United States Department of Agriculture
Research, Education, and Economics

ARS □ ERS □ NASS □ NIFA

Policies and Procedures

Title: Forms Management

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Distribution: All REE Offices in Headquarters, Areas, and Field Locations

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This P&P states policy and procedure for the creation, approval, design, and printing of the REE agencies' forms. It also provides procedures for requesting new or revised forms and establishes REE Forms as the electronic forms repository for the REE agencies.

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1.   Introduction

Need for Forms Management

Federal agencies use forms to organize, collect, and transmit information. By their specific characteristics forms:

- often guide the flow of work through an office or an entire organization,

- further the efficiency and accuracy of many administrative and operating tasks or procedures with minimal backtracking or delay, and

- provide the means for collecting and transmitting information quickly and efficiently, compiling a compact record, and standardizing tasks and procedures.

Management of the Forms Program

The Chief, Applications Development Branch (ADB), Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), oversees the REE agencies' forms management program. A forms manager is responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the program.

2.   Statement of Policy

REE offices will create and use forms in a cost effective manner. Therefore, they will:

- Maintain all forms for internal use within the REE agencies at the official REE forms site - https://reeforms.ars.usda.gov/REEFORMS/

- Create forms only when absolutely necessary

- Use forms as an efficient method of collecting information

- Minimize the stocking and printing of low volume use forms by designing forms suited for local reproduction

- Eliminate unnecessary and obsolete forms

- Adopt electronic forms processing techniques and systems

- Use available SF, AD, and other available Federal forms when possible rather than creating agency-specific forms

Issuances (P&P) Management. REE and ARS, NIFA, ERS, NASS forms should be prescribed by a P&P, unless it is self-explanatory. A P&P makes the introduction of a form official and ensures that correct clearance procedures are followed. P&P's provide the best medium for communicating guidance that cannot be placed completely on the face of the form, including:

- Clear instructions on who prepares the form, the number of copies prepared, and where and when to submit copies.

- A sample illustration of the form with sample entries, when this will help to ensure the accurate completion of the form.

- Unusual information about the availability of the form; i.e., its source and date of supply.

ADB's staff reviews P&P's that reference forms. Likewise, before a new form is created, the ADB staff requests copies of related P&P's and/or other prescribing documents.

3.   Definitions

Agency Form - A form established by a USDA agency used only within that agency or other agencies serviced by that agency.

Agriculture Department Form (AD) - A form originating in USDA and used by two or more USDA agencies.

Form - A fixed arrangement of captioned spaces designed for entering and extracting information or descriptive material. Certain items such as contract stipulations, instruction sheets, notices, tags, labels, posters, envelopes, form letters or checklists, and ADP forms are considered forms when it is necessary to control them for purposes of reference, printing, stocking, and distribution; to reproduce them in quantity; or to use them

Electronic Form - An arrangement of fixed data elements that have been (1) electronically captured (scanned) or electronically created, (2) magnetically stored (hard or floppy disk) for use on a computer, (3) filled in on-screen or sent to an output device (printer), and (4) electronically transmitted in its entirety or provided for transmission of data entered in the form.

Optional Form - A form developed by a Federal agency for use in two or more Federal agencies, and approved by GSA for non-mandatory Government-wide use.

Other Federal Agency Form - A form that originated in another Federal agency that is commonly used by USDA agencies. Typical Federal agency forms are those of the Office of Personnel Management and the General Services Administration.

Standard Form - A form prescribed by a Federal agency and approved by GSA for mandatory Government-wide use.

4.   Operating the Forms Program

ADB operates the REE forms program. All ARS, ERS, and NIFA forms; and NASS' administrative forms are included in this program. NASS operates a separate program for its program-related forms. The REE forms program functions include:

- Analysis

- Approval and Control

- Design and Composition

- Reproduction, Storage, and Stocking

- Periodic Forms Review

- Coordination and Training

Approval and Control

ADB assigns a number and an edition date to each new or revised form and maintains the following forms control records and files:

Historical Files. These official background files consist of a record of each form from its development to its current status.

