

**NASCOE National Convention Q & A Session
Savannah, GA**

- 1) There are many concerns with the retirement process, including excessive wait times. Can these be addressed?

Answer: Administrator Ducheneaux - Email the list to him and he will send to HR.

- 2) We are seeing FSA Losing CEDs to other jobs and then qualified PTs put into acting roles for long periods, sometimes 52 weeks to become hard-to-fill. There is a concern about these PTs being asked to do the CED job with zero training and then the PT's position is essentially vacant while they serve as CED and it can't be backfilled which reduces workload.

Answer: Amy Webbink (DAFO) - This is one of many areas in new 27-PM that we are excited about. Hard to fill procedures allows the STC to request expanded hiring authority to open it up to anyone in the agency.

- 3) CO-7 PTs selected for a CEDT position cannot be promoted unless they have served time & grade. Due to timing of promotion to CED, some PTs are having to wait longer than 12 months to get promoted to the grade 9, which doesn't seem fair.

Answer: Amy Webbink (DAFO) - There were similar issues brought up at the NEA Rally in PA. The good news is that a PT with a lot of experience as a grade 7 or 8, who used to become a CEDT at grade 7, now starts at grade 9. Unfortunately, we knew there would be a gap with some employees who were close to promotion. We need to be careful as that PT has return rights for 6 months. The National Office will be happy to look at suggestions.

- 4) In our state all our CEDs are classified at grade 11, however we now have many more programs and almost half the staff. FLM's are grade 12 and usually don't manage the entire office (supplies, leasing, etc.). We're continuously doing more with less and not getting compensated for it. Is there anything that can be done to include complexity into workload flexibility.

Answer: Amy Webbink (DAFO) - We have heard a number of concerns on grade classification and tweaks we may want to look at going forward. We do look at payee numbers instead of 1099s now. Linda Treese - It's something we need to look at. DAFO has been gathering data with ARS.

- 5) When will the unaccounted work for the two surveys we completed be reflected in the OPO data?

Answer: Trina Brake (DAFO) - I don't believe it was ever intended to be captured in the OPO tool. It is informational only. Administrator Ducheneaux - There is another tool that can be used which is the RFS. Every RFS needs to be captured to help use this as a tool.

- 6) When will we know if the remaining 25% of ERP will be paid to the producers? Producers were told it would be issued if the funds are available.

Answer: Scott Marlow (DAFP) - We have a ways to go before we decide to revisit that. We have phase 2 to do as well as phase 2 of ELRP. Can't give an exact timeframe, but you can say there is a list of other programs to come out first, so it will definitely be after those. We've done as much as we can with the automatic payments, so round 2 will be more complex which will by necessity create a longer sign-up period.

- 7) In the June newsletter it said COVID exigency would be in effect like it was last year. Is this true?

Answer: Amy Webbink (DAFO)- This year, all field office service centers were deemed essential, so the normal leave restoration exigency process won't be required. Will be the same for 2022 as it was for the previous two years. Clarification was recently sent out to STOs.

- 8) We appreciate the help CO's receive with temp employees, but the onboarding process is challenging which limits the help that they can give. The other thing is that they can't buy-back their temp time like they could in the 80's.

Answer: Amy Webbink (DAFO)- We value our temporary and hear the request on the buy-back, but it requires congressional action. In terms of the background checks, for offices that are near fingerprint locations, that significantly speeds up the time.

- 9) One CO has 1600 CRP contracts paying 1.5 million annually. The time spent filling out reports is very time consuming. Is there a way to automate this and also to share this data with NRCS?

Answer: Scott Marlow (DAFP) - That is a very reasonable thing to ask for. We have prioritized using data that we have and information sharing (like with ERP). But it is deceptively difficult to do mechanically. We will do the best we can to not have that redundancy. Jim Williams - We are just now moving to using Sharepoint for the bulk of the reporting. We are also comparing quarter to quarter, so we don't ask again. WDC is trying to get the lists much smaller and easier to get at it. Bear with us for a month or two.

10) We understand the importance of RFS but requiring entities to add in the contact person is another step which makes it a cumbersome process.

Answer: Lisa Berry (DAFP) We'll include your suggestion as we look to streamline this process.

