

Southern Plains Area

Advisory Council for Office Professionals



Travel Is Not Simple and Every Travel is Different.....

by: Carole Perryman

Freida Williams, the Transportation Assistant for the Southern Plains Area, provided a five-day travel training in August 2004 at Weslaco, TX. Most of the participants were already doing travel, but the time each participant had actually been doing the travel for their offices was different in length of time. Some had been doing it only for a few weeks and others were veterans. Freida provided each one of us a *Travel Manual*. This would be a replacement for all those torn and ragged individual notes we've stuck in our old manuals (planning to file when we have more time). Our new manual has bulletins, forms, examples, and instructions for providing answers for those obscure travel problems we experience when completing the *travel authorization* and *travel voucher*. This was also a great time to network with other office professionals and discuss how they handle travel problems that seem to creep up at the last moment. We had the opportunity to share internet sites for currency conversions, language translations, and other sites that the SPA Professionals uses when compiling domestic and foreign travels.

One afternoon, we broke into groups of two or three. We were given details for a reconstructive travel and we were instructed to complete two AD-202 forms. The travel consisted of a traveler driving their personal vehicle. We were given the information that the traveler spent two days going to their meeting and

two days traveling after the meeting before returning to work at their office. The per diem rates covered their lodging so it was not necessary to do a letter for actual subsistence. As in all cases, one AD-202 addressed the additional lodging while traveling plus lodging during the travel and the mileage rate for driving to and from the meeting, plus the miscellaneous expenses. The second AD-202 was based on the amount if flying, lodging and miscellaneous expenses. After everyone was finished, we compared our totals. It took longer to get the information on the form because at our individual offices, we have the per diem rates, Map Quest, and other information in our *Internet Favorite* lists. Not having the information readily available, each group spent time locating the information we needed to complete the travel authorization.

If all travelers would board a plane at their local airport, stay at lodging that honors per diem rates, and never deviate from their travel plan, travel would be a cinch to enter. But, travel is not simple and every travel is different. Fortunately, we have Freida that we can call and say "HELP ME!"



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2004 Midwest Area Conference for Office Professionals

by: Olivia Pedraza

NACOP was invited to the 2004 Midwest Area Conference for Office Professionals. The theme for the conference was "Discover Tools to Build a Better You" and was held October 18-21 at the Millennium Hotel in St. Louis, MO. It was a very successful conference.

They had several motivational speakers give presentations. These were Dr. Aayd Abdul-Karim, "You can Lead Yourself"; Dr. JoAnn Pina, "Creating Influence and Power Through Cross-Cultural Communication"; and Traci Lynn, "Activate Your Dream". In addition, there were breakout sessions that were given by the Area Office staff. These sessions were ARMPS, Correspondence, Future (Retirement), Red Tape (RPES); RSA; Webpage; and Word Adobe. The breakout

sessions and handouts will be available on the PASTG (Midwest Area Advisory Council) at <http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/pastg/>. There was a session called "Ask the Expert" where an "Expert" from the Area Office would be available to answer questions on such topics as ARIS, ARMPS, CATS, Correspondence Tips, Information Technology, Procurement, Pay and Leave, RPES, Ethics and Travel. Dave Carter and Steve Schaefer, from Headquarters, also gave excellent presentations.

In conjunction with the Conference, NACOP worked on completing the short term goals that were set at their last annual meeting. The Council is also working and brainstorming for the 2006 National Conference.

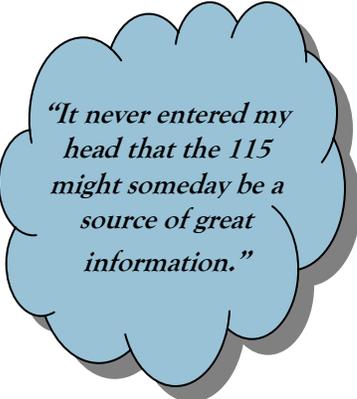
COI and 115..... The Missing Link

by: Ruth Treat

Once upon a time in SPA, back long ago when I was still at Stillwater doing 115's and all those other things that you all do, it never entered my head that the 115 might someday be a source of great information. And that's saying a lot coming from the Queen of Collecting Information, Useful or Not.