Functional Files. Used during forms analysis, these files contain a copy of related forms classified by subject. They are a working tool that brings together forms dealing with similar subjects and functions.

Forms Index. This is an internal record of all REE forms that is used by the forms manager to assign form numbers and track Agency forms.

Design and Composition

ADB designs forms using a forms software package. Forms design and composition conform to the standards and guidelines set forth in the General Services Administration (GSA) Handbook,

Forms Analysis and Design. These forms are electronically created and stored on a Web server for user access. Users may retrieve, fill-in, store, transmit, and print forms from personal computers.

In addition to REE and ARS, ERS, NASS, NIFA forms, ADB designs and publishes Agriculture Department (AD) forms and Standard and Optional forms (SF and OF), except those that GSA deems may not be electronically generated.

Upon completion of forms design, ADB:

- clears the final copy with the originating office for REE agencies' forms;

- requests approval of final copy from the Departmental Forms Manager for AD, SF, and OF forms;

- publishes approved forms.

Prioritizing Form Requests

ADB prioritizes requests for new and revised forms on a first come first served basis along with consideration for customer deadlines. Designing a new form or making major revisions to an existing form takes 4-6 weeks. The work includes designing, reviewing, testing, and publishing the form. Making minor revisions to an existing form takes 1-2 weeks.

Reproduction, Storage, and Stocking Methods

Reproduction, storage, and stocking of most forms is unnecessary. ADB publishes electronically designed forms for users in the REE agencies. The forms are placed on a Web server, making them available to users with Internet access and Adobe Reader software, as required. Storing forms on a Web server eliminates the need to print and manually stock forms in valuable office space and ensures that the latest version is always available.

Electronic Forms. These forms consist of those that can be filled in electronically as well as those requiring completion by hand. If a form is not available on the electronic forms Web site at https://reeforms.ars.usda.gov/REEForms, send an E-mail to ADB at aris@ars.usda.gov with a subject line of e-Forms and include the form number and name, and a copy of the form, if possible. ADB will review the request and advise the user. However, there are some forms that cannot be electronically created such as folders, cards, stickers, booklets, and envelopes

Printed Forms. These are forms that do not lend themselves to being stored electronically like folders, cards, stickers, booklets, envelopes, etc. Within the OCIO, the OCIO Mission Area REE (OMAR) staff arranges for the printing, storage, and stocking of any REE agencies' forms or AD forms sponsored by the REE agencies that must still be printed. These printed forms are stocked

at the Beltsville Service Center (BSC) located in Beltsville, Maryland. Additionally, the BSC stocks SF, AD, OF, and other Federal agencies' forms that are used USDA-wide.

Periodic Forms Review

ADB annually coordinates a review of forms by the functional sponsors of the forms to determine if the existing form is current and still required. ADB also consults with functional sponsors and users of a form to identify problems and recommend changes or revisions.

Training

A forms user guide is available on the electronic forms Web site at https://reeforms.ars.usda.gov/REEForms. Clicking on the User Guide folder will display a copy of the user guide which you can view and print.

5.   Procedures

Originators of Forms for REE Agencies

This section explains the process for requesting new forms or changes to existing forms. Users can make such requests. ADB requests approval from the functional sponsor of the form.

New Forms. Before creating a new form, consider the following questions:

- Is the form really necessary?

- Can an existing form meet this need?

- Will the proposed form fit the present or anticipated procedure?

- Will it improve operations?

- Will it be economical to use?

If the answers to the above questions justify the creation of a new form:

- Discuss the workload required by the form with the individuals and/or offices having an interest in the form.

- A written justification in the form of an E-mail is required from the functional sponsor of the form.

- Develop the draft design and layout for the proposed form. Include necessary regulatory statements.

  1. **Forms used for claims or certification** must declare penalties for deliberate falsification, such as:

     > Claim forms: "A knowingly false claim is a criminal offense. Title 18 U.S.C., section 1001."

