

USDA Labor Management Forum

November 13, 2013 Minutes

Draft

I. ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

The USDA Labor-Management Forum Meeting was called to order at 1:07 p.m.

Member Roll Call:

Labor and Designated Alternates:	Management and Designated Alternates:
Steve Hollis, AFGE	Bryan Knowles, DM, Management Co-Chair
Chris Berry, NFFE	William P. Milton, Jr., DM
Linda Williams, NTEU	Dan Kline, DM
Shantelle Gordon, AFSCME	Randolph Wilkinson-OHRM
David Mergen, AFSA	Jacqueline Myers, FSIS
Sarah Rehberg, NAAE	Steve Placek, NAD
Stan Painter, AFGE	Edna Primrose, RD
Melvin Hawkins, NTEU	Gayle Barry-Norman, NRCS
Marcus Washington, AFSCME	Frank McDonough, FNCS
	Mark Rucker, FFAS
	S. Moore, OGC (for T. Trost)
	Martin Gold, APHIS (for Marilyn Holland)

Other Attendees: Chris Nelson-OSEC, Don Bice-OSEC, Karlease Kelly-OHRM, Roderick Mance-OHRM, MaryJo Thompson-OHRM, Kathy Hall-ARS, Hillary Clark-ARS, Brant Lindsey-NTEU, Leslie Violette-NRCS, Joe Abbott-FSIS, Dianna Parker-NFC, Jocelyn Somers-AFGE, Wilbert Grant-AFGE, Rob Huttenlocker-APHIS, Dave Cann-AFGE

Note Taker(s): Dan Kline/Myron Greenhow

II. DISCUSSION

Introduction: The USDA Management Co-chair (also the ELRO) **Bryan Knowles** called the quarterly meeting to order at approximately 1:07 p.m. All members introduced themselves for the benefit of the participants on the teleconference line. **Bryan** made a motion to accept the minutes if there were no objections to them. AFSA's **David Mergen** seconded the motion. The minutes were adopted.

Strategic Planning: OBPA's Associate Director **Don Bice** and OSEC's Program Analyst **Chris Nelson** gave a presentation on the Department's strategic plan revisions. **Don** noted that with the enactment of the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010

(GPRAMA), the Office of Management and Budget set out guidance that requires executive agencies to revise their strategic plans. The Department has established a Performance Improvement Council. It is made up of representatives from across the USDA. In the development of the draft schematic, some objectives were changed. We incorporated performance metrics and more useful measures. In the Outcomes we want to communicate government-wide what we are doing. It's important to note that our earlier plan contained no specific objectives. **Chris** noted this is a five year visionary document. It will show the successes in USDA.

The Department identified five goals with incorporated Outcomes and Objectives for each goal. The first goal contains mostly programmatic outcomes. The Secretary has envisioned the idea of stretched goals; he wants USDA to become one of the top ten best places to work in the federal government. We're going to look at things like civil rights compliances; - how many are we doing; can we improve in how monies are dispensed; finding additional process improvements; leveraging technology; reducing greenhouse gases; physical security; maximizing our return on employee investments. These are all things we're looking at. We intend to become one of the best places to work in the Federal government.

Dave Cann, an AFGE National Representative, asked if Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are employed for everyone and if they are taken seriously. The USDA Chief Human Capital Officer **William P. Milton Jr.** indicated that IDPs have been a priority of the Secretary since 2010. The Department has developed a Departmental Regulation which spells out expectations. The USDA Labor Co-chair (also an AFGE Representative) **Steve Hollis** voiced his concerns for the workforce that may not be receiving time to carry out or engage in the objectives spelled out in their various IDPs. "It's systemic," noted AFSCME Representative **Shantelle Gordon**. Employees are directed to complete a package they do not understand nor know why they are doing it.

The Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) HRD Director **Frank McDonough** agreed with Shantelle and noted this should be viewed as an opportunity for labor and management to engage one another to ensure everyone understands what is the purpose and intent of utilizing IDPs. NFFE Representative **Chris Berry** reaffirmed a USDA adage, "what gets measured, gets done;" to emphasize what he believes needs to happen here.

Steve inquired as to whether minorities and women make up the lower grade positions; and, whether or not USDA is "encouraging contracting in" in view of the added support from on the Hill. **Chris N.** responded that contracting isn't specifically defined, but there are requirements under GPRAMA that **Don** touched on. On Civil Rights, agencies are still required to conduct civil rights compliance reviews. **Billy** noted that agencies are no longer required to develop or submit affirmative action plans, but they must submit a MD-715 to EEOC.

