

## APD ALERT

# PROMOTING THE ABILITYONE PROGRAM



### **BACKGROUND**

The AbilityOne Program was created by the Javits-Wagner-O’Day (JWOD) Act and is guided by FAR Subpart 8 and 41USC 46-48c. The JWOD Act of 1938 created jobs and training for individuals who are blind or have severe disabilities and established the Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled (41 CFR 51). The Committee for Purchase is comprised of 15 Presidentially-appointed members that established and maintain a “Procurement List” of all products and services required to be purchased by the Federal Government from AbilityOne participating nonprofit agencies.

Two central nonprofit agencies, through the Committee for Purchase, administer the AbilityOne Program. The National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH work with over 600 nonprofit agencies across the country, as well as in Puerto Rico and Guam. Through meaningful employment, the AbilityOne Program is a cost-effective way to help people who are blind or have other severe disabilities achieve greater independence, enabling many individuals to reduce the dependence on Government support.

Departmental Regulation (DR) 5080-001 entitled “USDA and the AbilityOne Program: Increasing Achievements and Setting Department Goals,” dated May 23, 2007, outlines procedures, requirements and performance measures for increasing the Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) participation in the AbilityOne Program.

As required by AGAR 408.705(a), ARS has appointed an AbilityOne Program Advocate for the Agency. The Advocate designated is the Chief, Acquisition Programs and Oversight Branch, of the Acquisition and Property Division (APD), Administrative and Financial Management in ARS. This position was identified by the Head of the Contracting Activity Designee (HCAD) as the individual to serve in this important role. This position already serves as the Competition Advocate for ARS, which places this

individual in an effective position to serve in the Agency role of AbilityOne Program Advocate.

REE supports the AbilityOne Program in its organizational activities to the fullest extent possible. The Administrators of the REE mission agencies signed a memorandum of support committing REE to a greater utilization of the AbilityOne Program, thereby creating new opportunities and employment for persons with disabilities. REE has historically taken an aggressive position in promoting the AbilityOne Program for the products and services provided by the AbilityOne Program participating nonprofit agencies. These actions have included the following:

1. Issued APD Alert No. 2011-06, USDA Mandatory Sources for Office Supplies, which provides guidance to our procurement and nonprocurement personnel on using the mandatory blanket purchase agreements to obtain office supplies, including the AbilityOne Program nonprofit agencies.
2. Issued REE Manual # 213.3M, REE Purchase Card Program, which Agency procurement and nonprocurement personnel use to be trained in the mandatory sources of supply, including the AbilityOne Program.
3. ARS Field Acquisition Manual #213.2 contains instructions on the AbilityOne Program for all procurement personnel conducting simplified acquisitions.
4. All REE procurement and nonprocurement cardholders and their associated approving officials are required to take the USDA Web-based AbilityOne Program Training in AgLearn prior to receiving to receiving a purchase card and/or convenience check authority.

REE does not have a separate awards program to recognize participation in the AbilityOne Program. Instead, the recognition is built into existing awards programs as follows:

1. Individual Performance Awards for Acquisition Personnel

Acquisition personnel have elements requiring active support of all procurement preference programs, including the AbilityOne Program. Depending upon the individual's support of the program, the accomplishments are recognized through the performance evaluation process and bonus awards associated with it.

2. AFM Annual Awards for Diversity

This ARS award program specifically recognizes the contribution of employees in the area of diversity, which also includes any deserved recognition of an individual who promotes and achieves successful accomplishments in the procurement preference program area, which includes the AbilityOne Program.

### 3. SPOT Awards

ARS has an active SPOT awards program in place which has allowed for the recognition of individual procurement and nonprocurement personnel's support of the mandatory supply sources, including the AbilityOne Program.