     > Forms not involving claims: "A willful false statement is a criminal offense. Title 18 U.S.C., section 1001."

  2. **Forms approved by Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995** must contain a statement listing the valid OMB control number and the burden estimate.

  3. **The Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. 552a,** requires the explanation to individuals directly solicited to give personal information:

     - The authority (whether granted by statute or by Executive order) that authorized the solicitation of the information

     - The intended use of the information

     - Routine uses of the information

     - Whether the disclosures of the information are mandatory or voluntary and the effects on individuals who do not provide all or any part of the requested information

     - Submit the draft copy and justification to the appropriate official within your organization for review and approval. If approved, submit the package to ADB by E-mail to aris@ars.usda.gov with a subject line of e-Forms.

Revised Forms.

- REE personnel should critically evaluate frequently used forms and make recommendations for improvements or deletions to ADB, including reasons for any changes. Employees should consider these questions:

1. What other forms provide all or part of the information requested?

2. Why is the form cumbersome?

3. Why has the form lost validity or currency?

- Develop the draft or note proposed changes on a copy of an existing form.

- Submit the draft copy or marked up version of the existing form to the appropriate official within your organization for review and approval. If approved, submit the package to ADB by E-mail to aris@ars.usda.gov with a subject line of e-Forms.

- Send notification to ADB by E-mail to aris@ars.usda.gov with a subject line of e-Forms when the revision of a P&P requires a change in or elimination of an existing form.

Other Official Federal Forms

Users of AD, SF, OF, and other Federal forms who want these forms included in electronic format should submit to ADB by E-mail to aris@ars.usda.gov with a subject line of e-Forms both a blank copy and a completed version of the form. These forms are designed by ADB using the following guidelines:

- The electronic reproduction must be complete, containing all instructions and questions that appear on the current official form.

- The wording and punctuation of all items, instructions, and identifying information must match exactly.

- No data elements may be added or deleted.

- The sequence and format for each item on the form must be reproduced to the highest degree possible.

- Each item must print on the same page in approximately the same location. Forms printed face to back on the original may be printed on single sheets provided each page is identified with the form number, page number, and edition date.   Multiple part sets may also be printed as single sheets.

- The final form must be printed using the same dimensions (length and width) as the current edition.

- All blocks must remain approximately the same size and lines must remain

approximately the same length.

- The electronic form must contain the vendor/producer at the bottom of the face page.

Exceptions to Changes of Other Federal Forms

Certain exceptions to forms are granted when it can be demonstrated that changing the content, format, or printing is cost effective.

- **Content** exceptions are changes to the data elements of the form such as additions, deletions, or revisions.

- **Format** exceptions are changes made by rearranging the data elements or changing the spacing of entries on a form without changing the data elements.

- **Printing** exceptions are changes in the printing specifications for a form (such as changes to paper, including size and establishment of sets and marginally punched constructions) that result in no changes in content or format.

To request exceptions, submit the following to ADB by E-mail to aris@ars.usda.gov with a subject line of e-Forms for approval:

AD Forms:

An original and one copy of form AD-687, Forms Action Request and Notice;

Sample copies of proposed changes; and justification or supporting documents.

SF and OF Forms:

An original and three copies of SF-152, Request for Clearance, Procurement, or Cancellation of Standard and Optional Forms; Sample copies of proposed changes; a justification statement explaining the reasons for the request, including: Why the standard or optional form cannot be used in the prescribed, existing format or construction or is not economical as prescribed; the proposed alterations or changes; the expected cost benefits; and an estimate of the number of forms expected to be used in 1 year. Since the use of optional forms is not mandatory, an exception is not required if an agency elects not to use an optional form.

6. Ordering Forms

Electronic Fill In Forms

Forms that can be filled in via personal computers are stored on the Web server and are available

for use as needed. If a supply of blank forms is required, users can:

- print, via office laser printer, the number of copies required; or

- print a supply of the form (using the electronic version as a camera copy) via the USDA Short Order Duplicating Stations, USDA Printing Plant, or if a field office, via a local printer.

