

United States Department of Agriculture  
Research, Education, and Economics

# ARS □ ERS □ NASS □ NIFA

## *Policies and Procedures*

**Title:** Recruitment, Retention, and Relocation Incentives and Other Special Pay

**Number:** P&P 412.5.v.2 - REE

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Human Capital Planning and Development  
Agricultural Research Service

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**Distribution:** REE offices in Headquarters, Areas, and Field Locations

This P&P provides guidance and information on recruitment, retention, relocation and travel incentives, pay and travel advances, superior qualifications and pre-employment interviews, as well as other allowances, differentials and repayment of student loans.

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# 1. General Information on Recruitment, Relocation, and Retention Incentives

## 1.1 References

This Policy and Procedure (P&P) must be used in conjunction with:

- 1.1.1 [Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 575-Recruitment, Relocation and Retention Incentives; Supervisory Differentials; and Extended assignment Incentives, Subparts A-Recruitment Incentives, Subpart B-Relocation Incentives, and Subpart C-Retention Incentives. \(5 CFR 575, subparts A, B, and C\);](#)
- 1.1.2 [Title 5, United States Code, section 5753 \(5 U.S.C. 5753\);](#) and
- 1.1.3 [Title 5, U.S.C. 5754.](#)

## 1.2 Policy

It is USDA's policy to allow delegated officials within Agency and Staff Offices to authorize and approve recruitment and relocation incentives and to recommend retention incentives in accordance with the law and regulations set forth in the P&P, as well as the governing regulations identified in Section 1.1 of this P&P.

## 1.3 Delegation of Authority

- 1.3.1 The Secretary retains the authority to review and approve payment of recruitment, relocation and retention incentives to employees appointed to a:
  - 1.3.1.1 Senior-level or scientific or professional position paid under [5 U.S.C. 5376](#);
  - 1.3.1.2 Senior Executive Service position paid under [5 U.S.C. 5383](#); or
  - 1.3.1.3 Position under the Executive Schedule established under 5 U.S.C. Chapter 5311-5317, or a position for which the rate of pay is fixed by law, at a rate equal to a rate for the Executive Schedule (for example, an employee of the Senior Scientific Research Service SSRS).
- 1.3.2 The Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA) retains the authority to review and approve payment of retention incentive to a:
  - 1.3.2.1 General Schedule position as defined under [5 U.S.C. 5332](#) or [5305](#) (or similar special rate authority);

**1.3.2.2** Prevailing rate (wage) position as defined under [5 U.S.C. 5342\(a\)\(3\)](#); or

**1.3.2.3** Law Enforcement Officer position as defined in [5 CFR 550-103](#);

The overall authority, or a portion thereof, may be redelegated to the Director, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), at the sole discretion of the ASA.

**1.3.3** Agency and Staff Office Heads are delegated the authority to review and approve payment of recruitment and relocation incentives, consistent with existing statutes, to employees appointed to a:

**1.3.3.1** General Schedule position as defined under [5 U.S.C. 5332](#) or [5305](#) (or similar special rate authority);

**1.3.3.2** Prevailing rate (wage) position as defined under [5 U.S.C. 5342\(a\)\(3\)](#); or

Agency and Staff Office Heads may re-delegate this authority to their Deputy Administrator Management and/or their Mission Area Human Resources Director.

**1.3.4** At the discretion of the Director, OHRM, or designee, the delegations of authorities made under this P&P may be revoked at any time where violations of this and other governing policies are discovered. The delegation of authority will be reinstated by the Director, OHRM, or designee, when the Agency or Staff Office puts the appropriate management controls in place to correct the violation.

## **1.4 Exclusions from Coverage**

An Agency or Staff Office may not pay a recruitment, relocation, or retention incentive to an employee in a position:

**1.4.1** To which they are appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate;

**1.4.2** In the Senior Executive Service as a non-career appointee (as defined in [5 U.S.C. 3132\(a\)\(7\)](#));

**1.4.3** Excepted from the competitive service by reason of its confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character; or

**1.4.4** Not otherwise covered by the exclusions in paragraphs 1.4.1, 1.4.2, and 1.4.3 of this Section:

- 1.4.4.1 To which an individual is appointed by the President without the advice and consent of the Senate;
- 1.4.4.2 Designated as the head of USDA; or
- 1.4.4.3 In which the employee is expected to receive an appointment as the head of USDA.

## 1.5 Definitions

Agency. An organizational unit of USDA, other than a Staff Office as defined below, whose head reports to an Under Secretary.

Agency Head. The head of a USDA agency or an official who has been delegated the authority to act for the head of the agency in the matter concerned.

Competencies. The knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics an individual needs to perform the duties of a position.

Different Geographic Area. For the purpose of paying a relocation incentive a move to a different geographic area means that the worksite of the new position is 50 or more miles from the worksite of the position held before the move or where a waiver of the 50-mile requirement is approved under Section 2.1.4, of this P&P, means less than 50 miles from the worksite of the position held before the move if the employee must relocate to accept the position.

Employee. An employee that has the meaning given in [5 U.S.C. 2105](#), except that the term also includes an employee described in [5 U.S.C. 2105\(c\)](#). Additionally, for the purpose of a:

Recruitment incentive also includes an employee described in [5 U.S.C. 2105\(e\)](#). Employee means an individual not yet employed who has received a written offer to be newly appointed or reappointed and has signed the written service agreement before payment of the incentive.

Relocation incentive also includes an employee who is appointed without a break in service to a position in a different geographic area or whose duty station has changed permanently or temporarily to a different commuting area, assuming all other conditions in Section 2 are met.

Employee of the Federal Government. An employee (as that term is defined in 5 U.S.C. 2105, except that the term also includes an employee described in 5 U.S.C. 2105 (c) and (e)) of any part of the Government of the United States.

Newly Appointed. For the purpose of paying a recruitment incentive:

- The first appointment, regardless of tenure, as an employee of the Federal Government; or
- An appointment of a former employee of the Federal Government following a break in service of at least 90 days; or
- An appointment as an employee of the Federal Government when the employee's Federal service during the 90-day period immediately preceding the appointment was limited to one or more of the following:
  - A time-limited or non-permanent appointment in the competitive or excepted service;
  - A non-permanent appointment (excluding a Schedule C appointment under [5 CFR part 213](#)) in the competitive or excepted service;
  - Employment with the government of the District of Columbia (DC) when the candidate was first appointed by the DC government on or after October 1, 1987;
  - An appointment as an expert or consultant under [5 U.S.C. 3109](#) and 5 CFR part 304;
  - Employment under a provisional appointment designated under [5 CFR 316.403](#); or
  - Employment under the Student Career Experience Program under [5 CFR 213.3202\(b\)](#).

#### Forms

ARS-43	USDA Project Deferred Cash Payment Agreement
ARS-494	Revocable Permit
REE-11	New Hire Recruitment Incentives
REE-12	Service Agreement
REE-14	Current Federal Employee Incentives
REE-15	Waiver of Relocation Expenses Statement of Understanding
REE-16	Occupancy of Federally Owned Quarters
REE-17	Rates for Quarters and Services Furnished to Federal Emp.

Rate of Basic Pay. The rate of pay fixed by law or administrative action for the position to which an employee is or will be appointed before deduction and including any special rate under [5 CFR part 530](#), Subpart C, or similar payment under other legal authority, and any locality-based comparability payment under [5 CFR part 532](#), Subpart F, or similar payment under other legal authority, but



excluding additional pay of any other kind. For example, a rate of basic pay does not include additional pay such as night or environmental differentials.

Service Agreement. A written agreement between a USDA Agency or Staff Office and an employee under which the employee agrees to a specified period of employment with the Agency or Staff Office in return for payment of an incentive.

Staff Office. A USDA administrative office whose head reports to the Secretary.

Staff Office Head. The Head of a Staff Office or an official who has been delegated the authority to act for the Head of the Staff Office in the matter concerned.

## 1.6 Responsibilities

The Secretary is responsible for:

- Reviewing and approving payment of recruitment, relocation and retention incentives paid to employees as outlined in Section 1.3 of this P&P.

The ASA is responsible for:

- Reviewing and approving retention incentives as outlined under Section 1.3 of this P&P.
- Re-delegating the authority, if applicable, as outlined in Section 1.3 of this P&P.

The Director, OHRM is responsible for:

- Establishing USDA's recruitment, relocation and retention incentive policy and providing technical assistance and advice on issues that arise;
- Monitoring Agency and Staff Office compliance with USDA's policy;
- Requesting ASA approvals under Chapter 1, Section 1.3 of this P&P made at the request of an Agency or Staff Office;
- Requesting OPM waivers based upon critical Agency or Staff Office need made at the request of an Agency or Staff Office; and
- Reporting to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as required.

Agency and Staff Office Heads are responsible for:

- Approving recruitment and relocation incentives, where authorized, in writing;
- Requesting approval of retention incentives, where authorized, in writing;
- Establishing written policy and procedures that address how recruitment, relocation, and retention incentive determinations will be made in their individual Agency or Staff Office;
- Ensuring that recruitment, relocation and retention incentive determinations within their Agency or Staff Offices are made or requested in accordance with the requirements set forth in this P&P;
- Monitoring and assessing the program; and
- Reporting to OHRM, as requested.

