

USDA LABOR-MANAGEMENT FORUM

MEETING MINUTES

October 19, 2010

Approved January 27, 2011

Roll Call and Adoption of Minutes

The meeting commenced at 1:10pm in the Food Safety Conference room at 1800 M Street NW, Washington DC, Co-chair Debra Arnold called the roll. The sign-in sheet is attached.

The August 25, 2010, forum meeting minutes were corrected and approved.

Pre-Decisional Involvement (PDI)-Training

Joe Swerdzewski, Facilitator, gave the presentation. He began by suggesting that the group consider another time to go through how PDI works. Motion was offered and passed to consider another date and time. Billy Milton recommended that lead labor relations and union reps be offered the opportunity to attend. Also recommended that the place where it would be held should be able to accommodate approximately 40 people. Training should take place within the next two months prior to the next quarterly forum. Dates of availability should be given to Debra by Monday, October 25, 2010.

Climate Assessment Survey

Joe Swerdzewski gave the presentation on the Phase I Assessment which focused on interviews with key labor relations representatives of the agency and the union. The report does not link names of the interviewees with their comments. The Conclusion and Recommendations will be distributed by the Agency to each respective Union and Management member of the Forum. Stan Painter asked how the reports would be distributed. Ron James said that they would be sent by email by the end of the week. Billy Milton said that a meeting will be scheduled with each Agency Head, HR/LR representatives, and Union Presidents to discuss the results of the reports and how challenges will be addressed.

Member Ron James gave the presentation on the Phase II Assessment. He explained that Phase II is an electronic survey of approximately 2000 union and management employees involved in labor relations. He said that the list of survey participants was almost complete, but that Forest, Rural Development, and National Appeals Division had not yet supplied the list of their participants. FSIS submitted over 800 people to be surveyed, but approximately 95 union representatives had no email address. Stan Painter volunteered to send out the survey if the survey was sent to him for those people. Ron said that he would have the information sent to Stan. The goal is to have the survey completed by the end of November. The results of the

survey will be used to establish the baseline for agencies in the Labor-Management Relationship metric.

Metrics Committee Report

Ron James presented the Metrics Committee Report. The discussion included ways of linking forum performance in the Mission & Service Delivery metric with the Department's Strategic Plan in agencies where there might not be a direct link between an agency's mission and the particular goals and objectives included in the Department's Strategic Plan. The OHRM staff committed to work with forums within agencies to overcome this issue. There was also discussion on whether it was necessary to have reports by forums within agencies to go from the agency level to the mission area before it got to the Department. The suggestion was made that the mission area level could be skipped. Ron James said that he would look into the possibility of having reports made electronically by forums directly to the Department. The suggestion was made that a Information Technology person should be put on the USDA Labor-Management Forum. There was no action on the suggestion.

After discussion, the report and its recommendations were approved by consensus.

Cultural Transformation Website

The presentation was made by James Gore from the office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration. My Gore substituted for Carmen Jones. Cultural Transformation Initiative website was launched October 15, 2010. The first Ask the Secretary town-hall will be held October 22, 2010. 250 questions have been submitted, all questions will be answered. 54 recommendations are being implemented. Issues that have been raised include telework and training/education. IDPs will now be required for non-bargaining unit employees. Senior managers will be evaluated on diversity/disability hiring.

Hiring Reform

The presentation was made by Anita Atkins, Policy Director, OHRM. The Department met with OPM on September 24 to address questions that had been presented, satisfied with progress, gave feedback.

One of the key elements of the Hiring Reform Initiative is to eliminate essay style KSAs. Mandatory narrative responses to KSAs are going away on November 1, 2010. KSAs will now be seen as competency evaluations to reflect abilities. Another change is that application can be made by resume and cover letters submitted in any format. Also, Category Rating – allows applicants to be grouped into categories (qualified, well qualified, highly qualified) will replace the rule-of-three.

There were several questions asked pertaining to the new hiring process:

Question #1: How does this affect Veteran Preference?

- Must provide sufficient information to be put into the highly qualified groups
- There is absolute preference for veterans
- Disabled veterans will continue to float to the top

Question #2: Will each Agency need to update their policies in the hiring process

- It depends on what the agency's policies are and whether they conflict with the elements of hiring reform.

Question #3: Do assessment questionnaires need to be certified by OPM

- Not at this time, although there will have to be validation.

Agencies that have similar occupations are being asked to share their assessment tools. OPM is also building assessment tools for like-jobs. The purpose of the assessment tools is to provide responsibility and accountability in the hiring process. The tools should identify core competencies. The Department also wants to make sure applicants and managers are completing the hiring survey. OPM revised the surveys on October 1, 2010. The overall goal of the initiative is to improve the quality and speed of hiring. The target time to hire is 80 days. Currently, on average with background checks, it takes 130 days.

Another element of the initiative is to notify applicants about their status. Automated systems have that option, but the information has to be put in the system. Currently USAJOBS can track an applicant's status and provide automatic notifications if used properly.

OPM has created a registry for employees with disabilities who can be hired immediately. OPM is also looking at developing a general registry for some targeted jobs.

Enterprise Social Networking Tools

The presentation was made by Audrey Marks from the Office of Chief Information Officer. Enterprise social networking tools are intended for use by all USDA Federal Employees and contractors with level 2 e-authentication. Employees must have an USDA email account. This will not currently intended to be used as a mandatory management tool. If that changes, it would be subject to bargaining as appropriate under Federal labor law. Question was asked if this would be available to everyone.

Employee Viewpoint Survey

This was sent to labor reps on the USDA Labor-Management Forum to help unions come up with ideas to improve employee morale.

Implementation of mission area LMFs-updates – No updates

PDI Reports -

- Labor members of Forum will request more time to comment on the DRs
- Referral of Bonus – Received input from NTEU
- Employee Awards and Recognition Program (DR) – No comments received
- USDA Mentoring Program (DR) – Received comments from AFSA
- Employment of Veterans (DR) – No comments received
- Leave Administration – Excused Absences/Administration Leave (DR) – Open for comments until October 21, 2010.
- Personnel Management of USDA Employees Assigned to Reconstruction and Stabilization Activities (DR) – Open for comments until October 26, 2010
- Category Rating – Discussed as part of the Hiring Reform Initiative presentation by Anita Atkins

Forum Web Presence and Sharepoint Site

The USDA Labor-Management Forum will get space on departments' intranet site. Ron James will send out an announcement when site is set up.

Monthly Teleconferences

Henry Schmick recommended that the USDA Labor-Management Forum hold monthly teleconferences in between quarterly Forum meetings. There was consensus that the teleconferences be held.

Bargaining Pilot (b)(1)

It was announced that the OGC/AFGE Local 1106 was one of only seven labor-management groups government-wide whose application was accepted to participate in the (b)(1) pilot under Executive Order 13522.

Transit Benefits Decrease

Effective January 1, 2011, the benefits will decrease because the current increase was funded by stimulus funds that run out December 31, 2010.

DRs – Foreign Service

OHRM is reviewing policies at the Department level to make sure that Department level responsibilities are properly discharged and that when policies are issued, Foreign Service employees who read them are clear as to whether they are covered.

Next Forum Meeting Scheduled.

The next meeting of the USDA Labor-Management Forum was scheduled for Thursday, January 27, 2011. Note takers will be MRP.

Meeting adjourned at 4:20pm.