### 4. USDA Small Business and AbilityOne Awards Program

The Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization's (OSDBU) Small Business and AbilityOne Awards Program recognizes the work of USDA employees who have provided excellent support to the AbilityOne Program and AbilityOne businesses that have provided exemplary products or services to USDA. There are two AbilityOne awards:

- (Agency or Department) AbilityOne Program Contractor of the Year
- (Agency or Department) Employee Special Achievement Award (AbilityOne Program Area)

## **POLICY GUIDANCE**

It is REE policy that:

- REE will take actions necessary in order to promote and enhance REE's acquisition program in conjunction with the AbilityOne Program to obtain supplies and services directly from an AbilityOne participating nonprofit agency.
- Purchase cardholders should always buy items on the mandatory Procurement List from AbilityOne Program vendors before using commercial sources.
- REE will strive to increase their AbilityOne Program acquisitions annually by at least ½ percent of the total AbilityOne Program procurement dollar amount according to guidance in DR 5080-001.

## **SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Head of the Contracting Activity Designee (HCAD).** The HCAD will:

- Designate the REE AbilityOne Program Liaison and take actions to increase REE's participation in the AbilityOne Program through contracting opportunities and program support.
- Ensure sufficient contract requirements are set aside for AbilityOne Program nonprofit agencies in an effort to increase participation in the AbilityOne Program.

**REE AbilityOne Program Liaison.** The REE AbilityOne Program Liaison will:

- Increase awareness of the AbilityOne Program in REE.
- Serve as REE's AbilityOne Program expert, guiding efforts to meet the goals and increase REE's participation in the AbilityOne Program through contracting opportunities.
- Inform the USDA AbilityOne Program Liaison of any disputes or problems that may require the attention of the USDA Committee member.
- Provide appropriate recognition via existing award programs to those that exceed in this area to the REE AbilityOne Program Liaison.
- Attend Departmental AbilityOne Program meetings to discuss Program issues, agency performance, successes, and other activities.
- Submit an annual AbilityOne Program Performance Plan to OSDBU as required in DR 5080-001.

**REE AbilityOne Program Coordinators.** The REE AbilityOne Coordinators will be designated by the Business Service Center Acquisition and Property Division Branch Chiefs. For the REE mission agencies (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Economic Research Service, and National Agricultural Statistics Service), the Coordinators will be designated by the administrators of the agencies. The REE AbilityOne Program Coordinators will:

- Increase awareness of the AbilityOne Program in their respective Agency/Area.
- Review annual procurement forecasts and Annual Resource Management Plans to direct appropriate procurement actions to AbilityOne sources.
- Serve as Agency/Area Program expert, guiding efforts to meet the goals and increase REE's participation in the AbilityOne Program through contracting opportunities.
- Inform the REE AbilityOne Program Liaison of any disputes or problems that may require the attention of the USDA AbilityOne Program Liaison.
- Provide appropriate recognition via existing award programs to those that exceed in this area to the REE AbilityOne Program Liaison.
- Submit an annual AbilityOne Program Performance Plan to the REE AbilityOne Program as required.

**Contract Specialists and Purchasing Agents.** Contract specialists and purchasing agents will to the maximum extent practicable, promote and enhance the agency's acquisition program by obtaining supplies and services directly from an AbilityOne participating nonprofit agency.

**Fundholders and Program Managers.** Fundholders and program managers will make a commitment to the AbilityOne Program and placed increased emphasis on obtaining products from the USDA blanket purchase agreement and services from an AbilityOne participating nonprofit agency.

### **ABILITYONE PROGRAM PERFORMANCE PLAN**

Each REE AbilityOne Program Performance Plan will include the following information:

- How the agency supported USDA's efforts to increase participation in the AbilityOne Program.
- The previous year's accomplishments by number and dollar amount of contracts awarded.
- The mechanism used to obtain the information provided, such as from an approved AbilityOne Program distributor, NISH and/or NIB officials, the Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation, and other internal procurement dollar tracking systems.

### **CONTACT**

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the specific designated individuals for your Agency/Area. Refer to APD Homepage for your contact at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/acquisitions/pdffiles/REEAbilityOneLiaisonandCoordinators.pdf>

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