## **2. Recruitment and Relocation Incentives**

### **2.1 Requirements**

**2.1.1** Each determination to pay a recruitment or relocation incentive shall be:

- Reviewed and approved by an official of the Agency or Staff Office who is at a higher level than the recommending official, unless there is no official at a higher level;
- Based on a written determination that, in the absence of such an incentive, the Agency or Staff Office would encounter difficulty in filling the position with a high quality candidate;
- Made before or after the recruitment or vacancy announcement takes place, but prior to the employee entering on duty; and
- Considered in addition to any decision made to reimburse employees for relocation expenses under the General Service Administration's Federal Travel Regulations

**2.1.2** When necessary to make a timely offer of employment, Agency or Staff Office Heads may establish criteria, in advance, based on identification of qualifications typically possessed by high quality candidates for a specific position or other

similar positions and authorize the recommending official to offer a recruitment incentive (in an amount within a pre-established range) to any high quality candidate without further review or approval.

- 2.1.3** In determining which employees may receive a recruitment incentive, an Agency or Staff Office may target groups of positions that have been difficult to fill in the past or that may be difficult to fill in the future, and may make the required written determination to offer a recruitment incentive on a group basis. Relocation incentives must generally be made on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.1.4** Relocation incentives can only be paid to an employee whose new position is not in the same geographic area as the worksite of the position held immediately before the move. A position is considered to be in a different geographic area if the worksite of the new position is 50 or more miles from the worksite of the position held immediately before the move. If the worksite of the new position is less than 50 miles from the worksite of the position held immediately before the move, but the employee must relocate (i.e., establish a new residence) to accept the position, a waiver may be granted by the Agency or Staff Office using the authority in [5 CFR 575.205\(b\)](#). In all cases, the employee must establish a residence in the new geographic area before the Agency or Staff Office may pay a relocation incentive to the employee.
- 2.1.5** A relocation incentive may be paid only when the employee's rating of record (or an official performance appraisal or evaluation under a system not covered by 5 U.S.C. chapter 43 or [5 CFR part 430](#)) for the position held immediately before the move is at least "fully successful" or equivalent.
- 2.1.6** In determining whether a recruitment or relocation incentive should be paid and the amount to be paid, an Agency or Staff Office shall consider the following factors, as applicable in the case at hand:
- The availability and quality of candidates possessing the competencies required for the position, including the success of recent efforts to recruit high quality candidates for similar positions, using indicators such as offer acceptance rates, the proportion of positions filled, and the length of time required to fill similar positions;
  - Recent turnover in similar positions;
  - Labor-market factors that may affect the ability of the Agency or Staff Office to recruit high quality internal or external candidates from similar positions now or in the future (may include such factors as salary ranges of comparable positions, scarcity of skills, emerging technology, etc.);
  - Special or unique competencies required for the position;

- For recruitment incentives, the practicality of using the superior qualifications appointment authority provided by 5 U.S.C. 5333 and 5 [CFR 531.203](#)(b) or a student loan repayment authority prescribed by 5 U.S.C. 5379 or 5 CFR 537 alone or in combination with a recruitment incentive;
- Funding availability;
- Positive and negative impacts on the morale of current employees;
- For incentives for temporary relocations, whether it would be more cost-effective to pay per diem for a detail;
- Attractiveness of the duty station in such terms as remoteness, cost of living, community amenities, etc.;
- Agency or staff office efforts to use non-pay authorities, such as special training and work scheduling flexibilities, to resolve difficulties alone or in combination with a recruitment incentive;
- The desirability of the duties, work or organizational environment, or geographic location of the position;
- The urgency of filling the position;
- The salaries typically paid outside the Federal Government for similar positions;
- The approved use of a direct hire authority by OPM; and
- Other supporting factors as the Agency or Staff Office may determine appropriate.

## **2.2 Payment of Recruitment and Relocation Incentives**

**2.2.1** An Agency or Staff Office may pay a recruitment or relocation incentive:

- As an initial lump-sum payment at the commencement of the service period required by the service agreement or before the employee enters on duty once the employee has signed a service agreement established under this plan;
- In installments throughout the service period required by the service agreement;
- In a combination of these methods.

**2.2.2** The total amount of a recruitment or relocation incentive paid to an employee in a service period may not exceed 25 percent of the annual rate of basic pay of the employee at the beginning of the service period multiplied by the number of years (including fractions of a year) in the service period (not to exceed 4 years).

- For hourly rate employees who do not have a scheduled annual rate of basic pay, compute the annual rate required under this paragraph by multiplying the applicable hourly rate in effect at the beginning of the service period by 2087 hours.
- For the purpose of determining the number of years in a service period under this paragraph, divide the total number of calendar days in the service period by 365 and round the result to two decimal places. For example, a service period covering 39 biweekly pay period equals 546 days, and 546 days divided by 365 days equals 1.50 years.

**2.2.3** At the written request of an Agency or Staff Office, OHRM may request that OPM waive the limitation set out in paragraph 2.2.2 of this Section. The written request must demonstrate that the competencies required for the position are critical to the successful accomplishment of an important agency or staff office mission, project, or initiative (e.g., programs or projects related to a national emergency or implementing a new law or critical management initiative). Under such a waiver, the total amount of the incentive paid to an employee in a service period may not exceed 50 percent of the annual rate of basic pay of the employee at the beginning of the service period multiplied by the number of years (including fractions of a year) in the service period. In no case may a waiver provide total incentive payments exceeding 100 percent of the employee's annual rate of basic pay at the beginning of the service period. Waiver requests must include the following:

- A description of the critical Agency or Staff Office need that the proposed incentive would address;
- The basis for determining that a position is likely to be difficult to fill in the absence of an incentive;
- The basis for authorizing an incentive;
- The basis for the amount and timing of the approved incentive payment;
- The length of the required service period;
- In the case of a relocation incentive, that the worksite of the employee's new position is not in the same geographic area as the worksite of the

position held immediately before the move (or that a waiver was approved and that the employee has established a residence in the new geographic area); and

- Any other information pertinent to the case at hand.
- An Agency or Staff Office may not pay a relocation incentive until the employee establishes a residence in the new geographic area.
- An Agency or Staff Office may pay a recruitment incentive to an individual not yet employed who has received a written offer of employment and signed a written service agreement.
- A recruitment or relocation incentive is not part of an employee's rate of basic pay for any purpose.
- Payment of a recruitment or relocation incentive is subject to the aggregate limitation on pay under [5 CFR part 530](#), subpart B.

## **2.3 Service Agreements**

- 2.3.1** Before a recruitment or relocation incentive may be paid, the employee must sign a written service agreement to complete a specified number of months of employment in the agency offering the incentive or the successor Agency or Staff Office in the event of a transfer of function.
- 2.3.2** The minimum period of employment that may be established under a service agreement for an incentive shall be one year and shall not exceed four years.
- 2.3.3** An Agency or Staff Office may delay a service agreement commencement date until after the employee completes an initial period of formal training or required probationary period when continued employment in the position is contingent on successful completion of the formal training or probationary period. The Agency or Staff Office must make the determination to pay an incentive before the employee enters on duty in the position. However, the service agreement must specify that if an employee does not successfully complete the training or probationary period before the service period commences, that Agency or Staff Office is not obligated to pay any portion of the incentive to the employee.
- 2.3.4** Service under one service agreement will run concurrently with service under any other simultaneous or subsequent service agreements in effect.
- 2.3.5** An Agency or Staff Office may not commence a relocation incentive service agreement during the service agreement period of a previously authorized relocation incentive service agreement.

- 2.3.6** An Agency or Staff Office may commence a relocation incentive service agreement during a service period established by an employee's previously authorized retention incentive service agreement or while an employee received previously authorized retention incentive payments without a service agreement.
- 2.3.7** An Agency or Staff Office may not commence a recruitment incentive service agreement while an employee receives retention incentive payments without a service agreement or during the service period established by an employee's relocation or retention incentive service agreement.
- 2.3.8** Except as specified in Section 2.3.3 above, the required service period must begin upon the commencement of service with the Agency or Staff Office.
- 2.3.9** The service period must end on the last day of a pay period.
- 2.3.10** The service agreement must specify the total amount of the incentive, the method of paying the incentive, and the timing and amounts of each incentive.
- 2.3.11** The service agreement must include the conditions under which the Agency or Staff Office must terminate the service agreement. Reasons include:
- If the employee is demoted or separated for cause;
  - If the employee receives a rating of record of less than fully successful or equivalent; and
  - If the employee otherwise fails to fulfill the terms of the service agreement.
- 2.3.12** The service agreement must include the conditions under which the employee must repay a recruitment or relocation incentive as specified in this plan.
- 2.3.13** The service agreement may include any other terms or conditions, including discretionary reasons in Section 2.4 of this P&P that, if violated, will result in termination of the service agreement. For example, the service agreement may specify the employee's work schedule, type of position, and the duties he or she is expected to perform. In addition, the service agreement may address the extent to which the period of time on detail, in a non pay status, or in a paid leave status are creditable towards the completion of the service period.
- 2.3.14** Annually, as long as conditions giving rise to a determination to pay a group recruitment incentive still exist, the determination to pay the incentive must be reviewed and recertified by the Agency or Staff Office.

