MWACOP News Notes

Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals

Members of the council include:

Amy McNamara - Sr. Co-Chair (Amy.McNamara@usda.gov)

Marci Bushman - Jr. Co-Chair (Marci.Bushman@usda.gov)

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Kelli Adkins - Technical Advisor/ NACOP Representative (Kelli.Adkins@usda.gov)

Beth Burmeister - Technical Advisor/ NACOP Representative (Beth.Burmeister@usda.gov)

Sherri Buxton - Sponsor (Sherri.Buxton@usda.gov)

Erika Stoltz - New member (Erika.Stoltz@usda.gov)

Traci Kinnick - New Member (Traci.Kinnick@usda.gov)

Message from the Co-Chairs

Welcome to Summer!!! After being on Max Telework for two-years, we are all transitioning back into the workplace and noticing all the different ways the role of the Office Professional has changed. We have become Zoom and Microsoft Teams experts. We have set the bar on how to be successful in the Work/Life Balance while still meeting the Agency's Mission. We cannot express how proud we are of all the Office Professionals and the example each of you has set during this time of change. Each of you have made a lasting contribution and the phrase "a job well done" is very much an understatement.

MWACOP would like to welcome the new Office Professionals representing the MWACOP. Traci Kinnick is a PSA with the Crop Bioprotection Research Unit located in Peoria, Illinois, and Erika Stoltz is a PSA with the Vegetable Crops Research Unit located in Madison, Wisconsin. It is such a pleasure to have you on board and embark on this journey with other Office Professionals. MWACOP members are available to answer any questions and assist with training needs, in addition to your assigned Mentors. Do not hesitate to reach out to your mentors or Council members, as we are here to help.

The Council will be holding our Annual Meeting in August of this year. We will be scheduling future Refuel and Refocus (R&R) sessions, along with preparing the Midwest Area's Tabletop Display for the NACOP Workshop scheduled for Spring 2023. MWACOP is always looking for ways to improve the process of the Office Professional. If you have suggestions for future R&R's, please reach out to the Council at ARS-MWA-COP@usda.gov or any Council member.

I, Amy McNamara, will be transitioning to my new role as Ex-Officio at the end of our yearly meeting. I am excited for Marci Bushman who will serve as the new Sr. Co-Chair for the next Council year. She has been an invaluable resource and I have been lucky to serve alongside her this past year.

As always, we are here as a Council to assist you, the Office Professional. If you have a question or need support, do not hesitate to contact any of us.

Amy McNamara, Senior Co-Chair and Marci Bushman, Junior Co-Chair

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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

Welcoming New Office Professionals to MWA

Janet Johnson started March 27, 2022, with the Virus and Prion Research Unit in Ames, Iowa. Janet has various previous experience working private, non-profit, and for the state of Iowa. Her experience includes working in the Trust Department of a bank, the newsroom of a television station, Iowa High School Athletic Association, and Iowa State University. Amidst the pandemic, Janet began working from home and decided she was interested in a change and up for trying something new; ultimately, bringing her to USDA. Janet enjoys traveling; mostly to the western states such as Colorado and Wyoming. Janet thoroughly enjoys the outdoors. In the last couple of years, Janet joined a small group who have restored older, rundown cemeteries. They have cleaned hundreds of headstones and have uncovered old stones nearly buried from time, making them look new again. A couple of these uncovered, ended up being children who were in her family line in the 1800's that she knew nothing about. Words of wisdom Janet follows "It really does only take one person in one specific scenario at the right time, to make a big difference in something. We should all strive to be that one special person so when the time comes, we can make a difference that really counts."

Christina Brown joined the Office of Area Director in Peoria, Illinois on March 28, 2022. Christina has been in the Peoria area for the past couple of years and started to look for employment in the area. She has a personal and educational background in agriculture. Christina read the job board posting and she was immediately interested in becoming part of the USDA-ARS unit. Prior to ARS a majority of Christina's experience has been in the private industry; Laverdiere Construction as an Accounting Specialist and McDonough District Hospital where she started as a recruiter and was later promoted to Practice Manager of the Specialty Clinics (Ears, Nose and Throat; General Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynecology; Podiatry; and Orthopedics and Sports Medicine). Christina enjoys spending time with family, running, and volunteering as a Firefighter/EMT. A motto she would like to share "You are not a true success unless you are helping others be successful."

