



MWACOP News Notes

Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals

June 2021 Issue

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Message from the Co-Chairs

Welcome to Spring! As we cross the one-year mark of max telework, we reflect on how “the seasons have changed” with all the ways ARS has conducted daily business. From Zoom meetings, Microsoft Teams training sessions, and all the new tools we have used to communicate, we have continued to come together to meet our Mission’s goals. The transition has been an adjustment for us all; the phrase “a job very well done” is an understatement.

The MWACOP would like to extend our warmest welcome to the new Office Professionals (OPs) supporting the Midwest Area! It is such a pleasure to have you on board and embark on this journey with other OPs. In addition to your assigned Mentors, MWACOP members are also available to answer any questions and assist with training needs. Do not hesitate to reach out to your mentors or Council members. We are here to help!

The Council has launched a new Marketing Team to focus on promoting the MWACOP. The Marketing Team has created many new and exciting items: the MWACOP email address, the “Refuel & Refocus” webinar series and Teams site, and a MWACOP Zoom background. This month, we are also welcoming three new PSAs as members: Janeen Polen with the Application Technology Research Unit, the Corn, Soybean and Wheat Quality Research Unit, both located in Wooster, Ohio, and the Soil Drainage Research Unit located in Columbus, Ohio; Shelby Nepple with the Corn Insects and Crop Genetics Research Unit located in Ames, Iowa, and Lauren Browning with the Livestock Behavior Unit located in West Lafayette, Indiana.

Our council will be holding our Annual Meeting in August of this year, and we will be looking closely at your survey responses to see how we can address your concerns and identify improvements to our processes and tools.

I, Jessica Boyer, am transitioning to my new role as Ex-Officio as my time as Sr. Co-Chair to this council is coming to an end. It has been a pleasure serving as a team member. Amy McNamara will be serving as your new Sr. Co-Chair and has been invaluable as a Jr. Co-Chair.

MWACOP is here to assist with all the needs of the Office Professional in every stage of service. Please, never hesitate to reach out to a member if there are any questions, comments, or suggestions on ways we can better serve you.

Here is to new beginnings,
Jessica L. Boyer, Sr. Co-Chair and Amy McNamara, Jr. Co-Chair

Members of the council include:

- Jessica Boyer (Jessica.Boyer@usda.gov) - Sr. Co-Chair
- Amy McNamara (Amy.McNamara@usda.gov) - Jr. Co-Chair
- Marci Bushman (Marci.Bushman@usda.gov) - News Notes Editorial Team
- Tracy Durre (Tracy.Durre@usda.gov) - News Notes Editorial Team/Marketing Team
- Kerri Bentley (Kerri.Bentley@usda.gov) - SOP/Web Editorial Team
- Ann Kessler (Ann.Kessler@usda.gov) - SOP/Web Editorial Team
- Brian Brusky (Brian.Brusky@usda.gov) - Recorder
- Janeen Polen (Janeen.Polen@usda.gov) - Member
- Lauren Browning (Lauren.Browning@usda.gov) - Member
- Shelby Nepple (Shelby.Nepple@usda.gov) - Member
- Kelli Adkins (Kelli.Adkins@usda.gov) - Ex-Officio/Technical Advisor/NACOP Representative
- Beth Burmeister (Beth.Burmeister@usda.gov) - Technical Advisor/NACOP Representative
- Brittney Jones (Brittney.Jones@usda.gov) - Technical Advisor
- Sherri Buxton (Sherri.Buxton@usda.gov) - Sponsor



MWACOP members attending the 2020 virtual annual meeting. From top left: Jessica Boyer, Kelli Adkins, Brittney Jones, Marci Bushman, Beth Burmeister, Amy McNamara, Tracy Durre, Kerri Bentley, Sherri Buxton, Ann Kessler, and Brian Brusky. Not pictured are new members Janeen Polen, Lauren Browning, and Shelby Nepple.



MWACOP Website: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/MWA/Pages/MWACOP.aspx>

MWACOP SOP Website: <https://www.ars.usda.gov/midwest-area/docs/sop-manual/>

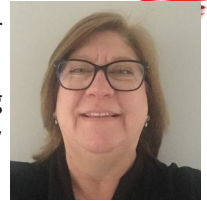
NACOP Website: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Inside%20ARS/NACOP/Pages/NACOP.aspx>

MWACOP has an email address!

ARS-MWA-COP@usda.gov

New Office Professionals in the MWA

Dawn Ausman started November 8, 2020, with the Assistant Director's Office at the National Center for Animal Health in Ames, Iowa. She does not have any previous federal employment experience, but applied with the USDA because she felt it would be a great place to work. Dawn enjoys spending time with family and friends, attending basketball and football games and enjoys summer weather by the pool. Her advice in life is "Have courage and be kind."