## **2.4 Repayment of Recruitment and Relocation Incentives**

- 2.4.1** An Agency or Staff Office may unilaterally terminate a recruitment or relocation incentive service agreement based solely on the management needs of the Agency or Staff Office. For example, an Agency or Staff Office may terminate a service agreement when the employee's position is affected by a reduction in force, when there are insufficient funds to continue the planned incentive payments, or when the agency assigns the employee to a different position, if the different position is not within the terms of the service agreement.
- 2.4.2** An authorized Agency or Staff Office official must terminate a recruitment or relocation incentive service agreement if an employee is demoted or separated for cause (i.e., for unacceptable performance or conduct), if the employee receives a rating of record (or an official performance appraisal or evaluation under a system not covered by 5 U.S.C., chapter 43 or [5 CFR part 430](#)) of less than fully successful or equivalent, or if the employee otherwise fails to fulfill the terms of the service agreement.
- 2.4.3** If a service agreement is terminated under paragraph 2.4.1 of this Section, the employee is entitled to all recruitment or relocation incentive payments that are attributable to completed service and to retain any portion of an incentive payment he or she received that is attributable to uncompleted service.
- 2.4.4** If a service agreement is terminated under paragraph 2.4.2 of this Section, the employee is entitled to retain recruitment or relocation incentives previously paid by the agency that are attributable to the completed portion of the service period. If the employee received recruitment or relocation incentive payments that are less than the amount that would be attributable to the completed portion of the service period, the agency is not obligated to pay the employee the amount attributable to completed service, unless the agency agreed to such payment under the terms of the recruitment or relocation incentive service agreement. If the employee received recruitment or relocation incentive payments in excess of the amount that would be attributable to the completed portion of the service period, he or she must repay the excess amount. The full amount of the authorized incentive must be prorated across the length of the service period to determine the amount attributable to completed service and uncompleted service. Exception: When the employee is separated as a result of material false or inaccurate statements or deception or fraud in examination or appointment, or as a result of failure to meet employment qualifications, the employee must repay all recruitment incentives received under that service agreement.
- 2.4.5** If an employee fails to reimburse the paying agency for the full amount owed under paragraph 2.4.4 of this Section, the amount outstanding must be recovered from the employee under the agency's regulations for collection by offset from an indebted Government employee under [5 U.S.C. 5514](#) and [5 CFR part 550](#),



Subpart K, or through the appropriate provision governing Federal debt collection if the individual is no longer a Federal employee.

- 2.4.6** The right of recovery of an employee's debt may be waived in whole or in part by the Agency or Staff Office Head if he or she determines that recovery would be against equity and good conscience or against public interest.
- 2.4.7** When an employee is promoted or reassigned to a position with greater promotion potential in another USDA Agency or Staff Office, the service agreement will be transferred with the employee and no repayment will be required by the USDA agency which initiated the bonus and any subsequent payments due the employee will be the responsibility of the new hiring Agency or Staff Office. Employees that subsequently fail to complete the remainder of the service agreement and are subject to the requirements of paragraph 2.4.4 of this Section will be indebted to the agency that actually made the payment that is recoverable.
- 2.4.8** The termination of a service agreement is not grievable or appealable.
- 2.4.9** The agency must give a 30 day notification in writing to an employee when it terminates a recruitment or relocation incentive.

## **2.5 Evaluation and Reports**

- 2.5.1** OHRM will conduct periodic review and evaluations of the use of recruitment and relocation incentives to ensure that the payment of the incentives conform to the criteria established under this P&P. Agency and Staff Offices must periodically evaluate the use of recruitment and relocation incentives within their respective Agencies and Staff Offices.
- 2.5.2** As requested by OHRM, each Agency and Staff Office must submit a written report to OHRM on their use of the authority. Requests made by OHRM will specify all required information.
- 2.5.3** Agencies and Staff Offices must keep a record of each determination to grant recruitment or relocation incentives and make these records available for review upon request.

## **2.6 Procedures, Records and Forms**

- 2.6.1** Each determination to pay a recruitment or relocation incentive will be documented on form REE 11/12. A copy of the determination will be maintained and made available for review upon request.
- 2.6.2** Service agreements made in connection with recruitment and relocation incentives will be documented on form REE 11/12. A copy of the service agreement will be placed in the Electronic Official Personnel Folder (EOPF) for

the period of time specified in the service agreement. A second copy will be attached to the REE 11, New Hire Recruitment Incentives.

### **2.6.3 Recruitment Incentives**

#### **Selecting Official**

- initiates form REE-11, New Hire Recruitment Incentives, by checking the block for Recruitment Bonuses;
- under “Justification,” completes section A determining whether the coverage will be under FEPCA or the ARS Demonstration Project;
- if a deferred payment is chosen under the ARS Demonstration Project completes the USDA Demonstration Project Deferred Cash Payment Agreement, ARS-43, obtains the employee’s signature and date, and signs and dates it and attaches it to the New Hire Recruitment Incentives form;
- includes a 12 month Service Agreement, REE-12, signed and dated by the employee; and
- signs and dates the form and forwards the package to the second level supervisor.

#### **Second Level Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

- reviews the request and approves or disapproves by signing or not signing the form; and
- returns the unsigned form and the package to the selecting official; forwards the signed form and the package to the Budget, Fiscal and Agreements staff in the appropriate Business Service Center.

#### **Budget, Fiscal and Agreements Staff (ARS); Budget Offices in ERS, NASS, and NIFA**

- reviews requested amount plus payment agreement and signs the form if concurs on available funds;
- returns package if funds are not available; and
- if concurs, forwards the package to the final approving authority.

#### **Final Approving Authority**

- reviews the form and approves or disapproves; and
- forwards the approved package to the Service Center for processing.

### **2.6.4 Relocation Incentives**

#### **Recommending Official**

- initiates form REE-14, Current Federal Employee Incentives, by checking the block for Relocation Expenses;
- completes Section B by checking the justification for the expenses;

- attaches a justification outlining the difficulty experienced in filling the position and the rationale for the amount proposed;
- if there is no relocation expense payment authorized, attaches the Waiver of Relocation Expenses Statement of Understanding, REE-15;
- includes a 12-month Service Agreement, REE-12, signed and dated by the employee; and
- signs and dates the form and forwards the package to the second level supervisor.

### **Second Level Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

- reviews the request and approves or disapproves by signing or not signing the form; and
- returns the unsigned form and the package to the selecting official; forwards the signed form and the package to the Budget, Fiscal and Agreements staff in the appropriate Business Service Center.

### **Budget, Fiscal and Agreements Staff (ARS); Budget Offices in ERS, NASS, and NIFA**

- reviews requested amount and signs the form if concurs on available funds; and
- returns the package if funds are not available; and
- if concurs, forwards the package to the final approving authority.

### **Final Approving Authority**

- reviews the form and approves or disapproves; and
- forwards the approved package to the Business Service Center for processing.

## **3. ARS Demonstration Project**

This project authority applies only to ARS due to specific legislation passed by congress. Recruitment incentives for ERS, NASS, and NIFA are found under Section 2 of this document.

ARS Demonstration Project cash payments have no prescribed limit on the amount of payment that may be negotiated. The amount will depend upon budget availability and the agreement of the Area Director. The cash payments may be made by one of the following means:

- lump sum upon entrance on duty;
- incrementally over a period not to exceed 36 months; or
- lump sum deferred until completion of a specified term of service, not to exceed 36 months.

These payments will be paid according to the schedule shown on the Deferred Cash Payment Agreement, ARS-43. Employees agree that no outstanding deferred or incremental amounts will

be paid in the event they are no longer employed by ARS. If a deferred payment schedule is arranged, each scheduled payment must be initiated with an SF-52, Request for Personnel Action. Payments are issued after the first salary check and are subject to tax withholdings. The schedule of payment is the length of the service agreement, not to exceed 36 months. Service under one service agreement will run concurrently with service under any other simultaneous or subsequent service agreements in effect.

## **4. Retention Incentives**

### **4.1 Requirements**

**4.1.1** Each determination to pay a retention incentive shall be:

- Approved by the ASA unless re-delegated under Section 1.3.2, of this P&P;
- Submitted to the ASA for approval, at least, 30 days in advance of the proposed effective date;
- Recommended by an official of the Agency or Staff Office who is at a higher level than the requesting official, unless there is no official at a higher level;
- Authorized only for current employees;
- Based on a written determination that the unusually high or unique qualifications (i.e., competencies) of the employee or a special need of the Agency or Staff Office for the employee's services make it essential to retain the employee and that, in the absence of such an incentive, the employee would be likely to leave the Federal Service (except as provided in Section 4.3 of this P&P);
- Based on a written description of the extent to which the employee's departure would affect the Agency or Staff Office's ability to carry out an activity or perform a function that is deemed essential to their mission;

**4.1.2** Except as provided in Section 4.1.3, an Agency or Staff Office may seek approval to pay a retention incentive to a group or category of employees under the conditions prescribed in this Section when they determine that:

- The unusually high or unique qualifications (i.e., competencies) of the group or category of employees, or a special need of the Agency or Staff Office for the employees' services, makes it essential to retain the employees in that group or category; and

- There is high risk that a significant number of the employees in the group would be likely to leave the Federal service in the absence of a retention incentive.
- 4.1.3** An Agency or Staff Office may not include in a group retention incentive authorization, an employee covered by [5 CFR 575.303](#)(b), (c), (e) or those in similar categories of positions approved by OPM to receive retention incentives under [5 CFR 575.303](#)(g).
- 4.1.4** A retention incentive may be paid only when the employee’s rating of record (or an official performance appraisal or evaluation under a system not covered by 5 U.S.C. chapter 43 or [5 CFR part 430](#)) is at least “fully successful” or equivalent.
- 4.1.5** In determining whether a retention incentive should be paid, and in determining the amount of any such payment, an Agency or Staff Office shall consider the following factors, as applicable in the case at hand:
- Employment trends and labor market factors such as the availability and quality of candidates in the labor market possessing the competencies required for the position and who, with minimal training, cost, or disruption of service to the public could perform the full range of duties and responsibilities of the employee’s position at the level performed by the employee;
  - The success of recent efforts to recruit candidates and retain employees with competencies similar to those possessed by the employee for positions similar to the position held by the employee;
  - Special or unique competencies required for the position;
  - Agency or Staff Office efforts to use non-pay authorities to help retain the employee instead of or in addition to a retention incentive such as:
    - Special training;
    - Work scheduling flexibilities; or
    - Improving working conditions;
  - The desirability of the duties, work or organizational environment, or geographic location of the position;
  - The extent to which the employee’ departure would affect the Agency or Staff Office’s ability to carry out an activity, perform a function, or complete a project that the Agency or Staff Office deems essential to its

mission;

- The salaries typically paid outside the Federal Government; and
- Other supporting factors as the Agency or Staff Office may determine appropriate.

