring retired employees generated a lengthy discussion among participants. The basic question posed by the LAO's is "can we hire retired employees." AFM response follows:

Response from APD

ARS can contract with a former employee without any special approvals and there is no waiting period. All the normal contracting procedures apply.

Response from HRD

To rehire people who have retired, we rehire them as "re-employed annuitants". The salary they earn is off-set by the amount of their annuity. I always recommend that a retired person stay off the rolls for at least one pay period before coming back on as a re-employed annuitant – this saves a lot of confusion in the NFC system as far as pay-setting and the off-set is concerned. If a location is going to hire a re-employed annuitant, I ask that the LAO track the numbers in the accounting system, to help us make sure the person is not being paid a full salary. Many times we have overpaid people who come back as re-employed annuitants, and it's a sad time when they have to pay it back. To bring someone back using re-employed annuitant, we need a 52 and position description as usual.

The other way for a retired person to stay connected with us is through a Collaborator appointment. This is a ZZ appointment (as compared to GS). The person receives no salary, but since they are on a Federal appointment, they can legally work in our lab/office space, use lab and office equipment, drive a government vehicle, attend meetings on behalf of the agency and we can pay for the travel; and they are covered by OWCP in the event of a mishap. For Collaborator appointments we need a 52 and a list of duties (don't need a full position description).

In either case, if a person was a "financial disclosure filer" in his/her previous appointment, they will have to file again under the new appointment.

OPM has proposed new rules to lighten up on the restrictions for hiring retired people that would involve not requiring the offset to their salary. We

submitted comments supporting the new rules, and suggested even greater flexibility than they initially proposed, stating that being able to hire retired people to train their replacement would be a good Knowledge Management strategy (KM is an item under Human Capital in the President's Management Agenda), and would help reduce downtime as the number of retiring people increases. We have not yet seen the final new rules yet.

HRD advises that as soon as you know someone is going to retire, please send in the 52 and begin the recruitment. We have no restrictions on this – there may be Area policies in place surrounding this issue, but HRD would rather begin the recruitment so there is less down time between the time the person retires and the time the new person comes on board. HRD also has been supportive in those few instances in which the replacement is hired prior to the current employee's retirement. Financial issues at the location may prohibit this, or there may be Area policies which discourage this practice, but it is not prohibited by any HR regs. A few months of overlap would be reasonable – 6 or more months would not be reasonable.

Status of LAO pd: The Work Group has developed draft pd's, and is currently working on a standardized recruitment package as well as standardized performance elements. The Work Group is planning to have the package ready for Jim's and Dr. Knipling's review by the end of February, and for presentation to the AC and AFMC at their March (joint) meeting.

2. No Allowance in overlap of retiring employees with recruitment

There was a good deal of discussion regarding the overlap of retiring employees with the entrance of new recruits. All participants seem to recognize the benefit of having experienced employees participate in the orientation and training of new employees, but few people have succeeded in obtaining approval to do it. It was agreed that AFM would pursue this issue further through direct discussions with the Human Resources Division.

3. How changes in procurement affect rural locations

A couple of participants from rural Mid West Area locations discussed the difficulty they have in acquiring support and maintenance services from local vendors who are not willing to be paid with the credit card and register with the CCR. The discussion centered on the perception that implementation of IAS imposed additional reporting burdens, i.e., FPDS-NG, than existed prior to IAS.

Response from Acquisition and Property Division (APD)

Unfortunately, as you know there is no relief when it comes to IAS. It is not a more efficient system for anyone. It isn't just remote locations. It took Mary almost an hour to figure out how to do a receipt and that was with help

from Brad. If IAS were our car or home we would have gotten rid of it long ago. No one would put up with something like this in their personal life.

For services she should just continue to write checks if the vendor doesn't take the card as long as the services are \$2,500 or less, which that sounds like is the case. Right now we are a long way off from including credit card purchases in IAS so she doesn't need to be concerned with the CCR requirement.

4. Insufficient or outdated manual regarding SCA policies and procedure

There was concern expressed that ARS Manual 280.0 is outdated.