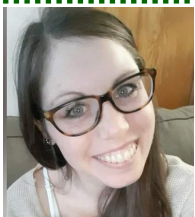
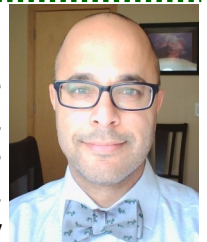
Cylie Colbeth joined the Location Support Staff in Madison, Wisconsin, on March 3, 2019. Her employment journey has all been in Wisconsin: Somerset, Green Bay and Madison. Her most interesting job was her first job. Cylie's grandpa has a herd of Shetland/Welsh ponies and had a gig to show them off called the Milk Buds. They would hitch eight of the ponies to a wagon for fairs, parades and rodeos, then her grandma, aunts, cousins and she would sing signature dairy-related songs from the wagon as her grandpa drove the ponies around. Cylie decided to join the USDA because her partner used to work at the Dairy Forage Unit and had a really good experience with the Location Support Staff. He had suggested she look there one day, and coincidentally this position was posted right when he had mentioned it. She feels like the USDA found her! Cylie enjoys walking and running in the sunshine, anything crafty, spending time with her partner, friends, and her cat, Kevin (who has become infamous as we've been working from home) and absolutely loves getting dressed up and decorating for Halloween and winter holidays! She drank a sparkling ICE water that had printed on the side of the bottle, "As in life, chill for best results" and feels she couldn't have said it better. Nothing is worth the detriment that stress can have on your mental health, so her advice is to take the time you need to be healthy, find balance, and try to find something to enjoy each day. Oh, and asking for help is SO underrated!

Rhiannon Hanson started on November 22, 2020, with the Infectious Bacterial Diseases Unit in Ames, Iowa. She last worked in federal service over 20 years ago in Heidelberg, Germany as the Administrative Assistant to the U.S. Army Hospital Administrator. Rhiannon's employment journey has covered everything from working with the public to satisfy their hamburger needs to owning a franchise of a women's gym. After coming to ARS, she has immense respect for those who work so hard to keep the world fed and healthy. When not at work, Rhiannon is painting, writing short stories, or irritating her grandson with her music too loud. Her one piece of advice would be to always celebrate when someone else has something great happen in their life, even if it is just in your own heart. Always celebrate joy when you see it.



Rita Mueggenberg joined the Plant Introduction Research Unit in Ames, Iowa, on April 11, 2021. Her previous employment includes the Department of Corrections and Iowa State University Dean of Students. Rita applied for her position because she felt ARS would be a fun and relaxed working environment. She enjoys camping at Little Wall Lake in her free time. Rita's advice is to take the extra five minutes of time to save the next person 30 minutes.

Justin Robinson started on March 14, 2021, with the Vegetable Crops Research Unit in Madison, Wisconsin. He served in the U.S. Army for six years, then had ten years of federal service as a Department of the Army Civilian. After his service to the Army, he wanted to be closer to family in the Midwest and to achieve a better work-life balance. Outside of work, Justin enjoys reading, writing, and playing board games. He also travels extensively and has been to 49 of the 50 states. He especially enjoys the National Parks. He spent a month "alone" in Japan on a work-study program. Justin's advice is that good questions are a superpower. In negotiations, learning what the other party wants is more important than explaining what you want; at work, questions are how you get better at your job; in life, questions add richness and meaning, which in my opinion are better than the comfort of "knowing it all."



Larissa Tungesvick joined the Ruminant Diseases and Immunology Research Unit in Ames, Iowa, on March 28, 2021. She does not have any previous federal employment experience, but she does have experience providing secretarial services. Larissa applied with the USDA because she was interested in the studies/research being done. Larissa enjoys kayaking and camping in her free time. Her favorite motto is "Teamwork makes the dream work."

Retirements

Debi Schaefer



After over 40 years of service to the USDA, ARS in Madison, Wisconsin, Ms. Schaefer will retire on July 2, 2021. In October 1980, she began her federal service as a part time GS-4 Secretary to the Research Leader (RL) of the Plant Disease Resistance Research Unit. In late 1986, she transferred to the Dairy Forage Research Center and then transferred to the Barley and Malt Lab (now the Cereal Crops Research Unit), in July 1987 and has since served that unit in an administrative support capacity (GS-5 RL Secretary and ultimately promoted to a GS-7 RL PSA in 2007). Ms. Schaefer has served on the MWACOP twice, first as a member of the council and the second time as a NACOP Technical Advisor. Ms. Schaefer has served as a mentor to numerous new PSAs in the MWA. She has also participated in the AFM focus group during her time on the MWACOP and NACOP by serving as the PSA representative on the HQ Facilities, Engineering, Real Property and Safety Advisory Group (FERPSAG). Ms. Schaefer was selected as the 2017 ARS Office Professional of the Year. Ms. Schaefer has willingly taken on additional tasks when requested by the Madison Location Administrative Office and the Area Office to assist others, i.e., serving on the PSA position description update team, testing new software systems for release to the field, and taking additional training to assist the Madison location for micro purchases above \$4,999 and below \$10,000 when the location purchasing agents/contracting officers were reassigned to the Area offices.

Ms. Schaefer will now take the time to fully enjoy the next phase of life with her family, which includes her two grandchildren.

Thank you for your service to the USDA!