**4.1.6** In determining whether a retention incentive should be paid for a group or category of employees and in determining the amount of any such payment, an Agency or Staff Office will consider the factors as listed in both Sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.5.

## **4.2 Payment of a Retention Incentive**

**4.2.1** A retention incentive will be calculated as a percentage of the individual employee's rate of basic pay not to exceed 25 percent for an individual employee or 10 percent for a group or category of employees.

**4.2.2** An Agency or Staff Office will pay a retention incentive in bi-weekly installments after completion of the specified period of service

**4.2.3** A retention incentive may not be paid in advance of fulfilling the service agreement period.

**4.2.4** At the written request of an Agency or Staff Office and with the concurrence of the ASA, OHRM may request that OPM waive the limitation set out in Section 4.2.1, based on critical need. The waiver can permit the agency to pay an individual employee or group of employees a retention incentive of up to 50 percent of the employee's basic pay. In addition to the determination required by Section 4.1, an Agency or Staff Office must determine that the employee's (or group of employee's) usually high or unique qualifications (i.e., competencies) are critical to the successful accomplishment of an important Agency or Staff Office mission, project, or initiative (e.g., programs or projects related to a national emergency or implementing a new law or critical management initiative). Waiver requests must include the following:

- A description of the employee's work requirements and responsibilities or if requesting a group retention incentive, a description of the group or category of employees and the number of employees to be covered by the proposed retention incentive;
- A description of the critical Agency or Staff Office need the proposed retention incentive would address;
- Documentation supporting the finding of Section 4.2.4;

- The proposed retention incentive percentage rate and a justification for that percentage;
- The timing and method making the retention incentive payments;
- The service period required; and
- Any other information pertinent to the case at hand.

**4.2.5** Payment of a retention incentive is subject to the aggregate limitation on pay under [5 CFR part 530](#), subpart B.

**4.2.6** A retention incentive is not part of employee's rate of basic pay for any purpose.

### **4.3 Special Provisions for Payment of a Retention Incentive to a Current Federal Employee**

**4.3.1** An Agency or Staff Office may request approval to pay a retention incentive to a current employee if they determine;

- The Agency or Staff Office has a special need for the employee's services that makes it essential to retain the employee in his or her current position during a period of time before the closure or relocation of the employee's office, facility, activity, or organization, given the Agency or Staff Office's mission requirements and the employee's competencies;
- The employee would be likely to leave for a different position in the Federal service in the absence of a retention incentive. For the purpose of this section, a different position in the Federal service is defined as within USDA from one Agency and/or Staff Office to another as well as outside USDA; and
- Other conditions set out in this Section and as required by [5 CFR 575.315](#) are met.

**4.3.2** Agencies or Staff Offices may request approval of a retention incentive under this circumstance for a group or category of employees if:

- There is a high risk that a significant number of the employees in the group would be likely to leave for different positions in the Federal service in the absence of a retention incentive;
- The Agency or Staff Office has a special need for the employees' services that makes it essential to retain the employees in their current position during a period of time before the closure or relocation of the employees'

office, facility, activity, or organization, given the Agency or Staff Office's mission requirements and the employee's competencies; and

- Other conditions set out in this Section and as required by [5 CFR 575.315](#) are met.

## **4.4 Service Agreements**

**4.4.1** Before a retention incentive may be paid, the employee, except as provided in Section 4.4.5, including each employee covered by a group retention incentive authorization and any employee who may receive a higher retention incentive as a result of an approved waiver of the maximum limit on the amount of a retention incentive, must sign a written service agreement to complete a specified period of employment with the Agency or Staff Office (or successor Agency or Staff Office in the event of a transfer of function).

**4.4.2** Agencies or Staff Offices are responsible for determining and requesting the length of the service period in their requests for approval. There is no minimum or maximum amount of time required.

**4.4.3** The service agreement must include the commencement and termination dates of the required service period. The service period must begin on the first day of a pay period and end on the last day of a pay period.

**4.4.4** The agreement must specify:

- The percentage rate;
- That the incentive will be paid in bi-weekly installments;
- The timing of the incentive payment(s);
- The conditions under which the Agency or Staff Office must terminate the service agreement before the employee completes the agreed upon service period;
- The effect of a termination, including the conditions under which the Agency or Staff Office will pay an additional retention incentive payment for partially completed service; and
- Any other terms or conditions that, if violated, will result in a termination of the agreement.

**4.4.5** Written service agreements are not required if the Agency or Staff Office:

- Pays the retention incentive in biweekly installments; and



- Sets each biweekly installment payable at the full retention incentive percentage rate established for the employee under Section 4.2.1.

**4.4.6** An Agency or Staff Office may not commence a retention incentive service agreement (or begin paying a retention incentive) during a period of employment established under any service agreement required for payment of a recruitment incentive.

**4.4.7** After a retention incentive service agreement has commenced (or retention incentive payments have commenced), an Agency or Staff Office may pay a relocation incentive.

## **4.5 Continuation, Reduction or Termination of a Retention Incentive**

**4.5.1** An Agency or Staff Office may unilaterally terminate a retention incentive service agreement based solely on the management needs of the Agency or Staff Office. For example, an Agency or Staff Office may terminate a service agreement when the employee's position is affected by a reduction in force, when there are insufficient funds to continue the planned retention incentive payments, when conditions no longer warrant payment at the level originally approved or at all, or when the Agency or Staff Office assigns the employee to a different position, if the different position is not within the terms of the service agreement.

**4.5.2** A service agreement must be terminated if the employee is demoted or separated for cause (i.e., for unacceptable performance or conduct), if the employee received a rating of record (or an official performance appraisal or evaluation under a system not covered by 5 U.S.C. chapter 43 or [5 CFR part 430](#)) of less than "Fully Successful" or equivalent, or if the employee otherwise fails to fulfill the terms of the service agreement.

**4.5.3** The termination of a service agreement is not grievable or appealable.

**4.5.4** The agency must notify an employee in writing when it terminates a retention incentive service agreement.

**4.5.5** If an Agency or Staff Office terminates a service agreement under Section 4.5.1, the employee is entitled to retain any retention incentive payments that are attributable to completed service and to receive any portion of a retention incentive payment owed by the Agency or Staff Office for completed service.

**4.5.6** If an Agency or Staff Office terminates a service agreement under Section 4.5.2, the employee is entitled to retain retention incentive payments previously paid by the Agency or Staff Office that are attributable to the completed portion of the service period. If the employee received retention incentive payments that are less than the amount that would be attributable to the completed portion of the

service period, the agency is not obligated to pay the employee the amount attributable to completed service, unless the Agency or Staff Office agreed to such payment under the terms of the retention incentive service agreement.

**4.5.7** Annually, as long as the conditions giving rise to the original determination to pay a retention incentive still exist, each determination to pay an incentive will be reviewed and recertified by the Agency or Staff Office, and re-approval gained from the ASA, if it is determined the payment is still warranted. Requests for re-approval must be submitted at least 60 days prior to the expiration of the current incentive.

**4.5.8** Agencies or Staff Offices must reduce or terminate a retention incentive authorization when no service agreement is required whenever payment at the level originally approved is no longer warranted. An Agency, Staff Office, or the ASA may consider the following factors in determining whether to reduce or terminate a retention incentive:

- Whether a lesser amount (or none at all) would be sufficient to retain the employee (or group or category of employees);
- Whether labor-market factors make it more likely (or reasonably likely) to recruit a candidate with competencies similar to those possessed by the employee (or group or category of employees);
- Whether the Agency or Staff Office's need for the services of the employee (or group or category of employees) has been reduced to a level that makes it unnecessary to continue payment at the level originally approved (or at all);
- Whether budgetary considerations make it difficult to continue payment at the level originally approved (or at all); or
- Other supporting factors as applicable to the case at hand.

**4.5.9** Agencies and Staff Offices must terminate a retention incentive authorization when no service agreement is required if the employee is demoted or separated for cause (i.e., for unacceptable performance or conduct), the employee receives a rating of record (or an official performance appraisal or evaluation under a system not covered by 5 U.S.C. chapter 43 or [5 CFR part 430](#)) of less than "Fully Successful" or equivalent, or the agency assigns the employee to different position.

**4.5.10** The termination or reduction of a retention incentive is not grievable or appealable under law or regulation.

**4.5.11** If a retention incentive is terminated or reduced under paragraph 4.5.8 of this Section, the Agency or Staff Office must notify the employee in writing. The employee is entitled to receive any scheduled incentive payments through the end of the pay period in which the written notice is provided or until the date of separation, if sooner.

**4.5.12** Because retention incentives are always paid prospective, there should be no need for repayment of a retention incentive.

## **4.6 Evaluation and Reports**

**4.6.1** OHRM will conduct periodic review and evaluations of the use of retention incentives to ensure that the payment of the incentives conform to the criteria established under this P&P. Agency and Staff Offices must periodically evaluate the use of retention incentives within their respective Agencies and Staff Offices.

**4.6.2** As requested by OHRM, each Agency and Staff Office must submit a written report to OHRM on their use of the authority. Requests made by OHRM will specify all required information.

**4.6.3** Agencies and Staff Offices must keep a record of each determination to grant retention incentives and make these records available for review upon request.