In actuality, it didn't occur to me until just recently that the 115 author block, entered with complete names of the co-authors, can be the start of your COI lists for when your projects start their runs through OSQR. In fact, it is possible to pull up the PDF print file of a 115, use the Select Text tool to highlight the author name list, and copy/paste the list into a Word document. So it's possible to have a working COA list in your files for updating whenever you enter a 115. Then when the COI is needed for OSQR, all you have to do is assure that additional non-author cooperators are included. The key to make the 115 author list work for the COI, though, is to be sure that you have the complete name. OSQR uses the COI list to eliminate anyone who potentially has a "conflict of interest" with your project. Of course we like to think that our cooperators can be unbiased and can give a fair review, but why put them in that position? So OSQR has the enormous tasks

of comparing our COI lists with the list of suggested reviewers for a particular National Program. The problem comes when OSQR doesn't have enough information to eliminate just the one person. For instance, if we show Howard Duck as a co-author, and the suggested reviewers include Howard A. Duck and Howard U. Duck, which one does OSQR eliminate? Or worse yet, when we show D. C. Washington... is it Douglas or Dudley or somebody else? That's why it's so important to provide as complete name as possible. And the best time to track down that complete name is not 10 minutes before the COI is due.... It's in the quiet time of doing 115's, when things aren't so rushed. Sure will save time and headaches later!



"It never entered my head that the 115 might someday be a source of great information."

Ask Smurfy

by: Ruth Treat

One of these days I'm going to apply for a grant to study why it is that when a question pops up, it seems to be asked in a cluster....three or four times in a row. Smurfy is happy to answer questions, but sometimes she turns a dark shade of blue from answering them over and over and over. Here is a sampling of things that have come up recently.

Dear Smurfy: ARIS wants me to change my password, but I can't remember what it is. Windows automatically enters it for me. What do I do now? Locked Out in SPA

Dear Locked Out: Well, first off, don't do that. Don't let Windows remember your ARIS password. ARIS passwords must be changed every 90 days or so. When ARIS prompts you to change, you must know your old password. If you are letting Windows enter it every time, you have a good change of not remembering it when it counts. Then you could get your account locked up and have to have the programmers unlock you and reset your password, Best bet is to enter it yourself and it will be in the front part of your brain when you need it.

Dear Smurfy: I sent through an ARIS action, but it's still showing Pending status. What's the holdup? Pacing the Halls

Dear Pacing: No holdup at all. Pending doesn't mean what you think it means. Once a Work action is approved and moves into the Active records, whatever work you were doing to the record is approved. What's Pending is something about the record itself.

If it is a SCA or a NFCA, the record will have Pending status until the Award Date of the agreement is entered into the record. When Martha sends you out the signed agreement for your files, you can initiate the action to enter the date in you wish. Or I'll get it from Martha the next time there is an action on the record. Just because the record shows Pending doesn't mean that the project is not alive and well.

If it is a Reimbursable or Trust, the record will have Pending status until the money (or a commitment document from the funder) is received and posted to the record by Brenda. She changes the record by Active. Just remember that until the record is Active, you don't have any funds to spend.

Dear Smurfy: I'm entering a 115, and our Post Doc doesn't show up when I try query in for Contact Scientist. How do I get them into that database? Publess

Dear Publess: You Can't. Contact Scientist can only be a Category 1 or 4 or 6 scientist. The rationale is simple. Post Docs are temporary employees....here today, gone one of these days. Besides that, Post Docs do research in support of a Category 1 or 4 scientist, not "independently." So for Contact Scientist, use Post Doc's supervisor, who should be in a position to speak about the research.

Dear Smurfy: What's a COI? OSQR-phobic

Dear OSQR-phobic: A COI is a conflict of interest list. Most granting organizations require a COI in grant proposals, and we of course use them in the OSQR process. It is a listing of everyone that your scientist has had dealings with in the recent past. For OSQR, recent past means during the last four years (or students/post docs during the last eight years). It includes co-authors, collaborators, cooperators on grant proposals students, supervisors. The COI is used to eliminate anyone close to a project from evaluating it. Of course we'd like to say that none of our cooperators would be biased, but why put them in that position. So OSQR carefully compares our COI lists against the list of potential panelists and eliminates anyone on our lists. It is important to note that our COI lists need to show compete names, including first name and middle initial. If our lists shows I. B. Researcher, OSQR won't know whether to eliminate Ira B. or Isaac B. or even I. Benjamin. I can't stress enough that these lists need to be thorough.

Questions for the next Smurfy column will be yanked from current events, or is you have specific questions for Smurfy, send them to Ruth at rtreat@spa.ars.usda.gov.

SPA Advisory Council for Office Professionals (ACOP) Roles and Responsibilities



- **Chair**—Serves as leader and primary contact for the Council. Keep Area Director informed as to Council business. Determines need for conference calls and meetings of Council members. Keeps Council members up-to-date on Council matters through telephone, correspondence, or email.
- **Co-Chair**—Back up to the Chair and assume duties of Chair after one year.
- **Recorder**—Arranges for teleconference at request of Chair. Contact the teleconference center and informs Council members of procedures to follow at time of conference call. Records minutes of teleconferences and meetings, distributing copies to all members via US mail or email. Maintains file of recorded minutes, Council charter, and accurate roster and email list of Council members. Originals of the files will be maintained in the Area Office with the Recorder keeping copies.
- **Training Coordinator**—Remains abreast of upcoming training sessions within the Area and Agency, notifying office professionals throughout the Area of available opportunities.
- **Information Coordinator**—Solicits and compiles information of interest to be distributed in a newsletter for SPA office professionals. The newsletter should be sent to the members of the Council for their review prior to submission to the Area Office. The Area Office reviews the newsletter prior to distributing.
- **Member-at-Large**—Chair of the Council moves to this position and remains supportive of Council mission, offering assistance as needed.
- **Technical Advisor**—Appointed by the Area Director to serve on the National Advisory Council of Office Professionals, this individual continues to work with the SPA ACOP in promoting Council mission.