Brenda Thompson began her position on May 23, 2022 in Madison, Wisconsin. Prior to joining the USDA Brenda had worked in the private industry where she performed duties such as scanning, verification and processing of claims, and some reconciliation for a company. Fortunately, Brenda was offered a position to join ARS through a government application website which supports personnel with disabilities to find and get jobs. Hobbies of Brenda include cooking and spending time with family and friends. Brenda believes that sometimes life's journey takes us on detours and it is up to you to get back on track. She advises "Don't give up. Where there is a will, there is a way."

Welcome!

NACOP Update
Submitted by: Beth Burmeister, Kelly Adkins and Amy McNamara

WHAT'S NEW?

Exciting things are happening in the National Advisory Council for Office Professionals. Recently, several new members and Sponsor joined NACOP. In addition, Administrative and Financial Management (AFM) directors attended NACOP meetings to provide updates that impact Office Professionals. As part of these updates, the directors requested feedback from NACOP on upcoming policies, software updates and processes as well as invite NACOP representation on committees, teams and focus groups.

New Faces
NACOP is excited to announce that Mari Gomez will serve as our Sponsor while Dr. Sharon Drumm is working in REE as a Senior Advisor. Mari shared that she is looking at all the groups, charters and goals to see where they may overlap. During the past several months, NACOP welcomed new members: Amy McNamara (Midwest Area), Kailey Harahan (Pacific West Area) and Kathryn Root and Brenda Holmes (Northeast Area).

AFM Overview
Lisa Baldus, ARS Deputy Administrator, provided a general overview of return to work, attempt to simplify SAMS and Foreign Travel, stabilize procurement oversight, focus on awards following quarterly reviews, launch IT status quo pilot in the Southeast Area, use artificial intelligence (AI) in CATS to glean info to populate into the Dashboard and develop a bot to process automation from SF-52s to Empower.

ARIS Modernization
Lorna Drennen, REE Assistant Chief Information Officer, gave an update on the ARIS Modernization effort. The ARIS platform will be moving away from Oracle. The contract for the new platform was sent to procurement the week of May 10. The ARIS Modernization team is in the process of setting priorities for which ARIS processes to tackle first. Lorna anticipates that ARS-115s will be identified as the second step. The user acceptance team will reach out to NACOP for testers.

During the question-and-answer session, Beth asked Lorna about the auditory alerts in ARIS at the end of each page. Following the meeting, Lorna responded to the question saying that the auditory alert is part of the 508 compliance. Lorna arranged for Beth, Kelli and Jill Miller to meet with the software developers to discuss a way to turn off the alerts. Alas, this will be an issue to move forward to the ARIS update on the new platform.

Foreign Visitor Vetting Process
Bryan Norrington, Director of the Office of International Research Engagement and Cooperation, shared the proposed interim foreign visitor review/vetting process flow chart and requested NACOP feedback.