## **4.7 Procedures, Records and Forms**

**4.7.1** Each determination to pay a retention incentive will be requested and documented on form [AD-1073](#). A copy of the determination will be maintained by the Agency or Staff Office and made available for review upon request.

**4.7.2** A written notice of each retention incentive authorization will be provided to the employee involved in those cases where service agreements are not required. It will contain the percentage of salary, the expected duration of the allowance and specific dates covered, and provisions regarding early termination or reduction of the retention allowance.

### **4.7.3 Retention Incentives**

#### **Recommending Official**

- initiates form REE-14, Current Federal Employee Incentives, by checking the block for Retention Allowances;
- completes Section C, determining what percent of salary the allowance will be and its equivalence in dollars, the year of recertification, and the date of termination;
- attaches a justification stating the employee's unique qualifications or the special needs of the agency, the evidence the employee is likely to leave, and the extent to which the departure would affect the agency; and

- signs and dates the form and forwards the package to the second level supervisor.

### **Second Level Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

- reviews the request and approves or disapproves by signing or not signing the form; and
- returns the unsigned form and the package to the selecting official; forwards the signed form and the package to the Budget, Fiscal and Agreements staff in the appropriate Business Service Center.

### **Budget, Fiscal and Agreements Staff**

- reviews requested amount and signs the form if concurs on available funds;
- returns package if funds are not available; and
- if concurs, forwards the package to the final approving authority.

### **Final Agency Approving Authority**

- reviews the form and approves or disapproves; and
- forwards the approved package to the servicing Human Resources Division for processing.

### **Department Approving Authority**

- HRD sends package to the Department for approval
- Approves or Disapproves Retention Incentive Request

## **5 Pre-Employment Interviews**

### **5.1 Purpose**

To pay travel expenses to qualified, referred candidates to conduct interviews for vacant positions.

### **5.2 Background**

Hiring managers may wish to pay travel expenses for qualified candidates they would like to interview. Pre-employment interview expenses include payment of travel expenses from residence to the official duty station in accordance with the Federal Travel Regulations.

### **5.3 Policies**

Decisions on payment of expenses for pre-employment interviews will be based on a written determination. The justification section of form REE-11, New Hire Recruitment Incentives will be checked and the written determination attached. Agencies may reimburse all or part of pre-employment travel expenses, i.e., only subsistence or only common carrier transportation costs. If only common carrier expenses are authorized, agencies must pay the full amount to which a Government employee would be entitled for those expenses. Common carrier tickets that cost exceeds \$100.00 must be obtained by the agency and charged to the government through the use of the central-billed account.

All authorized expenses, with the exception of transportation expenses by common carrier, are to be paid, as incurred, by the interviewee. An interviewee cannot be issued a travel advance.

### **5.4 Responsibilities**

The office conducting the pre-employment interview is responsible for preparing the REE-11, New Hire Recruitment Incentives and obtaining signatures from approving officials. This office is also responsible for making any travel arrangements when the government is paying for common carrier costs and also for assisting the interviewee with submitting a voucher for other approved costs. Agencies will reimburse the interviewee for allowable travel expenses upon submission and approval of a travel voucher with proper receipts.

### **5.5 Authorities**

5 CFR 572.101 (b)  
5 CFR 572.102

### **5.6 Procedures**

Prepare REE-11 with appropriate justification.  
Obtain appropriate approval.  
Make travel arrangements.  
Conduct interviews.  
Prepare travel voucher.

## **Preemployment Interview Procedures**

### **Selecting Official**

- initiates form REE-11, New Hire Recruitment Incentives, by checking the block for preemployment interviews;

- checks the appropriate box under “Justification” and attaches a narrative statement;
- attaches the list of all candidates; and
- signs, dates, and forwards the package to the second level supervisor.

### **Second Level Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

- reviews request and approves or disapproves by signing or not signing the form; and
- returns the unsigned form and the package to the selecting official; forwards the approved package to the Budget, Fiscal and Agreements staff in the appropriate Business Service Center.

### **Budget, Fiscal and Agreements Staff**

- reviews requested amount and signs the form if concurs on available funds;
- returns the package if funds are not available; and
- if concurs, forwards the package to the final approving authority.

### **Final Approving Authority**

- reviews the form and approves or disapproves; and
- forwards the approved package to the Service Center for processing.

## **6 Superior Qualifications and Special Needs Pay-Setting**

### **6.1 Purpose**

This authority is used to make competitive offers to highly qualified candidates entering the Federal service to set the payable rate of basic pay for an employee above the minimum rate of the highest applicable rate range for the employee’s position of record.

### **6.2 Background**

This authority may be used for a first appointment as a civilian employee of the Federal Government; or a reappointment that is considered a new appointment under 5 U.S.C. The authority may be used for a reappointment only when the employee has had a break in service of at least 90 days from the last period of civilian employment with the Federal Government.

May be used for a reappointment without requiring a 90 day break in service if the candidate’s civilian employment with the Federal Government during the 90 day period immediately preceding the appointment was limited to employment under a time-limited appointment in the competitive or excepted service.

### 6.3 Policies

Managers may choose to set the payable rate of basic pay of a newly appointed employee above the minimum rate of the grade under this section if the candidate meets one of the following criteria:

The candidate has **Superior Qualifications**. This should be based on the level, type or quality of the candidate's skills or competencies demonstrated or obtained through experience and/or education, the quality of the candidate's accomplishments compared to others in the field, or other factors that support a superior qualifications determination. The candidate's skills, competencies, experience, education, and/or accomplishments must be relevant to the requirements of the position to be filled. The qualities must be significantly higher than that need to be minimally required for the position and/or be of a more specialized quality compared to other candidates; or

The candidate fills a **Special Need**. Managers may determine that a candidate fills a special need if the type, level or quality of skills and competencies or other qualities and experiences possessed by the candidate are relevant to the requirements of the position and are essential to accomplishing an important agency mission, goal or program activity.

### 6.4 Authorities

5 CFR 531.212  
5 U.S.C. 5333

### 6.5 Responsibilities and Procedures

**Selecting Official** initiates Form REE-11, New Hire Recruitment Incentives, by checking the block for superior qualifications-advanced step; checks the appropriate box under "Justification" and attaches a narrative statement; completes the Worksheet for Calculating Appointment Above the Minimum Salary Based on Superior Qualifications, REE-13; and signs and dates the form and forwards the package to the second level supervisor.

**Second Level Supervisor** reviews request and approves or disapproves by signing or not signing the form; and returns the unsigned form and package to the selecting official; forwards the signed form and package to the Budget, Fiscal and Agreements Staff in the appropriate Business Service Center

**Budget, Fiscal and Agreements Staff** reviews requested amount and signs the form if concurs on available funds; returns the package if funds are not available;

and if concurs, forwards the package to the final approving authority.

**Final Approving Authority** reviews the form and approves or disapproves; and forwards the approved package to the Business Service Center for final approval or disapproval.

## **7 Pay and Travel Advances**

### **7.1 Policies and Procedures**

Requests for pay advances will be handled through the Financial Management Division's (FMD) P&P 327.5 – *Advance Payment (ARS)*. It is REE's decision not to use the personnel system for such payments. Travel advances must be handled through FMD's P&P 342.03 – *Travel Advances*.

## **8 Travel and Transportation Expenses for New Hires**

### **8.1 Eligibility**

Newly appointed employees or individuals not yet employed who have received a written offer of employment and have signed a written Service Agreement, REE-12, may be eligible for travel and transportation expenses. REE agencies may determine which positions for newly appointed employees or individuals not yet employed qualify for payment of travel and transportation expenses.

### **8.2. Policy**

- The determination to authorize payment of travel and transportation expenses must be made before the new hire or appointee incurs any expenses.
- The new hire or appointee must sign a one year service agreement before any travel and transportation services may be authorized. If the new hire or appointee violates the agreement, any funds expended for authorized allowances may be recoverable as a debt to the Government.
- Approval of travel and transportation expenses will be preceded by a budget and fiscal review by the Management Unit.
- Funding for travel and transportation expenses is the responsibility of the Management Unit Head. The Management Unit must have sufficient funding to pay all authorized expenses
- A relocation authorization must be issued and signed.



- Any allowances authorized will be made in accordance with the regulations and rates specified in the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) 41 CFR Chapter 302.

## **8.3 Travel and Transportation Allowances for New Hires**

### **8.3.1 New Hire (not under ARS Demonstration Project) (Applicable to ERS, NASS and NIFA):**

**8.3.1.1** When a new hire, not under the ARS Demonstration Project, is authorized payment of travel and transportation to the first post of duty, the Agency must pay all travel and transportation expenses in accordance with the FTR as listed below:

- Subsistence expense of new employee ONLY at established per diem rate while en route to the new duty station;
- Transportation of employee and immediate family, as defined in the FTR, which includes airfare or mileage allowance of a privately-owned vehicle, whichever is applicable, to the new duty station;
- Transportation of household goods and personal effects from place of residence at time of selection to first duty station including temporary storage of goods, or transportation of a mobile home (if used as permanent residence) in lieu of transportation and storage of household goods.

**8.3.1.2** The following are optional expenses that may be paid and/or limited at management's discretion and the availability of Management Unit funding:

- Shipment of a privately-owned vehicle.

### **8.3.2 New Hire under the ARS Demonstration Project**

**8.3.2.1** A new hire under the ARS Demonstration Project may receive any, all, or none of the following travel and transportation expenses. None of the listed allowances are entitlements. The Management Unit Head must make a determination as to what travel and transportation expenses will be authorized. Allowances that the Management Unit determines to provide must be specifically listed on the authorization.