Response from Extramural Agreements Division (EAD)

The Extramural Agreement Division (EAD) acknowledges that many policies and procedures found in Extramural Agreement Manual (EAM) 280.0 are outdated and/or obsolete. Since its publication in 1994, numerous changes to extramural agreement policies, procedures, processes, and deployment of a new Agreements Information Management System (AIMS) continue to erode the information published in the EAM.

To supplement the EAM guidance, EAD publishes interim policy via bulletins, as in the case of Bulletin 07-001, which outlines revised policy and procedures for developing, negotiating, awarding, and administrating Research Support Agreements.

We also issue permanent policy via Policies and Procedures (P&Ps), as in the case of P&P 700.0, which prescribes ARS policy for delegating extramural agreement authority. In addition, there are on-line user guides and instructions for AIMS and Grants.gov requirements.

So that you may locate these published policies and guidance easily, we have included the following links on our web site:

- AIMS manual - <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/agreements/AIMS.htm>
- Grants.gov manual - <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/agreements/files/UserInstructionsGrantsGov.doc>
- P&Ps and Bulletins - <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/agreements/ADODR.htm>

Implementation of the 2006 Business Process Review (BPR) of Extramural Agreements recommendations will inevitably result in more changes to the program, policies and procedures, including revisions to both ARIS and AIMS. Guidance issued as a result of the BPR will be available to all ARS employees sometime in February, or early March 2007.

5. Need for greater IT support

There was a brief discussion on the issue of obtaining more direct IT support for the locations. During discussion, we learned that this was primarily an isolated issue of concern, expressed by an LAO whose Area had recently lost its IT Specialist. AFM recommends that any concern for IT support at any location be addressed with the Area office.

6. CARE manuals not updated quick enough to keep up with changes

There was a brief discussion regarding CARE manuals and the process for how they are updated.

Response from CARE Coordinator

CARE questions are updated each year before the review season starts. The updates are done by the HQ functional specialists. These folks are also responsible for alerting me if there are any major changes during the year that would affect a CARE review. When that happens I put out an alert to all CARE team leaders who make adjustments in any upcoming reviews.

Generally we do not make hard copy changes to the questions until the next year. The questions are 50-60 pages. Keep in mind that when a change comes mid- year, several CARE reviews will already have been completed.

7. Outlook of FY2007 Budget

Do you have any additional information for the FY2007 Budget? We are still under a third Continuing Resolution (CR) through February 15, 2007. ARS will continue to operate under the House-passed bill, which is 6 percent less than FY 2006 level. If we continue to operate our budget under the CR conditions, will the Budget Office at HQs provide further guidance how to deal with the upcoming budget shortfall? Will you consider to give us further guidance for hiring personnel and/or foreign travel? Will the ARS implement the hiring freeze until we have firm directions from the OMB or President?

Response from AFM

Due to the rapid development of the budget issue, we will not repeat the discussion as it will be obsolete by the time these notes are published. It is important to note that the Deputy Administrator strongly advised that there are no plans to implement a hiring freeze in ARS. AFM recommends that LAO's seek guidance from their Area Offices for current budget updates.

8. Review of the LAO's PD's

What is the status of the LAO Position Description review? What will be the outcome of this review? How will it impact the LAO grades and duties? I am very interested in finding more information regarding this subject.

Response from HRD

The standard PD may, in fact, change how individual LAOs operate. One of the reasons for the decision to craft a standard pd is to set expectations for these positions operate with consistency across the agency – all toward providing support to the mission of the agency. Be assured that there is no motivation to downgrade any LAO- we have heard that some LAO's think there might be downgrades and that is just not true. The ultimate grade structure is yet to be determined. Each DAD will work with their LAOs and Research leaders to implement the new pd's and performance standards in an orderly fashion, after they are approved by me (Jim) and the Administrator.

The Work Group has developed draft pd's, and is currently working on a standardized recruitment package as well as standardized performance elements. The Work Group is planning to have the package ready for Jim's and Dr. Knipling's review by the end of February, and for presentation to the AC and AFMC at their March (joint) meeting. Expect to be completed by early summer. Never intended to downgrade or upgrade with a stroke of a pen. Will discuss with DAD's the concern to allow others to take LAO training.