Billy wanted to know what the reporting requirements would be under the revised strategic plan. **Don** informed him that reporting would occur on an annual basis and the report would be available on the USDA website.

Steve wanted to know whether USDA is trying to increase or decrease the use of government vehicles. **Chris N.** shared the goal is to decrease nationwide.

Chris B. wanted to know where senior leadership saw the work of the Forum in the development of the strategic plan. He noted that the Forum serve as a pivotal piece in communicating to the workforce of the ongoing efforts in strategic planning. We are still looking for Labor's support in the areas we identified under the ABIC earlier that continues without any input from the unions. NTEU Representative **Melvin Hawkins** will be retiring soon. **Steve** wanted to know if a committee was being established. **Melvin** chimed in that he would be introducing a replacement for his role. **Steve** asked if some other union wanted to participate. There was no immediate response. **Chris N.** shared that the ABIC has yet to receive any volunteers from Labor for the Marketplace or the Strategic Sourcing Initiative. He asked FSIS's Deputy Administrator for Management **Jacqueline Myers** whether there was still union engagement in the Workers Compensation Initiative; **Jackie** proffered that work has paused at the present time.

Dave, being unfamiliar, wanted to know what is meant by "the number of procurement actions." **Chris N.** shared that it was discovered that USDA had over 800 contracts for cellular services. An effort was made by the Department to consolidate these contracts down to a few contracts for all of USDA. We continued to look at areas where we could consolidate and make process improvements. We have since been able to highlight in the neighborhood of over \$900 million dollars in savings.

The Forum, having no further questions of **Don** and **Chris N.**, expressed its gratefulness for their participation as the gentlemen quietly made their exit.

Aspiring Leaders Program & Leadership Essentials Certificate Program: The Virtual University Provost **Karlease Kelly** opened the presentation noting that it relied upon the best practices of a similar program in the Forest Service. The Aspiring Leaders Program is intentionally intended to target GS 09 – 12 positions within USDA. Program training is accessible in AgLearn. Promotion of the program is the present responsibility of Training and Employee Development Specialist **Roderick Mance**. The Leadership Essentials Program is intended for GS-13 – 15 positions. **Billy** asked for approximate number of participants since the programs were put in place. **Roderick** replied 1300 total.

At this point, **Melvin** said that he understood everything up to now, but wanted to know what the programs are intended to accomplish. **Billy** reemphasized that the programs are open to all employees that meet the minimum pay grade requirements. He further emphasized that any employee that has completed either of these programs should note this as an accomplishment when applying for a position. **Melvin** sounding unimpressed wanted to know how much weight noting such an accomplishment would carry when applying for a position. Will other agencies note this as an accomplishment? **Karlease** responded that the programs are offered to improve

and enhance present skill sets. Employees can definitely highlight these programs as accomplishments. "However, the bottom line, it's not designed to promote people up."

Steve concernedly wanted to know why those at the GS-07 or below were precluded from consideration. **Karlease** noted that no one is precluded from completing the training in AgLearn, but whether employees may have opportunity to participate is up to their immediate supervisor.

Chris B. noted that the handout reflects no cost, but he intimated that there is still the issue time which itself bears an inherent cost. **Roderick** averred; the program requires at least eight hours to complete. **Chris B.** also wanted to know how this program comes into play for agencies that have their own similar program(s). **Karlease** noted in such cases these are available as a supplement.

Fiscal Year 2013 Cultural Transformation Metric & Milestone Report: **Billy** opened this part of the discussion noting that the annual report has yet to be submitted due to the partial government shutdown. He pointed that there are some noteworthy accomplishments that will be reflected in the report; for instance, recruitment actions went from 280 days to 80 days to complete; performance management is well above the government average for providing plans and completing appraisals; and HR University has over 85% participation of 201s and 203s with established accounts and completion of at least one course. The Transformation Diversity Officers Committee meets every month. There is currently no union participation though there is one slot that remains available. **Shantelle** requested that she be identified as the union representative for the available slot.

Frank requested that all participants in 104-A please speak up for the benefit of those teleconferencing.

Fiscal Year 2013 OPM Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (EVS): **Billy** introduced the OPM EVS Project Manager **MaryJo Thompson** to the Forum. **MaryJo** noted that the USDA overall had a 59 % response rate. She noted that USDA was leading government in a number of areas, for instance, diversity inclusion, performance management, and telework. She related that each agency/staff office has an identified point of contact (POC) for the OPM EVS. This individual acts as a liaison with OPM. The POCs have access to subcomponent data. I can send the POC List to **Myron** and he can distribute to you.

The website address for the OPM EVS is <http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/vu/index.php>.