Project Sync – Retention Team
Beth gave an update on Project Sync – Retention team. This team divided into three subgroups to take a deeper dive on retention of wage grade employees, technicians and Office Professionals.
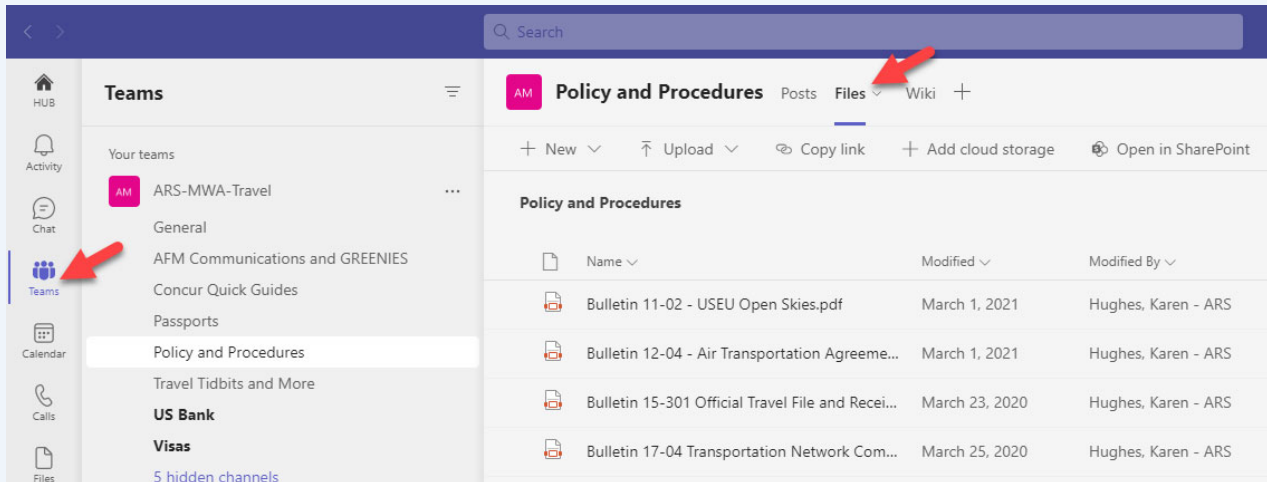
Training Workshop
We continue to discuss the NACOP Training Workshop that will be held in the Spring of 2023. Please add your name and information to the FY23 National Advisory Council for Office Professionals – Crush It: Tackle the Challenge conference meeting #2023-1361 in ATIS. This is a great opportunity for Office Professionals as this offers in-depth training and networking opportunities.

This is an exciting time for NACOP and Office Professionals. ARS leadership frequently requests feedback from NACOP on issues that impact Office Professionals. They not only listen, but they also implement some of our suggestions. We are making a difference for Office Professionals!
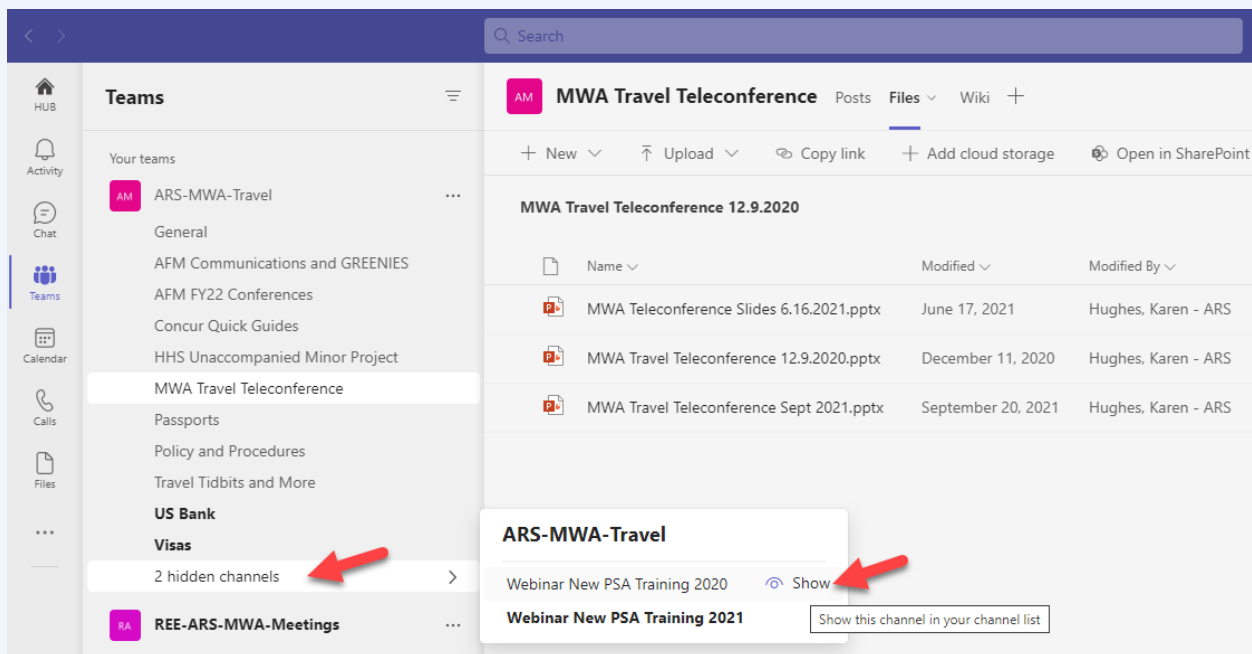
Travel References