**8.3.2.2** Allowances that the Management Unit may authorize for a new hire under the ARS Demonstration Project include:

- Subsistence expense of employee and allowable immediate family at established per diem rate while en route to the new duty station;
- Transportation for employee and immediate family which includes airfare or mileage allowance of privately-owned vehicle, whichever is applicable, to the new duty station;

- Direct reimbursement of certain closing costs for the sale of a residence at the previous duty station or lease breaking expense; or the use of a third-party vendor home sale program in lieu of the direct reimbursement of the home sale at the previous duty station;
- Direct reimbursement of certain closing costs for the purchase of a residence at the new duty station;
- Transportation of household goods and personal effects from place of residence at time of selection to first duty station including temporary storage of goods, or transportation of a mobile home (if used as permanent residence) in lieu of transportation and storage of household goods.
- Miscellaneous expenses (lump sum or actual expense subject to limitations);
- Shipment of a privately-owned vehicle;
- Househunting trip for employee and/or spouse as defined in the FTR; or
- Temporary quarters.

NOTE: Refer to Chapter 302 of the FTR for rates and other specifics.

## **8.4 Travel and Transportation Expenses Procedures**

### **Selecting Official**

- determines if can fill “new hire” position through merit promotion or through the ARS Demonstration Project;
- if through the merit promotion process, initiates form REE-11, New Hire Recruitment Incentives, by checking the block for travel and transportation expenses and attaches a signed and dated Service Agreement, REE-12; checks the appropriate box under “Justification” and attaches a narrative statement;
- if the employee is being hired under the ARS Demonstration Project, checks that block and completes Section B;
- obtains the signature and date of the ARS Demonstration Project selectee on the Service Agreement, REE-12, and attaches it to the package; and

### **Second Level Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

- reviews request and approves or disapproves by signing or not signing the form; and
- returns the unsigned form and the package to the selecting official; forwards the signed form and the approved package to the Budget, Fiscal and Agreements staff in the appropriate Business Service Center.

## **Budget, Fiscal and Agreements Staff**

- reviews requested amount and signs the form if concurs on available funds;
- returns form and the package if funds are not available; and
- if concurs, forwards the package to the final approving authority.

## **Final Approving Authority**

- reviews the form and approves or disapproves; and
- forwards the approved package to the Service Center for processing.

# **9 Relocation Expenses for Current Transferring Federal Employees**

## **9.1 Eligibility**

A Federal employee is:

- A current Federal employees without a break in service;
- A former Federal employees with less than a three-day break in service; or
- A former Federal employee separated as a result of a reduction-in-force or transfer of functions within the last year to a position hired to a different commuting area or whose duty station is changed to a different commuting area.

Transferring Federal employees may be eligible for travel and transportation expenses, including current Federal employees moving from one Federal agency to another.

## **9.2. Policy**

If a transferee meets one of the following criteria, the transfer is considered primarily for the benefit of the government and travel/transportation expenses must be paid:

- The transfer is initiated by Agency management;
  - The transfer results from a reduction in force action; or
  - The selectee possesses unique competencies directly related to the position being filled as determined by management.
- Travel and transportation expenses will not be paid to anyone selected from a vacancy announcement opened to applicants in the local commuting area only.
  - The determination to authorize payment of travel and transportation expenses must be made before the transferee incurs any expenses.
  - Approval of travel and transportation expenses will be preceded by a budget and fiscal review by the Management Unit.

- Funding for travel and transportation expenses is the responsibility of the Management Unit Head. The Management Unit must have sufficient funding to pay all authorized expenses
- The transferee must sign a one year service agreement before any travel and transportation services may be authorized. If the transferee violates the agreement, any funds expended may be recoverable as a debt to the Government.
- If relocation expenses are not authorized, the employee must sign the Wavier of Relocation Expenses Statement of Understanding, REE-15, acknowledging that the selection is primarily for their own benefit and convenience.
- A relocation authorization must be issued and signed.
- Any allowances authorized will be made in accordance with the regulations and rates specified in the FTR 41 CFR Chapter 302.

### **9.3 Relocation Allowances for Transferring Federal Employees**

**9.3.1** If relocation expenses are authorized, the agency will pay all the following expenses:

- Subsistence expense of employee and allowable immediate family at established per diem rate while en route to the new duty station;
- Transportation for employee and immediate family which includes airfare or mileage allowance of privately-owned vehicle, whichever is applicable, to new duty station;
- Transportation of household goods and personal effects from place of residence at time of selection to new duty station including temporary storage of goods, or transportation of a mobile home (if used as permanent residence) in lieu of transportation and storage of household goods.
- Direct reimbursement of certain closing costs for the sale of a residence at the previous duty station or lease breaking expense;
- Direct reimbursement of certain closing costs for the purchase of a residence at the new duty station; and
- Miscellaneous expenses and allowance.

**9.3.2** The following are optional expenses that may be paid and/or limited at management's discretion and the availability of Management Unit funding:

- Househunting trip for employee and/or spouse;

- Use of a third party vendor home sale assistance program in lieu of the direct reimbursement of a home sale;
- Temporary quarters; and
- Shipment of a privately-owned vehicle.

**9.3.3** If a current employee is selected to an ARS Demonstration Project position and relocation expenses are authorized, management cannot limit the expenses the employee is entitled to in Section 9.3.1 above. The employee is also eligible, at management discretion, for the relocation expenses as a cited in Section 9.3.2.

## **10 REE Student Loan Repayment Plan**

### **10.1 Purpose**

The authority to repay Student Loans is one of several flexibilities available to agencies to attract individuals to the Federal service, or to retain highly qualified personnel. Student loan repayments should not be used to retain employees who leave for positions in other Federal agencies, nor to recruit employees from other Federal agencies.

### **10.2 Authority**

This policy constitutes the Student Loan Repayment Plan for the Research, Education and Economics (REE) Mission Area. This plan meets the requirements set forth in 5 United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 5379 and 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 537.

### **10.3 References and Resources**

- Public Law 101-510, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1991, November 9, 1990, codified as 5 U.S.C. 5379 and amendment made by Public Law 108-136, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, November 24, 2003.
- Public Law 89-329, Higher Education Act of 1965, November 8, 1965, codified as 20 U.S.C.1071 to 1099 and amended by Public Law 105-224, October 7, 1998, codified as 20 U.S.C. 1087aa to 1087gg
- Public Health Service Act codified as 42 U.S.C. 292, et seq.
- 5 CFR Part 537
- National Finance Center Bulletin, Title 1, Payroll/Personnel Manual, 01-15, September 21, 2001
- Internet sites:
  - <http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/studentloan/index.asp>
  - <http://www.opm.gov/fedregis/html/archive.htm>

- <http://www.hqnet.usda.gov/intranet/refer.htm>
- <http://www.nfc.usda.gov>

FR, Jun 22, 2000, Vol. 65, No 120, pages 38791 to 38794

FR, Jan 11, 2001, Vol. 66, No. 8, pages 2789 to 2793

FR, Mar 16, 2001, Vol 66, No. 52, pages 15202 to 15203

FR, Jul 31, 2001, Vol 66, No. 147, pages 39405 to 39406

## **10.4 Responsibilities**

The Director, AFM, Human Resources Division (HRD) is responsible for setting policy and providing overall technical guidance and direction for the REE Student Loan Repayment Program. The Business Service Center will provide staff assistance and monitor compliance with the REE Mission Area policy.

## **10.5 Delegation of Authority**

Under REE's Plan, Agency Heads are delegated the authority to review and approve repayment of student loans. The repayments may be all or part of any outstanding federally insured student loan or loans previously taken out by a candidate who has been appointed to a job or to retain a current employee of the agency. Agency Heads are responsible for ensuring that the repayments are granted in accordance with the requirements set forth in the Department Plan. Redelegations should be consistent with the delegation of authority outlined in this P&P

## **10.6 Definitions**

- Agency as used in this document means agencies, service and program offices of the Department whose head reports to the Secretary, an Under Secretary, or an Assistant Secretary.
- Employees covered means candidates who have been appointed to jobs, or current employees, except employees serving under Schedule C or non career Senior Executive Service appointments, who are highly qualified, are eligible for student loan repayments, if all other conditions are met.
- Student Loan means a loan made, insured or guaranteed under parts B, D, or E of title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 or health education assistance loan made or insured under part A of title VII of the Public Health Service Act, or under part E of title VIII of that Act. A list of the qualifying student loans can be obtained from a servicing human resources specialist in HRD.

## 10.7 Requirements

Employees who hold the following kinds of appointments are eligible to receive repayments for student loans:

- Temporary employees serving on appointments leading to conversion to term of at least 3 years or permanent appointments, or
- term employees with at least 3 years left on their appointment; or
- permanent employees; or
- employees serving on excepted appointments with conversion to term, career, or career-conditional appointments (including, but not limited to Career Intern or Presidential Management Intern appointments).

## 10.8 Payment

### 10.8.1 Criteria:

- Loan repayments must be based on a written determination that, in the absence of offering loan repayment benefits, it would be difficult to either fill the position with a highly qualified candidate, or to retain a highly qualified employee in that position.
- Each determination for recruitment purposes (including the amount to be paid) must be made before the employee actually enters on duty in the position for which he or she was recruited.
- Payments authorized in order to retain an employee must be based upon a written determination that the high or unique qualifications of the employee or special need of the agency for the employee's services makes it essential to retain the employee, and that in the absence of offering student loan repayment benefits, the employee would be likely to accept or leave for employment outside the Federal service. The determination that an employee is likely to leave will be based on a written offer from an employer outside the Federal Government, or it may be based on a written statement by Agency Head or a delegated authorizing official within the agency, that the employee is likely to leave based on such evidence as personal knowledge that the employee is actively seeking outside employment and that competitive labor market conditions make it likely that such efforts will yield positive results for the employee. This determination must be based on written description of the extent to which the employee's declination of a job offer or departure of the employee would affect the agency's ability to carry out an activity or perform a function that is deemed essential to an agency's mission.

