



MWACOP News Notes

Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals

December 2020 Issue

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Message from the Co-Chairs

Season's Greetings from the MWACOP! As the seasons have changed and new challenges emerged during this COVID-19 pandemic, our Office Professionals have been a pillar of support for the mission of the ARS. Navigating through this new virtual workplace has been an adjustment at every level, and we continue to find new approaches to meet daily responsibilities. The work you, PSAs, Secretaries and Office Automation Assistants, do is important and appreciated!

The MWACOP would like to welcome the new Office Professionals who have onboarded to the MWA since this summer. The New PSA training will be conducted via Teams webinars beginning December 10, 2020, and continuing through February. Although it is our desire to host in-person training, restrictions from COVID-19 prevent us from doing so. In the interim, your mentors will provide support and attend these webinars with you in order to provide the best service to your units. Please contact your mentors or any member of the Council if you ever need assistance. We are glad to help.

The USDA has recently implemented a new system for Performance Standards. You have really stepped up with attending training and troubleshooting the EPMA System to help your unit supervisors. As with any new process, there were hiccups, yet once again, you continue to persevere through this difficult task.

Finally, we recognize this has been a difficult year for many of our families, friends and communities. The Employee Assistant Program (EAP, <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/HRD/REE-Work-Life-Programs/Pages/EAP.aspx>) offers many resources to help with challenges outside of work, provided at no cost to you. We would encourage you to check it out so you are aware of the different services available.

Stay encouraged! Together we will support one another as we assist our SYs, Technicians, AOs, and RLs each day. As always, we are here as a Council to help you.

Have a Joyous Holiday Season,
Jessica Boyer, Senior Co-Chair and Amy McNamara, Junior Co-Chair. Edited by Brittney Jones, Advisor

Members of the council include:

- Jessica Boyer (Jessica.Boyer@usda.gov) - Sr. Co-Chair
- Amy McNamara (Amy.McNamara@usda.gov) - Jr. Co-Chair
- Marci Bushman (Marci.Bushman@usda.gov) - News Notes Editorial Team
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- Brian Brusky (Brian.Brusky@usda.gov) - Recorder
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- Beth Burmeister (Beth.Burmeister@usda.gov) - Technical Advisor/NACOP Representative
- Brittney Jones (Brittney.Jones@usda.gov) - Technical Advisor
- Sherri Buxton (Sherri.Buxton@usda.gov) - Sponsor



MWACOP members virtually attending annual meeting. From top left: Jessica Boyer, Kelli Adkins, Brittney Jones, Marci Bushman, Beth Burmeister, Amy McNamara, Tracy Durre, Kerri Bentley, Sherri Buxton, Ann Kessler, and Brian Brusky.



MWACOP Website: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/MWA/Pages/MWACOP.aspx>

MWACOP SOP Website: <https://www.ars.usda.gov/midwest-area/docs/sop-manual/>



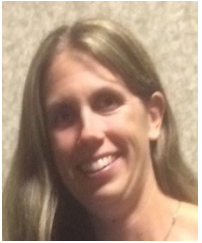
NACOP Website: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Inside%20ARS/NACOP/Pages/NACOP.aspx>

New Office Professionals in the MWA

Kim Ascherl started on October 11, 2020, with the Center Director's Office at the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research (NCAUR) in Peoria, Illinois. Prior to joining the USDA, Kim was a chemical stockroom and safety manager at Northeast Missouri State University while in grad school. She taught high school chemistry and physics for nearly ten years before returning to production chemistry. After working in a testing lab for several years, she realized she missed the intellectual stimulation of research. Kim moved back into research when she joined NCAUR in 2006 working as a Physical Science Technician doing research in the Bio Oils Research Unit. She was also very involved with outreach and the Emergency Response Team. Kim enjoys reading, music, traveling, and hiking. Her (and her father's) favorite saying is "You will never find new success if you don't ever try something else."