Submitted by: Marci Bushman

If you need to find anything travel related (forms, policies, Tidbits, etc.), remember to look in the Microsoft Teams files. Once you've logged into Microsoft Teams, click on "Teams" on the left side of the screen. There Karen Hughes has set up "ARS-MWA-Travel" with several different subjects or channels. Once you click on the subject you are looking for information on, it will automatically take you to the "Posts" for that subject. If you are looking for a certain file, you will need to click on "Files" towards the center at the top of your screen (a majority of the information is likely in the files section).

If you have "hidden channels", you will need to click on that link to see what subjects are hidden. To show a hidden subject, you hover over the subject line and to the right "Show" will appear. Click on "Show", then the subject will be included with all the others.
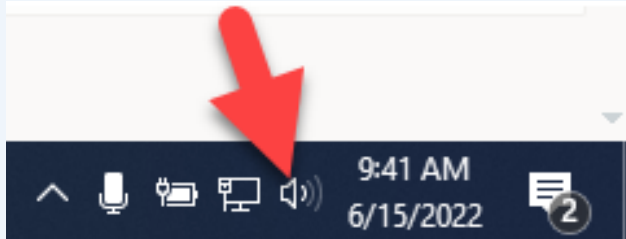

If you do not have access, please submit a request to join the Microsoft Teams: ARS-MWA-Travel Team by emailing Karen Hughes at karen.hughes@usda.gov.

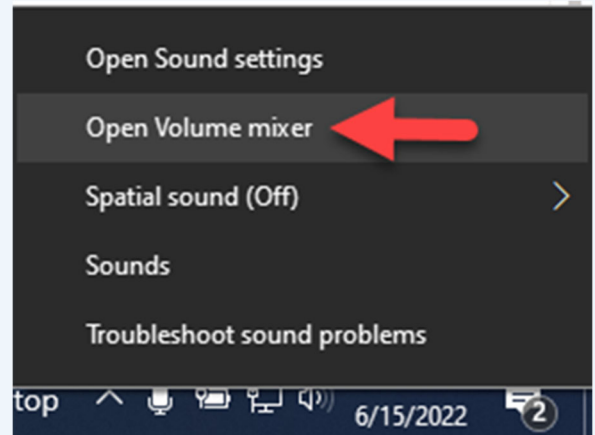## Tired of the ARIS "Dinging"??

Submitted by: Marci Bushman

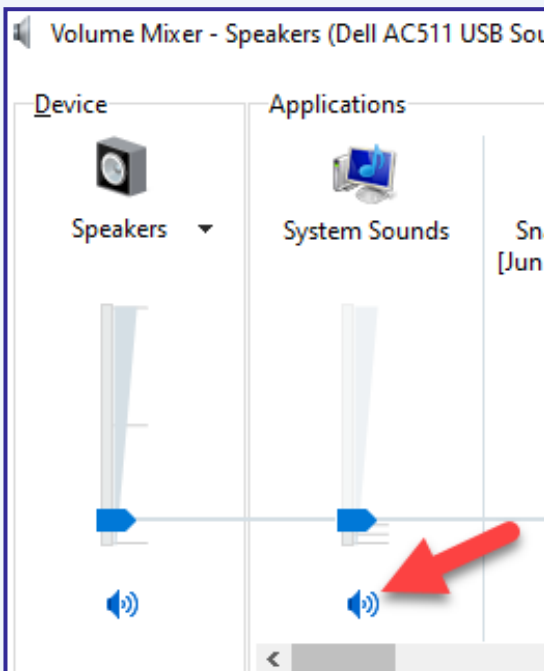Take the following steps to quite the sound:

1. Right click on the speaker icon in your task bar.
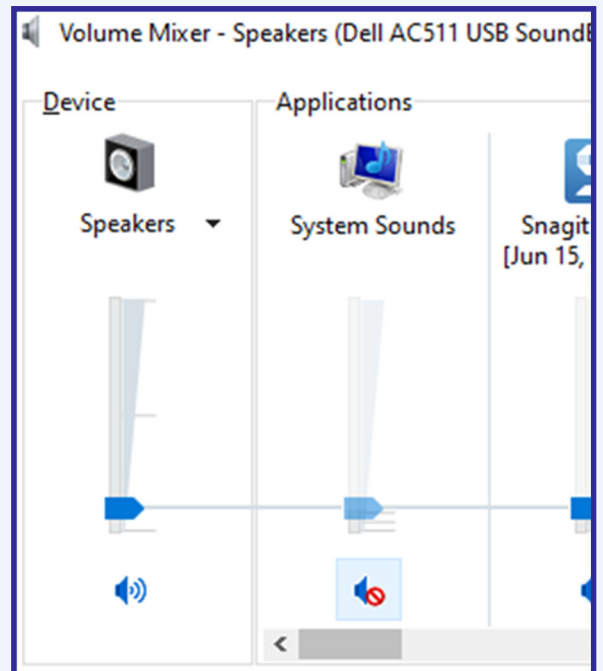

2. Click on "Open Volume mixer"

3. Scroll to the right until you find "System Sounds" and click on the speaker icon.

4. The sounds for ARIS (and possibly other systems you have open) will now be muted.

You can now close the window and enjoy using ARIS applications without all the dinging.

Please note that you may have to follow these steps each time you restart your computer.

Interesting Communication Quotes

Submitted by: Kelli Adkins

- "I think that the number one rule to effective communication should be 'choose your words wisely.' This is because a simple choice of your words can make a great difference and determine whether your message would be accepted or rejected." – Jason Mainsons

- "The biggest mistake is believing there is one right way to listen, to talk, to have a conversation – or a relationship." – Deborah Tannen

- "The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate." – Joseph Priestley

- "When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen." – Ernest Hemingway

- "The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said." – Peter Drucker

- "The greatest problem with communication is we don't listen to understand. We listen to replies. When we listen with curiosity, we don't listen with the intent to reply. We listen for what's behind the words." – Roy T. Bennett

- "Communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life." – Brian Tracy

- "To have good communications skills means you are able to make your point without a lot of fillers and stumbling." – Gregory Davidson

- "Good communication is the bridge between confusion and clarity." – Nat Turner

- "Speech is our primary means of communication. If it's important, we tell people about it." – Brian Knapp

- "The trouble with talking too fast is you may say something you haven't thought of yet." – Ann Landers

- "The basic building block of good communications is the feeling that every human being is unique and of value." – Unknown

- "Communication works for those who work at it." – John Powell

- "Effective communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what you know." – Jim Rohn

- "Effective communication helps to keep the team working on the right projects with the right attitude." – Alex Langer

- "Talking more than is necessary is a barrier to effective communication and effective listening." – Clodagh Swanson

- "To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others." – Anthony Robbins

- "Communication sometimes is not what you first hear, listen not just to the words, but listen for the reason." – Catherine Pulsifer

Things To Do

June

- Annual Reports
- Post Doc Requests
- ARMPS
- 3rd Quarter Reviews

July - September

- Gather attendee information for FY23 travel (Domestic and Foreign) to submit into ATIS
- IFR submissions
- Outgoing agreement submissions
- Monitor deadlines for small/large purchases
- Complete any required training in AgLearn
- Prepare for End of Year Performance Appraisals

October - December

- Update unit to FY23 accounting codes; webTA, CATS, etc.
- End of Year Closeout
- Year End Performance Appraisals
- FY23 Performance Plan development and IDP

Weekly or Regular Basis

- Back up computer on a regular basis.
- Keep Outlook Calendar current.
- Reconcile credit card transactions within Access Online [AXOL] and CATS.

Bi-weekly

- Review T&As (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 416/417s, Agreements which will be terminating and need to be extended or will require reports.
- Request necessary reports from SYs.
- Review citations - follow agency guidelines for format. Check the volume/page numbers along with the DOI.