

Deputy Administrator, Administrative and Financial Management
Listening Post
October 24, 2006

The following topics were discussed at the Deputy Administrator's Listening Post held October 24, 2006.

ARMPS and SAMS Software:

1. In the previous DOS software the approved ARMPS could be aggregated into the new fiscal year SAMS program. With the new Oracle platform Locations have to manually enter the approved ARMPS into the SAMS program.
2. Also, it is my understanding in the previous DOS software the previous approved ARMPS could be copied into the draft ARMPS and then Locations updated. Is the Oracle platform scheduled to be upgraded to allow Locations to aggregate between ARMPS and SAMS programs?

Response from Financial Management Division (FMD)

Right now, information from SAMS can be imported into ARMPS, which initiates the "draft ARMP". However, at this point, if a change to personnel information is required, that change has to be made in both ARMPS and SAMS.

The ability to export the information from ARMPS to SAMS is definitely on our list of things to do. The requirements are currently "under development". When they are finalized, the OCIO will begin working on the function.

It is not quite as easy as it may seem. As you might remember, it did not work "perfectly" in the old system information was duplicated or lost, so we can't just mimic what the old system did.

Also, in the old ARMP system, you could rollover the old year to the new and that became your draft. You then imported SAMS information and continued working to update for the current year.

Now, when you import SAMS into ARMPS, it automatically sets up some of the tables so the old rollover feature is not required.

E-Travel:

Concern was expressed regarding rumors that the LAO's will have a similar responsibility with E-Travel as they do with Integrated Acquisition System (IAS). For example, in IAS, as a Budget Approver, "I have to approve every requisition and I've been told I will have to approve each

airline ticket and authorization.” What will the LAO role be when the E-Travel is up and running?

Response from FMD

Regarding the rumor around E-Travel, we do not know the various roles yet and how this will play out but, please don't spread rumors. We certainly do not want to compare anything to IAS other than IAS. The way we will approach E-Travel implementation is to develop our ARS implementation approach using a robust team of ARS staff including a DAD, ABFO, LAO, a scientist, a secretary, and ATA, as well as, persons from my travel staff. We will design the system using a team approach to make sure it will work most advantageously for ARS. Our best chance for success is to take the people that will be using the system and use them as team members to design the process.

LAO Position Descriptions (PD):

What is the status of this? From the notes of the last teleconference it said a new PD was being drafted. Will it be generic enough for all LAO's.

Response from Human Resources Division (HRD)

A good working draft of a proposed new standard PD for LAOs will be reviewed and discussed at the upcoming Administrative Financial Management Council (AFMC) meeting in Alabama. The Task Group has done a good job of capturing current duties and responsibilities as well as those envisioned for the future, and the next step is to provide an opportunity for the entire AFMC to review, discuss, and make any changes. The standard PD is intended to describe how the Agency wants all LAOs to operate. Having said that, I realize there could be individual instances in which a position might operate differently and which must be considered on an individual basis.

As the Agency's research program has grown over the past several years, our business processes to support that research have become more complex. New responsibilities are being assigned to LAOs and there are new expectations on these positions and the people in them, as to how the Agency views them. New skills are and will be required. Prior to development of this new standard PD, the AFMC developed a set of competencies for the LAO position. Competencies are KSAs, that is, knowledge, skills, and abilities, plus behaviors that are required for performance in a position. These competencies not only support the PD, but also form the basis for future recruitment strategies, training plans, and performance plans.

This package of a standard PD, recruitment strategy, training, and performance plans will not only support uniformity in these critical positions, but will also save time of the Research Leader (RL) who supervise these positions. For example, when a vacancy occurs, the RL will not have to spend a lot of time working on a vacancy announcement and recruitment strategy, we will simply implement the standard recruitment strategy. Likewise, the RL will not have to devise performance plans, a set of elements and standards will already be available for implementation.

Note: This initiative is a priority for AFM and USDA.

Integrated Acquisition System (IAS)

1. Are other location Purchasing Agents having problems assimilating to the new IAS system? It would be great if there was an FAQ page for them to refer to that deals with the real day-to-day functions as they experience them. Mike McGee has been great, but he doesn't have all the answers since he doesn't experience the procurement process through IAS first hand.

Response from Acquisition and Property Division (APD)

Yes, everyone is struggling learning the new system. You are not alone. An REE IAS Web site was posted 11/9/2005. It has a Q&A section.