Traci Kinnick joined the Crop Bioprotection Research Unit (CBP) in Peoria, Illinois, on October 11, 2020. She has worked as an Admissions Director for a Tennis Academy, US Olympic Committee Intern with USA Badminton, Administrative Assistant at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, and Coordinator at an independent Ambulatory Surgery Center. Traci decided to join the USDA because of the people and wanted a new challenge and opportunity. In her spare time, she enjoys tennis, basketball, swimming, biking, hiking, cooking/baking, and gardening. Her advice is there's always something to do, something to learn. Embrace the challenge and grow with a smile.



Laura Mead started on September 13, 2020, with the Agroecosystems Management Research Unit (AMRU) on the Iowa State University Campus in Ames, Iowa. She had nearly 10 years of federal service working for 5½ years for the VA Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa and for the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency in West Des Moines, Iowa for almost 4½ years. Prior to her federal service, Laura worked in administrative roles for private practice physicians, schools, churches, and one long-term care facility as an Activity Assistant. Laura found this position after her family relocated and she wanted to continue her federal employment. She has extended family members that work for the USDA and speak very highly of it. In her free time, Laura loves spending time with her husband and three grown children. She also has three dogs – two large golden doodles and one small Havanese – who bring her a lot of joy and are awesome co-workers when teleworking. 😊 Laura also enjoys doing some hand crafts, playing piano, and reading. Her advice is to take time to process things so you can respond appropriately, rather than reacting poorly.



Shavone Allen joined the Renewable Product Technology Research Unit (RPT) in Peoria, Illinois, on September 27, 2020. She served in the United States Military for 8½ years. Following her military service, Shavone obtained her B.A. in Human Resource Management from Governors State University in 2017 and became a certified yoga instructor in 2019. Her hobbies consist of yoga, couponing, traveling, movies, and cooking/baking. Shavone is an active mother of 3 and recently discovered how not to step on Legos throughout the house (thanks to her 8 year old son). She also enjoys spending time dancing and singing karaoke with her kids, and teaching them independence.



Megan Halford started on July 19, 2020, with the Food Biological Control of Insects Research Laboratory (BCIRL) in Columbia, Missouri. She served in the US Army for 8 years, both active duty and reserve. Previously, she worked for the Missouri Department of Conservation in the Fisheries Division for 13 years before finding employment with the USDA. Outside of work, Megan enjoys spending time with her lovely daughters, hiking with her dogs, fishing and paddling Ozark streams, stargazing, and hanging out with friends. Megan feels that respect and kindness go a long way in this world - it isn't so much what you say but how you say it.



WELCOME!

Retirement of Gail Bursott

Submitted by: Tracy Durre

Gail Bursott retired from ARS on December 1, 2020. Gail began her career with the USDA-ARS-NCAUR (National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research) in Peoria, Illinois, over 40 years ago. She has had many roles during her time at NCAUR, including serving as the Program Support Assistant for the Functional Foods Research Unit for the past 11 years.

Gail could always be counted on to take on additional responsibilities to support others within NCAUR and the Midwest Area. During her time with ARS, she has trained many new office professionals and was referred to as the go-to-person for her knowledge of programs, processes, and requirements.

During retirement, Gail is looking forward to catching up on some good books and traveling to the Florida sunshine.



Congratulations and thank you, Gail, for your many years of service and dedication to the Agricultural Research Service and the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research.

Congratulations!

NACOP Update

Submitted by: Beth Burmeister & Kelli Adkins

Thank you to Deborah Schaefer who represented the Midwest Area office professionals and served on NACOP for four years. During her term, Debi was instrumental in facilitating, compiling and editing the Quick Reference Guide (QRG) and maintaining the Resource Assistance List.

In June the Area Office nominated Kelli Adkins to serve on NACOP. At the annual meeting, Kelli accepted the role of Outreach Coordinator and Beth transitioned to the role of Senior Co-Chair.