Turkey Roasting Guide

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, tape this turkey-roasting refresher course to your fridge.

GETTING STARTED

TOOLING UP—A Large, sturdy roasting pan with rack, no more than 2 inches deep; meat thermometer; potholders or oven mitts

BUYING—1 to 1 1/2 pounds of turkey per person

THAWING—Start in the morning and allow 24 hours for every 4 pounds of bird. Do not count the cooking day as part of the thawing time. Thawed birds keep 2 days in the refrigerator. The bird is ready for roasting when the giblets and neck can be removed and no ice crystals remain the body cavities.

STUFFING— 3/4 cup per pound of bird (That's 11 cups for a 15 pound bird). Stuff bird just before roasting (not ahead). Loosely spoon stuffing into neck and body cavities; pull neck skin over stuffing; secure to bird's back with a short skewer.

TRUSSING—After stuffing, tuck drumsticks under band of skin across tail, reset leg clamp, or tie legs to tail with kitchen string. Twist wing tips under bird's back.

ROASTING—Place turkey, breast side up, on the rack of the roasting pan. Brush bird with cooking oil. Cover loosely with foil. Place in a preheated 325° F. degree oven. After two-thirds of the cooking time, cut string between drumsticks. Remove foil the last 30 to 45 minutes.



Calendar Reminders

November

- National Native American Month
- Federal HOLIDAY—Veterans Day
- Federal HOLIDAY—Thanksgiving Day
- Remind employees to schedule their use or lose by the end of PP23
- Give SY's a copy of their ARIS "Detail by Author" report and ask for input on their accuracy
- DEAR (Annual Diversity Enhancement In Agricultural Research) Report due in Area Office



December

- Federal HOLIDAY—Christmas Day
- December 1st: Last day to donate excess annual leave to recipients
- Late December: Send memo to SY's to submit documentation of their accomplishments to RL for performance appraisals
- December 31: Last day for ARIS-115's to be included in Detail by Author Report documentation



January

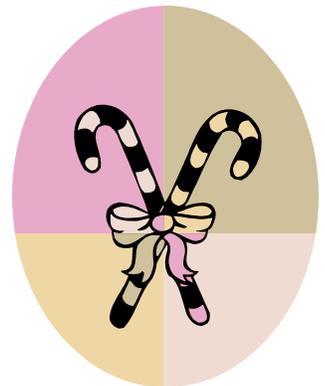
- Federal Holiday—New Year's Day
- Federal Holiday—Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday
- Early January: Pull Detail by author reports from ARIS for ARS-435 appraisals
- Submit documentation of Cat. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 accomplishments, appraisals and award forms to Area Director (if at Center, submit through Center Director).
- Go through files, disposing of materials that may be discarded, and do a general "housecleaning" of computer files and general files.



Happy Holidays

February

- Groundhog Day
- Chinese New Year
- Valentines Day
- Federal HOLIDAY—President's Day
- Fat Tuesday—Ash Wednesday
- Black History Month
- Be sure all Cat 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 employees have performance standards and IDPs in place for the coming year. Make sure all other employees have had mid-term performance reviews completed.



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WEB PAGE

The SPA ACOP homepage is updated periodically and has information about the council members, our charter, SPA directory, information about the shadowing program, information about the orientation packet, and many useful website links. We are going to keep the directory up-to-date so if you see something in the directory that needs to be changed, please let Noelia Martinez know and she will make the changes immediately. The web page is located at <http://www.spa.ars.usda.gov/acosp.htm>

MEMBERSHIP TO COUNCIL

Would you like to serve on the SPA Advisory Council? Each year as some members rotate off the Council, new members come onboard to continue the mission of the Council which is set out to serve the SPA Secretaries/Program Support employees, Location Research and Administrative Team and Area Director in an advisory capacity. The Council also strives to strengthen and improve the professional image of all SPA secretaries and program support employees through orientation, training, and networking. Membership to the Council is for a three-year period. In order for our Council to continue its mission, new members are needed each July. Anyone interested in joining the Advisory Council, please contact a current Council member. Your name will be submitted to the Area Director for consideration and appointment.

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Please contact Noelia Martinez if you would like to contribute an article that supports the SPA ACOP Mission.