You can access it directly at: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/initiatives/IAS/>

It is also linked from the AFM Home Page which is at: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/index.htm>

2. There was a concern expressed for the time it takes to enter credit card buys into IAS.

Response from APD

Credit card (purchase card) buys are not currently being entered into IAS. Although the Department anticipated having a purchase card module ready for the IAS version update that will be deployed in December 2006, the purchase card module is no longer a certainty for this IAS release. When it does occur, from the requisitioner's end, the time requirements will be unchanged since the entry will be processed in the exact same manner; time requirements are anticipated on the buyer's end. However, since the module is not ready, we do not have a response other than to say it will take no longer to enter, than it currently takes to process a purchase order. As a reminder, the purchase card module will apply only to those actions above the micro-purchase threshold (\$2,500).

3. Is there any validity in making it a cardholder's responsibility (who happen to be, in a large part, scientists and technicians) to manage PCMS charges in yet another administrative system, IAS, as well as continue to enter and reconcile charges in CATS and take care of PCMS reconciliations? Please keep in mind the researchers are already complaining heavily about the current administrative duties taking precedence over research. Please help!

Response from APD

Right now purchase cards shouldn't go through IAS and if the buy is under \$2,500 it will never go through IAS. When we do get a purchase card buy through IAS we have the

program office cancel it. There is no interface with IAS, PCMS, or systems like CATS; so there will be duplicative effort at times.

Note: APD is working with the Department in an effort to correct and/or modify IAS functions where required.

PCMS:

Will card limits be raised to \$3000?

Response from APD

We are awaiting a decision by the Department's program manager for the purchase card about raising the limit on USDA's micro-purchase cardholders. The Service Contract Act (\$2500) and Davis Bacon Act (\$2000) thresholds did not change with the \$3000 FAR change to the micro-purchase threshold. The Department is currently considering how or if they want to make this change due to these other limitations.

Privacy Act Training:

Are contractors required to complete Privacy Basic Training through AgLearn?

Response from APD

Contractors can access AgLearn to take the Privacy Act training. It is APD's understanding that each Area has to set up domain for non-Federal employees to get access to AgLearn. This also involves the non-Federal employees getting e-Authentication. Linda Rafats from OCIO advised that the Area Information Technology Specialists (AITS) are aware of this issue, and have been working on this issue for some time. Since this is all very technical, Locations should contact their AITS's for assistance to get contractors access to AgLearn and Privacy Act training.

Identification Badges

What is the status of the new ID badges?

Response from HRD

Dave Love's response-Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 12 directed the establishment of a common identification standard for Federal employees and contractors. As the first phase of HSPD 12 implementation, Personal Identity Verification (PIV) procedures for new ARS hires were implemented in March 2006. A PIV process for contract employees is pending and will be communicated when it has been established.

As a key component, of HSPD 12, all USDA employees should be issued a new PIV card during the next 2 years. The new card has been labeled a "LincPass" in honor of President Lincoln. The issuance of the LincPass will begin in 4 metropolitan areas (NYC, Washington D.C., Seattle, and Atlanta) starting in early CY 2007. The issuance of the LincPass to all USDA employees is projected to be completed by October 2008.

Regarding the issuance of ID badges to contractors, the Director of APD has currently indicated that we will pursue a position of "business as usual" at this time. Any change to this position will be formally issued in the future.

Ethics Training

There was concern expressed for the recent notification to all employees advising of the Ethics Training requirement and that the message was confusing to many.

Response from HRD

A message was distributed to all REE employees about 2 weeks ago on the annual ethics training requirement and a modified Confidential Financial Disclosure Report. While the communication was sent to all employees, action was required only for those in positions subject to the financial disclosure requirements. In an effort to clarify the intended audience, the message included a Statement that " If your position is not subject to financial disclosure requirements, you may disregard this message." We will continue to work with the OCIO on a mechanism to limit these communications to those required to take the annual training. Sorry for any confusion.

Note: AFM has agreed to provide a separate advance notification to the LAO prior to issuing an all employee transmission which may require the LAO to intercede with instructional information.

Electronic Employee Orientation

Is there some effort being made to develop an employee orientation CD or on-line orientation training for new employees?

Response from HRD

HRD takes the lead on overall orientations for new employees to the Agency. We contacted HRD to request a response to this question/issue and was advised by Dave Love that on-line orientation is in the development stage and should be available within a few months. Information will be issued by HRD on this.