In 2018 NACOP nominated official professionals to serve on each of the five AFM Functional Advisory Groups. We are pleased and honored that we have MWA representation on three of the five advisory groups. Debi Schaefer served on the Facilities, Engineering, Real Property & Safety Team Advisory Group and rotated off in November. Kelli volunteered to serve on this advisory group. Beth continues to serve on the Human Resources Team Advisory Group. Lori Burma also represents NACOP and the MWA on the Homeland Security Team Advisory Group.

Since then, other working groups are seeking NACOP representation on their committees. Recently, leadership requested NACOP representation on the ARS International Engagement Council, Adobe Department Review (Kelli) and ARIS Modernization. NACOP members have already been serving on the ARS Engagement Council and Your 2 Cents. Participation on these working groups speaks highly of the administration's support of NACOP and the importance of office professional representation on these committees.

Thank you for the privilege of representing you, the MWA office professional, on NACOP and these various committees. In order to do our jobs effectively, we need to hear from you. What are your concerns and frustrations about a new process, program or procedure? The office professional viewpoint is valued on these teams and taken into consideration.

NACOP is also looking for ways to support and provide resources for the office professional. If you have an idea, please let us know. We are here to serve and represent you!

Things To Do

December

- Prepare new files for the coming year for calendar year files (T&A's and any "calendar year" files).
- Update Investigator/SY time on projects in ARIS to agree with Annual Resource Management Plan System (ARMPS).
- Submit new Offsite Use of Equipment memos for the new calendar year as needed.
- Complete 1st Quarter Performance Reviews by December 31st.
- USDA No Fear Act Refresher training due December 31st.
- Refresh yourself with what you did last year.
- Ask your travelers what meetings they plan to attend in FY-22 (Domestic & Foreign).
- Complete 2nd Quarter Performance Reviews by March 31st.

Weekly or Regular Basis

- Back up computer on a regular basis.
- Monitor supplies and order as needed.
- Reconcile credit card transactions within Access Online [AXOL] and CATS.

January – February (or during slower times)

- Time to catch up on all paperwork and filing.
- Go through files. Dispose of materials that need to be discarded. Do a general housecleaning of computer files and paper files.
- Check expiration dates of passports. If need renewal begin the process (at least 75 days before the expiration).
- Update FY-21 1st Quarter Performance Reviews in EPMA by January 15th.
- USDA Information Security Awareness Training due January 31st.
- Rethink how you work and establish goals for efficient management of tasks.
- Review T&A's (maintain communication of changing deadlines).
- Update REE Directory or send information to person responsible for updates.

Bi-weekly

- Review T&A's (maintain communication of changing deadlines).
- Update REE Directory or send information to person responsible for updates.

Monthly

- Monitor required AgLearn Training.
- Reconcile Status of Funds as needed or required.
- Check ARIS to monitor progress of manuscripts, check for any 416/417's, Agreements which will be terminating and need to be extended or will require reports.
- Request necessary reports from SY's.
- Review citations - follow agency guidelines for format. Check the volume/page numbers along with the DOI.

March

- ARMPS: Do what you can do to get ready.
- Start an ARMPS folder.

You can find the MWACOP Reminder Calendar at: <https://www.ars.usda.gov/ARSUserFiles/50000000/CalendarReminder.pdf>.

New Office Professionals Training

The New PSA training will be conducted via Teams webinars. This training is MANDATORY for PSAs who did not attend the entire spring training or who have onboarded since that time. This training is highly suggested for PSAs who did attend the spring training but have been an employee for less than two years. This training is optional for all other PSAs. Sessions will be recorded but only available for seven days.