- Criteria for granting student loan repayments must stipulate occupations, grade levels, geographic areas, licenses, certifications, degrees, etc., and any justification which articulates why it is particularly difficult to recruit employees or retain highly qualified employees in the Federal service.
- An employee who receives a student loan repayment and moves to another Federal agency or USDA agency or Staff Office is not obligated to repay the benefit, unless the employee has agreed to make a repayment in this circumstance. The gaining agency is not obligated to reimburse the losing agency for the amount of the student loan repayment.
- Management officials must adhere to merit system principles and take into consideration the need to maintain a balanced workforce in which women and members of racial and ethnic minority groups are appropriately represented in Government service.
- See Informs program or HRD homepage for forms REE-11, New Hire Recruitment Incentives and REE-14, Current Federal Employee Incentives.

### **10.8.2** Conditions for Payment

Payments will be at the discretion of the individual authorized to make the determination and are subject to limitations, or conditions mutually agreed to, in writing, between the agency and the employee. Payments may be applied only to the indebtedness outstanding at the time the agency and the employee enter into the service agreement, and may not begin before the employee enters on duty with the agency. Student loan repayment benefits must be in addition to basic pay and any other form of compensation otherwise payable to the employee involved. Payments will be made by the National Finance Center (NFC) directly to the holder of the loan by electronic funds transfer.

### **10.8.3** Tax Withholdings

Tax withholdings must be deducted or applied at the time any payment is made. Tax withholding may not be spread out over time. Since these tax implications could create a financial hardship for the recipient of the repayment benefit, agencies can lessen the impact of tax withholding on a employee's paycheck in one of the following ways:

- Agencies can make smaller payments at periodic intervals through the fiscal year or subsequent years, rather than issue payments under this part in one lump sum;
- employees can write a check to the paying agency to cover the tax liability rather than have the tax liability withheld from the employee's paycheck; or



- agencies can deduct the amount of taxes to be withheld from the loan repayment benefit before issuing payment to the holder of the loan.

#### **10.8.4 Loans to be Repaid**

Before authorizing loan repayments, an agency must verify with the holder of the loan that the employee has an outstanding student loan that qualifies for repayment. Agencies should verify remaining balances with the holders of the loan to ensure that loans are not overpaid. The agency may repay more than one loan as long as the loan repayments do not exceed the limit. The amount paid by the agency is limited to \$10,000 per employee per calendar year, or a total career payment of \$60,000 per employee.

#### **10.8.5 Payment Size**

In determining the size of the loan payments, an agency should take into consideration the employee's value to the agency, and how far in advance the agency can commit funds. If budgetary considerations are an issue, agencies have the discretion to determine the repayment benefit amount given to an employee each year. This type of arrangement must be included in the written service agreement with the employee. The amount paid by the agency is limited to \$10,000 per employee per calendar year, or a total career payment of \$60,000 per employee.

#### **10.8.6 Employee Responsibility**

The employee will be responsible for making loan payments on the portion of the loan(s) that continues to be the employee's responsibility. Payments do not exempt an employee from his or her responsibility and/or liability for any loan(s) the individual has taken out. The employee will also be responsible for any income tax obligations resulting from the loan repayment benefit.

#### **10.8.7 Service Agreement**

Before any loan repayments may be made, an employee must sign a written agreement to complete a specified period of employment with the agency and to reimburse the agency for loan repayment benefits if the employee is separated involuntarily on account of misconduct or performance or the employee leaves the agency voluntarily. This agreement may also specify any other employment conditions the agency considers to be appropriate, such as, but not limited to, the employee's position and the duties he or she is expected to perform, work schedule, or level of performance.

- The minimum period of employment to be established under a service agreement must be 3 years, regardless of the amount of loan repayment authorized. Agencies can state in their service agreements that increases or

renewals of payments made under this part can be made without requiring the employee to enter into a new service agreement, or agencies can require an additional period of service, in the service agreement.

- There is no requirement for the employee to refund the loan repayment when the employee fails to complete a period of employment established under a service agreement because the employee is involuntarily separated for reasons other than misconduct or performance or the employee leaves the agency voluntarily to enter into the service of any other agency, unless reimbursement to the paying agency is otherwise specified in the service agreement.
- If the employee fails to reimburse the agency for the amount owed, a sum equal to the amount of the loan repayment must be recovered from the employee under USDA's regulations for collection by offset from an indebted Government employee under the authority of title 5 United States Code 5514 and 5 Code of Federal Regulation 550 Subpart K, or through the appropriate provisions governing debt collection if the individual is no longer a Federal employee.
- Any amount repaid, or recovered from any employee will be credited to the appropriation account from which the amount involved was originally paid. If possible, any amount so credited will be merged with other sums in such account and will be available for the same purposes and period, and subject to the same limitations (if any), as the sums with which merged.
- Agency Heads and their specific designees are delegated the authority to waive in whole or in part, a right of recovery of an employee's debt if he or she determines that recovery would be against equity and good conscience or against the public interest. The delegation includes payments to or on behalf of employees, or former employees, in full or in part, without regard to amount.
- A service agreement made under this part in no way constitutes a right, promise, or entitlement for continued employment or noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service. This language should be stated in the service agreement. (See Informs program or HRD homepage for form REE-12b, Service Agreement for Repayment of Student Loan)

## **10.9 Reports and Records**

**10.9.1** No later than November 15 of each year, the REE Mission Area will provide the Office of Human Resources Management/Personnel Policy and Partnership Division the following information for the previous fiscal year (See Appendix - Reports and Record).

- The number of employees given student loan repayments;

- the pay plan, series, step, salary, title, and location of the employees who received grade student loan repayments;
- the total amount of the student loan paid to each employee; and
- the total amount of student loan repayments made by the REE Mission Area.

**10.9.2** REE will keep a record of each student loan repayment determination and have the records available for review when requested. These records may be destroyed three (3) years after the loan has been repaid, or after the Office of Personnel Management has evaluated the program, whichever is later.

## **10.10 Appendix**

### **REPORTS AND RECORDS**

- No later than November 15 of each year, Mission Areas and Staff Offices must provide OHRM/PPPD the following information for the previous fiscal year:
  - (1) The number of employees given student loan repayments
  - (2) The pay plan, series, grade, step, salary and title of the employees who received student loan repayments (list below):
  - (3) The total amount of the student loan paid to each employee (list name of each student and amount received below):
  - (4) The total amount of student loan repayments made by the agencies, service and program offices .
- OHRM will request Race, Sex, National Origin, and Disability information from the National Finance Center database from HRD. This information will be reviewed and evaluated to determine if there are any disparities or issues related to protected groups by grade, salary, title, location, amount paid, or between Mission Areas or Staff Offices.
- The REE Mission Area must keep a record of each student loan repayment determination and have the record available for review when requested. These records may be destroyed after 3 years after the loan is repaid.

# **11 Hazardous and Environmental Pay**

## **11.1 Purpose**

Hazardous duty pay and environmental differentials are additional pay for the performance of hazardous duty or duty involving physical hardship.

## **11.2 Background**

Law and regulation intend that employees receive additional pay when exposed to hazards of an unusually severe nature. There are distinctly separate systems established for wage grade and GS employees. Environmental Differential Pay (EDP) is for wage grade employees and Hazard Pay Differential (HPD) is for GS employees. Schedules of categories for which differentials are payable are established and periodically revised by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

## **11.3 Policy**

It is REE policy that all hazards, physical hardships, and working conditions of an unusually severe nature will be eliminated or reduced to the lowest level possible. All employees are responsible for identifying and immediately bringing to the attention of management any element of danger or risk which causes or contributes to a hazard, physical hardship, or working condition of an unusually severe nature.

## **11.4 Responsibilities**

Responsible supervisors and managers must immediately notify the appropriate safety and health officer of the existence of hazardous conditions, particularly ones which may warrant hazardous duty or environmental differential pay. The safety and health official should inspect the worksite as soon as possible, determine the extent of the hazard, propose abatement procedures, and set a date for correction of the hazard. If abatement cannot be accomplished immediately, the safety and health official, in concert with management, should determine if the work can be allowed to continue within an acceptable level of risk. If not, the operation should be shut down until the hazard is eliminated or alleviated to an acceptable level of risk. A follow-up inspection must be conducted to ensure compliance with the established abatement procedures.

When action does not overcome these undesirable situations, EDP or HPD may be warranted for employees exposed to them if they match the categories which have been established by the Office of Personnel Management. These categories

are periodically updated by that Office. The existence of EDP/HPD is not intended to condone work practices which circumvent Federal safety laws, rules, and regulations. Willful violation may subject employees to disciplinary action.

#### **11.4.1 HPD**

- an HPD must be taken into account in the classification of a position;
- an HPD is “taken into account in the classification of a position” when the duty is a part of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required of the incumbent of the position. In other words, the incumbent of the position is able to influence the hazardous duty, i.e., exercise knowledge, skill, and ability to reduce the risk of the hazard
- the actual circumstances of the specific hazard or physical hardship must have changed from that taken into account and described in the position description;
- using the knowledges, skills, and abilities that are described in the position description, the employee cannot control the hazard or physical hardship; thus, the risk is not reduced to a less than significant level;
- “a risk of less than significant level” is used by OPM to be consistent with generally accepted standards such as those published by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

#### **11.4.2 EPD**

- management must determine whether the local situation is covered by one or more of the defined categories;
- an employee entitled to a differential will be paid an amount equal to the percentage rate authorized by OPM for the category in which the working condition or hazard falls, multiplied by the rate for the second step of WG-10;
- an employee entitled to a differential on the basis of hours in a pay status will be paid not more than one differential for a particular period of work. The payment is computed on the basis of the highest differential rate authorized during the period of entitlement;
- an environmental differential is part of basic pay and will be used to compute premium pay, the amount from which retirement deductions are made, and the amount on which group life insurance is based.

