



Building Rural America
National Association of Credit Specialists
of the
USDA – Farm Service Agency
Management/Personnel Committee

THE MANAGEMENT/PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MET AT THE TOWN AND COUNTRY RESORT IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA ON JUNE 24-26, 2013 TO REVIEW RESOLUTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE MEMBERSHIP.

THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION:

Resolution 1

CONCERN: FLMs supervising CO-PTs do not have these employees on their worklist in EmPowHR.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: CO-PTs under the supervision of an FLM should appear on their supervision worklist in EmPowHR.

DAFO RESPONSE: We are currently looking at the options of more closely aligning the functions performed by employees with their “supervisor of record” and then make sure it is discussed during the SED conference.

COMMITTEE RESPONSE: This can be done. It seems like it is a state issue. No further follow-up at this time.

Resolution 2

CONCERN: FLMs, SFLOs, FLOTs and FLOs are currently not provided management training; while COT's are provided management training.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Provide management training to FLOTs, FLOs, SFLOs, and FLMs.

DAFO RESPONSE: The currently operating COT/FLOT training task force will be reviewing this option along with others as they contemplate changes to the COT/FLOT training program. If we are ever going to get to the concept of one manager for the county office it needs to start with the COT/FLOT training program.

COMMITTEE RESPONSE: They have created a new employee taskforce (DAFO, DAFLP and field employees). They will be looking at training and development for new supervisors (FLM & CED). No follow-up at this time.

Resolution 3

CONCERN: When a FLM position is vacated and the office would qualify for a SFLO position. States are instead combining offices and increasing the size of service areas for existing FLMs. This is decreasing the promotion potential for FLOs.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Encourage the SED's to use the SFLO position when it is appropriate. This will increase the retention of exceptional employees.

DAFO RESPONSE: SEDs do have the flexibility to use established positions within the ceiling allocations to structure their staffs and the SFLO is one of those established positions available to them when the workload warrants using it. As our agency moves forward, how to best structure ourselves to deliver services within limited budgets will be something we have to determine. That would include delivery of farm loan programs. We will be meeting with SEDs to develop tools and options for SEDs to use in determining future staffing needs within States but with shrinking resources our workforce will be smaller and therefore the idea that the agency can maintain previous numbers of supervisors or any one type of position is not realistic. We have to structure ourselves for optimal use of our workforce and we have to adhere to regulations of proper position management which includes expected supervisor/management to employee ratios. We will make every effort to ensure we have the types of positions needed to properly deliver the services.

COMMITTEE RESPONSE: The position is available, but it is up to the SED how it is utilized. No follow-up needed.

Follow up from 2012:

Resolution 1

CONCERN: Empower is designed to be a full service site for employees and supervisors to access information on their positions and the on those that they supervise. Employees who log into Empower are unable to see position descriptions. Page 1 is completed with required information. Item 25 Description of Major Duties and Responsibilities is blank. The Position Description is not included.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Accurate Position Descriptions for all employees should be included on Empowhr.

NATIONAL OFFICE RESPONSE: The proposed solution is currently being addressed in one of the One USDA initiatives scheduled for implementation in the last quarter of FY13. When the required integration of EmpowHR is successful with the new staffing tool, "eRecruit," the position description will need to be entered into EmpowHR in order for it to flow to the new staffing tool before recruitment may begin. This integration will be done prior to implementation. In time, through promotions, competitive reassignments, new employees, etc., all employees' position descriptions will be in EmpowHR.

COMMITTEE RESPONSE: The furlough created some hurdles that weren't expected and have moved back implementation. They are now looking at March 2014. Follow up once implemented if there are still issues.

Resolution 3

CONCERN: For 6 months my FLO spent more than 50% of his time detailed to another office. ARS has no provisions to capture detailed work so the work done during details results in inaccurate information recorded for the employee's home duty station.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: ARS provide a category for work done during details or other work done in your home office that is assigned from another office. We request a notice/clarification on how to properly allocate work hours to the proper office.

NATIONAL OFFICE RESPONSE: During the solicitation of improvement to the Activity Reporting System, the Managerial Cost Accounting (MCA) Governance Board received several requests that address the same concern you have expressed. The MCA's proposed solution would include a modification to the current WebTA software to add an additional field to record an alternate work site. Because of budget and accounting issues, we are asking that employees currently not use more than one organizational accounting code in their T&A's to capture work being completed in different locations. A cost for the change in software will be requested for the CFO's consideration and a decision made in the next few months.

COMMITTEE RESPONSE: The change isn't looking probably at this time due to budget constraints. No follow-up needed.

Resolution 5

CONCERN: Currently, we are required to use USA Jobs for filling vacancies (i.e. hiring FLOTs). Managers get stacks of applications to wade through that have neither production agriculture experience nor any formal training in an agriculture field. The present screening questionnaire gives a higher value to someone with work experience, any work experience, over a person with an agriculture degree. For example, a person working in a nursing home or a welfare office will make a register and displace an individual with a 4 year degree in Agriculture Economics.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: The evaluation system/questionnaires should be changed so that persons with education, training and/or experience in agriculture make the list of referred candidates for consideration.

NATIONAL OFFICE RESPONSE: The criticality of the need to develop effective methods of assessing applicants for vacancies within the Agency is agreed and there have been steps taken to improve the assessment tools used in this process. A different assessment questionnaire for vacancy announcements (status and non-status candidates) for GS-1165 FLOT positions went into effect in October 2012. All vacancy announcements, regardless of the area of consideration, GS-1165-5/7 FLOT positions are advertised using the assessment tool that was developed from the independent consulting firm, SME's, and HR Psychologist. Since that time, the agency has not filled many FLOT positions due to budget, and the hiring freeze on outside of agency hiring. Management is confident the assessment will improve the quality of outside applicants, however it has been difficult to determine with the limited hiring.

COMMITTEE RESPONSE: Due to hiring freeze they haven't had many new hires. However those that have used it seem to be getting good candidates. No follow-up need at this time.

Resolution 6

CONCERN: We routinely receive mail from the St. Louis Finance Office which has been mailed in a large white envelope at the cost of \$1.00 or more. The contents will be only a regular white envelope with 1 or 2 documents in it which could have been mailed for \$0.45.

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

1. Scan and email document to county office
2. Do not use the large envelope.

NATIONAL OFFICE RESPONSE: This issue has been discussed many times over. Currently Rural Development handles FSA St. Louis mailroom services. In 2010 and 2011 FSA St. Louis had several PII incidents with mailing reports and letters to the field offices and to borrowers. One incident involved the single envelope getting ripped apart in the post office machinery and PII data got exposed. The solution to that PII violation was to double envelope all mailings sent to the field offices and borrowers that contain PII data. While I agree the doubling of envelopes are costly, FSA and RD does not want to put the agencies and borrowers at risk with future PII violations. The double enveloping has adequately mitigated PII violations.

Scanning and emailing the documents sent to the field offices would be time consuming and labor intensive. FSA St. Louis is not staffed to handle such a labor intensive process. FSA St. Louis is working diligently to get a lot of reports and letters sent electronically. FSA St. Louis will continue to work toward a more electronically based reporting system but at this time we are still regulated to the physical mailing of some reports and forms.

COMMITTEE RESPONSE: It was suggested that they look into using a smaller outside envelope. No follow-up needed at this time.