All Other Forms

Order forms (including REE, ARS, ERS, NASS, NIFA, AD, SF, and OF) incapable of being filled in electronically from the BSC or the GSA.

BSC-Stocked Forms:

Electronic Ordering. If possible, use the electronic ordering system. To do so, your office must have a personal computer and Internet access. The Web site address is http://www.bsc.usda.gov. This method reduces order turnaround time and minimizes data entry time and errors. Contact BSC for required customer identification numbers.

Mail Orders. Submit form CFPDC-1, Request for Forms and Publications, when ordering 15 line items or less. When ordering more than 15 line items, use form CFPDC-1A (Continuation Sheet). Be sure to include the order number from form CFPDC-1 in the space provided on the continuation sheet.

GSA-Stocked Forms:

Electronic Ordering. If possible, use the GSA Advantage online ordering system. To do so, your office must have a personal computer and Internet access. The Web site address is http://www.gsaadvantage.gov. You must register to use this system by clicking on the Register button on the home page and complete the Member Registration form and enter a User ID and Password.

Mail Orders. Complete and submit form AD-633, Multiuse Standard Requisitioning/Issue System Document, to the GSA Federal Supply Service (FSS) office servicing your region. Detailed ordering procedures are found in the FEDSTRIP Operating Guide.

7.   Summary of Responsibilities

Chief, Applications Development Branch, OCIO.

- Manages the REE Agencies Forms Management Program, including the

o   Control and coordination of forms development activities.

o   Review of REE agencies' form requirements and assignment of form numbers and edition dates.

o   Approval of forms for usage and printing.

o   Cancellation of forms no longer needed.

- Assures conformity with Department policies and standards, including adequate systems for reviewing, clearing, and controlling forms.

o   Analyzes and designs all REE agencies' forms (except non-administrative NASS forms) to conform with standards prescribed in the GSA Forms Design Handbook.

o   Designs electronic versions of REE, ARS, ERS, NASS, NIFA, AD, SF, OF, and other Federal agencies' forms upon request.

o   Assists the REE agencies in establishing and implementing agency forms management programs.

o   Maintains a central historical file of internal agency forms.

o   Monitors forms usage.

o   Coordinates forms management with other areas of information management.

o   Analyzes, reviews, and approves requests for exceptions to SF, OF, and AD forms, before forwarding to the Departmental Forms Management Officer (DFMO).

o   Provides technical assistance to all serviced agencies.

o   Represents the REE agencies in matters relating to forms management with the Department.

o   Notifies the DFMO of needed changes on AD forms and submits copies to the DFMO for review.

ARS Headquarters, Areas, and Location Offices

- Coordinate forms management within the organization following procedures in this P&P.

- Provide liaison with ADB.

- Create and approve only necessary forms in the administration of functional areas.

- Develop requirements and draft the layout of new forms.

- Determine if the information being collected is available from other sources or other forms.

- Coordinate a new requirement with ADB and the Issuances Manager.

- Ensure each new form developed or revised is supported by a P&P prescribing its use, when applicable. Provide ADB with a copy of the supporting P&P.

- Coordinate the conversion of REE agencies' use of printed forms to an electronic version with ADB.

Census and Survey Division, NASS

- Provides all forms management support to NASS for program forms and questionnaires.

Originators of Forms

- Ensure that an issuance prescribes and supports the use of each form.

- Develop draft, design, and layout for the forms that they originate.

- Establish initial quantities and determine inventory and reorder levels for such forms.

- Develop justification statements to obtain approval for exceptions to SF, OF, and AD forms.

All Forms Users

- Notify ADB when electronic forms require adjustments.

- Order forms only when necessary.

- Evaluate frequently used forms and make recommendations for improvements or deletions.

Paul R. Gibson
Chief Information Officer, OCIO
Agricultural Research Service