## **11.5 Authorities**

5 U.S.C. 5545(d)  
5 CFR 550.901  
5 CFR 532.511

## **11.6 Definitions**

- Hazardous duty - duty performed under circumstances in which an accident could result in serious injury or death.
- Physical hardship - the duty may not in itself be hazardous, but causes extreme physical discomfort or distress and is not adequately alleviated by protective or mechanical devices.

## **11.7 Procedures**

Responsible supervisors and managers must immediately notify the appropriate safety and health officer of the existence of hazardous conditions, particularly ones which may warrant hazardous duty or environmental differential pay.

The safety and health official should inspect the worksite as soon as possible, determine the extent of the hazard, propose abatement procedures, and set a date for correction of the hazard. If abatement cannot be accomplished immediately, the safety and health official, in concert with management, should determine if the work can be allowed to continue within an acceptable level of risk. If not, the operation should be shut down until the hazard is eliminated or alleviated to an acceptable level of risk. A follow-up inspection must be conducted to ensure compliance with the established abatement procedures.

When action does not overcome these undesirable situations, EDP or HPD may be warranted for employees exposed to them if they match the categories which have been established by the Office of Personnel Management. These categories are periodically updated by that Office. The existence of EDP/HPD is not intended to condone work practices which circumvent Federal safety laws, rules, and regulations. Willful violation may subject employees to disciplinary action.

### **11.7.1 Hazard and Environmental Payments**

#### **Recommending Official**

- identifies work situations possibly warranting EDP or HPD compensation to employees by comparison to the Code of Federal Regulations and prepares request for approval.

Request should include:

- description of hazard or hardship or severe working condition;
- the frequency of exposure;
- the estimated biweekly hours of exposure per employee;
- the applicable category requested;
- the differential rate;
- the corrective action taken to eliminate or reduce the situation;
- the official authorized to assign the work;
- the official authorized to approve the payroll documentation; and
- forwards the package to the second level supervisor.

### **Second Level Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

- reviews the request and forwards to the safety officer if payment is approved.

### **Safety Officer**

- reviews questioned situation in detail, including onsite study if required, and renders technical evaluation in terms of (a) the extent to which the situation matches other related categories and (b) the extent to which existing or proposed safety equipment, facilities, or procedures eliminate or degrade the impact of qualifying situations; and
- forwards the package to the final approving authority.

### **Final Approving Authority**

- reviews the package and approves or disapproves;
- notifies supervisors and union in writing of approval/disapproval and provides rationale; and
- forwards the package to the recommending official for processing.

### **Recommending Official**

- for each incident of exposure, documents the authorization for payment of the EDP/HPD by entering the appropriate code and number of hours in the Time and Attendance system:

- keeps a copy of the approval package along with the initial T&A Report for the 6-year duration of the T&A records.

## **12 Supervisory Differentials**

### **12.1 Purpose**

Authorizes payment to an employee under the General Schedule (GS) who has supervisory responsibility for one or more civilian employees not under GS (i.e., Federal Wage Schedule) if one or more of the subordinate civilian employees would, in the absence of such a differential, be paid more than the supervisory employee.

### **12.2 Background**

The supervisory differential prevents subordinate employees from earning a higher salary than the supervisor.

### **12.3 Authorities**

5 CFR 575.401-575.407

### **12.4 Procedures**

#### **Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

- initiates the Recommendation and Approval of Supervisory Differentials, REE-19, and signs the first part of the form;
- initiates a Request for Personnel Action, SF-52, requesting the salary change;
- initiates a written justification outlining the necessity for granting, ending, or adjusting the differential and the impact this will have on the unit; and
- forwards these forms and memos through supervisory channels to the Budget, Fiscal and Agreements staff.

#### **Budget, Fiscal and Agreements Staff**

- reviews requested amount and signs the Approval form if concurs on available funds;
- returns package if funds are not available; and
- if concurs, forwards the package to the final approving authority.



## **Final Approval Authority**

- reviews the package and approves or disapproves; and
- forwards the approved package to the Business Service Center for processing.

## **Servicing Human Resources Specialist**

- submits the required payment data to NFC via AD-343, Payroll Action Request; and
- attaches a memo to the Head, Payroll/Personnel Operations Section stating that, as an interim procedure, we wish for NFC to continue payment until we send in an AD-343 to end or change the payment.

## **Second Level Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

- on December 15, March 15, June 15, and September 15 of each year conducts a manual review of each approved instance to assure that the situation warrants a differential; and
- if the situation does not warrant a differential or a change in the differential, initiates a SF-52 and a justification memo stating the reason for the termination or change.

# **13 Quarters Allowance**

## **13.1 Background**

REE employees will be required to occupy Government quarters as a condition of employment only when essential program services cannot be given if the employee lives away from the station, or Federal property cannot be adequately protected through other means. The number of REE employees who occupy Federally owned quarters as a condition of employment will be kept to an absolute minimum.

## **13.2 Responsibilities**

Recommending Official initiates form REE-16, Occupancy of Federally Owned Quarters, and has the employee sign and date the agreement; attaches a brief justification; and signs and dates the form and forwards the package to the second level supervisor.

Second Level Supervisor and Any other Required Intermediate Levels reviews the request and approves/disapproves by signing/not signing the form if the housing is available; returns package

if housing is not available; and if concurs, forwards package to the selecting official who forwards it to the Property Management Officer.

Property Management Officer reviews the REE-16 and works with the Real Estate Warrant Officer (REWO) at the Business Service Center to fill out forms REE-17, Rates for Quarters and Services Furnished to Federal Employees as well as the ARS-494 Revocable Permit. Obtains the signature and date of the employee on both forms and forwards the package to the REWO.

Final Approving Authority (REWO) reviews the REE-16, REE-17, and ARS-494 forms and approves or disapproves. The REWO will update QMIS to reflect the new tenant and all approved forms will be forwarded to the servicing Human Resources Specialist at the Business Service Center for processing.

### **13.3 Procedures**

When employees who occupy Federally owned quarters as a condition of employment are transferred or reassigned to another position which also requires them to occupy such quarters, the Area/Division Directors must submit a new recommendation, justification and four copies of Occupancy of Federally Owned Quarters, REE-16, to cover the new position. If the new position does not require occupying Federally owned quarters as a condition of employment, the employees may continue living in the quarters in accordance with the provisions of the Real Property Manual, 245.1, or be required to vacate the quarters.

#### **Quarters Allowances Procedures**

##### **Recommending Official**

initiates form REE-16, Occupancy of Federally Owned Quarters, and has the employee sign and date the agreement;  
attaches a brief justification; and  
signs and dates the form and forwards the package to the second level supervisor.

##### **Second Level Supervisor and Any Other Required Intermediate Levels**

reviews the request and approves or disapproves by signing or not signing the form;

returns the unsigned form and the package to the selecting official;

forwards the package to the Property Management Officer.

##### **Property Management Officer**

reviews the REE-16 Rates for Quarters and Services Furnished to Federal Employees form and, as well as the employee, signs the form if the housing is available;  
returns package if housing is not available;

fills out form REE-17, Rates for Quarters and Services Furnished to Federal Employees and ARS-494, Revocable Permit, with the assistance from the Real Estate Warrant Officer (REWO) at the Business Service Center, and obtains the signature and date of the employee;

forwards the package to the final approving authority REWO.

#### **Final Approving Authority (REWO)**

reviews the REE-16, REE-17, and ARS-494 and approves or disapproves;

Updates QMIS to reflect the new tenant; and

forwards the approved package to the Human Resources Business Service Center for processing.

## **14 Uniform Allowance**

**<http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/HTML/uniform.asp>**

### **14.1 Purpose**

The purpose of uniform allowances is to provide a stipend to eligible employees to purchase uniforms.

### **14.2 Background**

The only Agency with uniform needs is ARS.

### **14.3 Policy**

Office/Staff/Area/Division Directors decide on the necessity or desirability of furnishing uniforms to employees who have the same basic function. ARS will pay an allowance for a uniform not to exceed \$800 a year.

### **14.4 Responsibilities**

Office/Staff/Area/Division Directors decide on the necessity or desirability of furnishing uniforms to employees who have the same basic function.

Timekeepers process uniform allowances will be processed on the employee's Time and Attendance Report.

## **14.5 Authorities**

5 U.S.C. 5901 - 5903  
5 CFR part 591, subpart A

## **14.6 Procedures**

The transaction codes used for these purposes are TC 51 with suffix code 1, Uniform Allowance (Taxable) and TC 51 with suffix code 8, Uniform Allowance (Tax Exempt).

Uniform allowances may be charged to the current year and one prior year appropriation during any pay period. The proper transaction code used for this purpose is TC 51, suffix 8, Uniform Allowance (Tax Exempt).

## **15 Physicians Comparability Allowance**

The Secretary of Agriculture may enter into a service agreement with a Government physician for an allowance for a specified period of service in return for an allowance in an amount not to exceed \$30,000 per annum. Only physicians serving in positions where there is a significant recruitment and retention problem will be eligible for an allowance.

Joon Park  
Director, Human Resources Division

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date