AFSA Representative **David Mergen** wanted to know if the unions will have access to the subcomponent data. **MaryJo** indicated they would. **Bryan** asked if **Dan** would share his brief exchange with **Melissa Baumann** regarding a very similar concern for the OPM EVS. **Dan** noted that OPM just released its 2013 survey results on November 8, 2013. Within the next week or two, the Department will be making available USDA agency specific data to both the USDA LM Forum and the LROs. The data is relied upon to complete the metric accomplishment report.

OPM will not provide you with subcomponent data; they'll simply return you to your agency. **MaryJo** pointed out that OPM's survey tool does possess an Analysis on Demand feature that allows added slicing and dicing of the response data. OPM has yet to activate this feature.

Frank pointed out that it's important to take a macro review of the OPM EVS. Overall pay is down and there is a government-wide decline overall. We need to take a look at trends, notwithstanding there were still some improvements in USDA.

Billy shared that during the Chief Human Capital Officers Meeting yesterday the discussion noted a need for an action plan for employee engagement. It should be noted that our preliminary results showed that FNS was one of the best agencies in USDA. Along this same vein, **Melvin** proffered that he would like to know where the Farm Service Agency (FSA) stood in comparison. **Billy** recommended he make his contact. **MaryJo** made it clear that not just any employee can request subcomponent data. **Billy** shared that unions should be able to obtain their agency specific data from their agency POC.

(The Forum took a break for approximately 15 minutes; the meeting resumed at 2:33 p.m.)

Partial Government Shutdown, October 1, 2013 – Looking Back: **Steve** wondered why he was identified as the presenter, he noted that he really has nothing to add, but suggested that others may have comments. He noted that **Edna** earlier noted lessons learned. He pointed out that anyone identified as “excepted” still had to come in to work. Steve wanted to know if anyone may have been permitted to telework. Deputy Administrator for Management **Edna Primrose** responded yes, they were.

Dave shared that he had two points he'd like to make. First, it's hard to get an accurate polling on how people view federal employees when their being lambasted by certain factions in the political arena. It would be nice if there was some way to promote the work being done during the shutdown. Secondly, looking at the Anti-Deficiency Act, there's nothing precluding union officials from receiving official time, despite OPM's advisement. It's something to be mindful of going forward. This something we are happy to address or have discussions on.

Shantelle noted that when it happened it was unorganized, unprepared and a lack of information. An alternative NTEU Representative **Brant Lindsey**, piggybacking on **Shantelle's** remark, noted that we could improve upon communication. **Melvin** similarly agreed that communications could be improved upon. **Chris B.** shared that the Forest Service maintained an agreement that addressed the government furlough. He shared that the agreement worked out well. He was in meeting every other day; there was a lot of dialogue. However, it would have been nice if there could have been better communications from the Secretary's office.

Billy informed everyone that OMB repeatedly emphasized that leadership was not to share with the Unions the information being relayed. It wasn't until 11:30 p.m. we noticed employees could be informed that they need not come in. **Curt** can attest to this. Subsequently, OMB ordered senior leadership to plan trips welcoming employees back to work. Now there are reports of a class action lawsuit for excepted employees that were required to work.

Bryan noted that at least one agency was bargaining post furlough procedures. Deputy Secretary is trying to find ways to advertise the good work being done in USDA. It's a good idea, if you have any stories please share them.

National Council for Labor-Management Relations meeting is next week; **Frank** will be sharing the FNS expanded telework pilot with the National Council. **Frank** shared that in his conversation with NTEU's **Eve Epstein**; the National Council is recognizing that things are happening in USDA. This is a product of listening-based negotiations. The National Council is set to meet on Wednesday, November 20, 2013.

Dave Mergen noted that OMB has updated its guidance on awards. My agency claims that it is still waiting on the Department to issue guidance. **Billy** indicated that **Dave** is correct. The Department has prepared guidance that is still undergoing review before I'll sign off on it. Awards can be no more than one percent of the aggregate. No moratorium on time off awards or special acts. OMB is now requiring agencies to elicit more detail as to why the performance rises to the level of an award. What significant process change was put in place; how did the employee's performance result in some kind of cost saving.

Edna expressed her appreciation for Labor's patience and cooperation.

Brantt expressed his heightened concern for Labor's increased involvement in the ABIC subcommittees due to rumors of realignments and reorganizations.

Melvin Hawkins wished everyone a farewell as he will be retiring at the end of the month.

Wrap Up and Confirmation of Meeting Dates: The Forum confirmed the next quarterly meeting for January 22, 2014.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.