11) The service agreement with Xerox is terrible. In one example, two weeks before the end of acreage reporting a CO's printer died. The part arrived right away, but still nobody has come to fix it yet. We need our equipment to get our job done.

Answer: Administrator Ducheneaux - Let me know when this happens, this is unacceptable.

12) With regards to CRP workload, the limitation of no sooner than 6 months to accept offers on re-enrollment makes it hard to complete the work in time. Can this be made longer to allow enough time to process these, maybe 9 months or a year? A little more grace period would be a tremendous help.

Answer: Scott Marlow (DAFP) - We met with conservation division last week looking at the timing overall. WDC is very aware of the challenges and wants to be proactive helping. We recognize the importance of the pieces and appreciate the recommendation. If there are specific windows that are challenging, happy to get that feedback. Looking to try and help next year but have some hurdles to meet.

13) Is it possible to review deadlines and avoid many reports and signups being due at the same time?

Answer: Administrator Ducheneaux - That is a reasonable request, and we will take a look at it and see what we can do.

14) Managers in all shared management situations that are lasting more than a certain time should get a temporary promotion. A CO-13 position would be appropriate. It is a benefit for the agency to have experienced people in these roles. Also, it is a problem that grade 11 CEDs can't apply for the DD position.

Answer: Marcus Graham (DAFO) - A lot of this is based on workload and classification. We've heard these issues. Amy Webbink - We acknowledge we've heard these concerns. Some shared management situations have quite a lot of workload associated with them. We've encouraged the use of cash awards in these situations and increased the funding for awards. The CED classification dashboard also shows some shared management CEDs have less workload than a stand-alone CED.

- 15) There is a Shared Management Task Force that NASCOE is participating in. There was some guidance developed by the task force creating information for new CEDs, but little else has been heard. Where is this task force at now?

Answer: Ryan Lukassen (DAFO)- There are number of items that DAFO team is looking at for shared mgmt. including putting together a guide. We'll work with DAFO about reconvening this task force.

- 16) Our office lease expired 15 years ago and since then we've only been able to get extensions. Our space is very tight including FLP. The STO and NRCS wants to combine but we continue to be stuck in limbo and can't expand our current space. Are there any updates on leasing?

Answer: Leasing is now under FPAC Business Center. We try to accommodate and work with the staff. There are certain rules that FSA must go by, including potentially using GSA space.

- 17) We've been told there is full funding for COC meetings but continue to hear the meetings are being limited. What can we do to make sure these are held?

Answer: Linda Treese (DAFO)- This has been an issue that was brought to DAFO before, and we've also talked to NAFEC. We want COCs to have time and travel to complete business needs. If the state needs additional travel money, they should come into DAFO. COC's should be meeting, either virtually or with travel. The guidance from DAFO to STO informs how the funding is calculating but there is not a restriction.

- 18) I just recently got done hiring for the 6th time. Can the hiring manager please see the full list of applicants and not the pre-screened list? We're losing a lot of internal candidates because they didn't include the right SF-50 or performance plan instead of performance appraisal. If I don't see them, I can't outreach to them to educate them on their error. Can we maybe reconsider not even allowing them to have the interview. An SF-50 is on file so can't we get the forms if they are hired? Can there be some training or a fact sheet for existing employees on where to go to get appraisal and SF-50?

Answer: Amy Webbink (DAFO)- We can put together some kind of tip sheet. DAFO is contemplating making some changes. For a GS, there is a different way to announce a position where the SF-50 is not required for an external position. If we mirror that for CO, would it create more confusion when they are applying for a GS position. It could be a merit system violation to see the entire applicant list, but maybe not if the position is closed.

19) We appreciate the 2-hour early dismissals recently granted. In the past, when we used to be granted this time everybody was able to use it and go home. Now the guidance is that someone must keep the office open but there is a difference in implementation in some states and also with NRCS.

Answer: Ryan Lukassen (DAFO) - DAFO's direction has been that we expect offices to remain open. The flexibility allowing the time to be used for a couple of pay periods allows everyone to take the time off. There is some specific flexibility in smaller offices. It is a management decision, which is why we vary with NRCS, but that is FSA's policy.