Meeting invites have been sent out for the first four dates from 9:00am-11:00am CST as below:

December 10 – Area Director welcome, SOP (Ann Kessler), RPES (Brittney Jones), Telework Agreements (Deborah Melendez)

December 15 – LincPass, eAuth, WebTA (Deborah Melendez)

December 17 – Foreign Visitor Process, Non-fed Suitability Tickets (Deborah Melendez & Tracy Durre)

January 12 – Ethics (Alberto Pantoja & Brittney Jones), Separation Tickets, EPMA (Deborah Melendez)

Tentative dates – to be evaluated in January once we have a better idea of future travel plans:

January 14 - ARIS/AIMS – D Projects & 115s (Chad Henry)

January 21 - ARIS/AIMS – Entering IFRs (Chad Henry)

January 26- ARIS/AIMS – Awarded Incomings (JoAnn Volk)

January 28 – ARIS/AIMS – Entering Outgoings (JoAnn Volk)

February 2, 4, and 9 – Travel (Karen Hughes)

February 11 – Digital Signatures / Adobe (Brittney Jones & Tracy Durre)

RPES Changes

Submitted by: Brittney Jones

The Research Personnel Evaluation System (RPES) Staff implemented a new Case Writeup Template in June. This has resulted in a simpler Draft submission process for us, but also a more complex Final process.

Some of the main changes include a change in font to 11 pt. Calibri, a left-justified document and no need to follow the formatting restrictions as listed in the Manual. However, it is recommended that you check the Draft case with the Template prior to submission to ensure the text fits within the allotted space. We've also been learning that special characters and formatting do not paste well into the Template, so simple is best whenever possible. In addition, we've found it easier to save the publications in a separate Word doc from the rest of the Case Writeup. Having the publications separate makes the review process easier and makes the Final Case assembly a bit smoother as well.

For the Final Case submission, the Indepth Reviewer Contact Sheet (ARS-570), Research Position Evaluation Case Writeup (Cover Sheet) (ARS-514), Template and publications are combined into one single PDF file. If any special characters or formatting is needed, it will be added after the Template has been combined with all documents and a PDF has been created. The Position Description Cover Sheet, the first three pages of the Case as a Word document (to be used as PD), and all Exhibit files are still submitted separately. If that wasn't enough change, the Position Description Cover Sheet (AD-332) has also been revised just this week, and all new submissions will require the updated form.

As always, a new process can feel overwhelming the first time you tackle it, so please feel free to contact Brittney Jones (Brittney.Jones@usda.gov) if you have any questions.

EAP Contact Information

Overwhelmed?

The EAP is here to help at no cost to you, 24/7.

For more information call **1-800-222-0364**
(1-800-262-7848 TTY), or visit our website
at **www.FOH4You.com**.



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Procedures for Publishing in Non-USDA Media

Submitted by: Beth Burmeister

An issuance was recently sent out about the Procedures for Publishing in Non-USDA Media Policy and Procedure (P&P), 152.1 v.6 (<https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Employee%20Tools/REAdminIssuances/Documents/152.1.v6.pdf>). Dr. Renee Wagner also sent an email to RLs and SYs reminding them the form in Exhibit 4 of the P&P should be used for requests from the publisher to sign a “transfer or assignment of copyright.” However, if the publishers will not accept that form, please send their proposed agreement to her to review. Frequently even when the publisher’s agreement has a check box for federal employees, there is often other language in the agreement related to “license,” “warrant,” “indemnification,” etc., that we cannot agree to, so the agreements should always be reviewed before signature.

Here is some guidance for the process:

- **If all of the authors are federal government employees** (and/or ORISE and/or visiting scientists who have assigned their IP rights to ARS under an ARS-215), you can complete the ARS form and return to the publisher in lieu of their form. In the meantime, Dr. Wagner can review and edit their form (if needed) in the event that they do not accept the ARS form.
- **If any author is NOT a federal government employee** (and/or not ORISE and/or not a visiting scientist who has assigned their IP rights to ARS under an ARS-215), one of them can sign the publisher’s agreement on behalf of the non-government authors, because they will likely have copyright IP that needs to be assigned to the publisher and we cannot do that on their behalf. You can then use the ARS form for the government authors.
- If you have journals in which you routinely publish, Dr. Wagner can review these agreements at any time. If you publish in any of the Wiley journals (they seem to have picked up a lot of the professional society journals in the past few years — the Tri-Societies publications are published by Wiley), we have an agreement already negotiated with them. Below is a picture of the form. You can get the fillable PDF form from Dr. Wagner.

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