Linda Miller



After about 30 years of service to the USDA, ARS in Ames, Iowa, Linda Miller retired on March 26, 2021. Linda began her career with ARS in 1991 as a Secretary (Typing) in the Facilities Engineering Management Unit located at National Animal Disease Center (NADC). After eight years in this position, she transferred to the Safety and Security Unit with the new title of Secretary, Office Automation. In 2005 Linda moved to the Food Safety and Enteric Pathogens Research Unit, where she spent the remainder of her career serving as the Program Support Assistant.

Linda had always been willing to share her knowledge, stay late to get the job done and help anywhere she could. Before Linda's departure, she put together various documents with helpful tips and information to assist the new PSAs. Her help and mentorship were tremendous during max telework. Linda was described by those who worked closely with her as a truly quiet but powerful force in meeting the ARS mission.

In 1996 and again in 1999, Linda received the Special Act/Service Award for assisting patrons above and beyond her expected duties.

Linda was an active member and Secretary of the Ames Area Civil Rights Advisory Committee (AACRAC) for four years. She also served four years as a committee member for the Green Team.

When asked what advice or words of wisdom she would like to share with new office professionals starting with ARS, Linda's advice was to take each project as it comes and always to do your best.

After retiring from ARS, Linda is looking forward to tackling various home projects.

Navigating the MWACOP SOP Website

Submitted by: Kelli Adkins

Just recently I went to the SOP website to locate information for Ethics. I am not going to lie...it took me a minute to locate what I needed. So I thought if I shared navigating the MWACOP SOP website that it might be helpful to one or two Office Professionals.

Finding form SEB-102:

Option 1:

Under the Ethics section you will select USDA Ethics Forms.

[Ethics](#)

- [USDA Office of Ethics](#)
- [Ethics Form Reference Sheet](#)
- [USDA Ethics Forms](#)

You will be taken to the USDA Office of Ethics website.

The screenshot shows the USDA Office of Ethics website. On the left sidebar, under 'Ethics Topics', the 'Forms' link is highlighted with a red arrow. The main content area shows a 'FORMS' section with a 'Download Acrobat Reader' link. Below this is a table titled 'FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE FORMS' with columns for 'FORM #', 'DESCRIPTION', and 'AVAILABLE FORMATS'.

Navigate to the bottom of the page and select (click on Adobe PDF) the form you are searching for.

AGENCY-SPECIFIC FORMS FOR EMPLOYEES OF THE RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND ECONOMICS AGENCIES (ARS, ERS, NASS & NIFA):

FORM #	FORM TITLE	AVAILABLE FORMATS
SEB-102	Conflict of Interest Certification	Adobe PDF
SEB-103	Request for Approval to Accept an Award from a Non-Federal Source	Adobe PDF
SEB-104	Acceptance of Free Attendance at Widely-Attended Gatherings	Adobe PDF
SEB-106	Request for Approval of Official Duty Activity	Adobe PDF

Option 2:

Under the Agreements section you will select Conflict of Interest Certification (SEB-102).

Agreements

- [Conflict of Interest Certification \(SEB-102\)](#)
- [Fund Transfers](#)
- [Grants & Agreements - FAQ](#)
- [Grants Gov Instructions](#)
- [Incoming Fund Request](#)

This will open the pdf fillable form. Click on the pdf SEB-102 at the bottom of your window.

The screenshot shows a file explorer window with a red arrow pointing to a PDF file named 'SEB-102_2016-REE...pdf'.

Save it to your computer and fill it out for signature.

For more resources and information visit the MWACOP SOP website:

<https://www.ars.usda.gov/midwest-area/docs/sop-manual/>

Using the SOP and find a broken link? Send the link to ARS-MWA-COP@usda.gov so we can correct it!

NACOP Update

Submitted by: Beth Burmeister & Kelli Adkins

The most exciting initiative for the National Advisory Council for Office Professionals (NACOP) this year was the All Office Professional Listening Session held on February 23rd. If you missed it, the link to the recording is available on [Axon](#).

During the Listening Session, three major topics emerged: training, mentoring and communication. As a follow up, NACOP met with the local Councils to discuss how we address these topics and learn from each other.

In the meantime, we contacted the Research Leaders Advisory Council (RLAC) to ask about their communication plan. They shared their 14-page document with NACOP. Our goal is to draft the NACOP communication plan and then assist the local Councils to develop theirs using the MWACOP's plan as a model. We plan to reconvene with the local Councils to present the communication plan and to brainstorm other ways to communicate.

Recently, NACOP updated the [Resource Assistant List](#). Several people who had volunteered to serve as subject matter experts retired or changed responsibilities. It is exciting to see new and familiar (MWA!) names of people who volunteered to answer questions on the subjects listed.

In addition, NACOP updated the [Quick Reference Guide](#) (QRG). We review this resource at least once a year to make sure all the links are working. If you find a broken link, please let us know. This helps us to continue providing a quality and reliable resource.

Members also serve on [committees and AFM advisory teams](#). If you have a question, please contact Kelli or I or go directly to the NACOP member serving on that committee. The committees or advisory teams want to hear from Office Professionals on what is working (or not) in the field. We are here to serve you!

2021 USDA Office Professional of the Year



On Tuesday, April 13, the Agency held its formal awards ceremony via Zoom to recognize the 2021 Agency Employee Recognition Program winners. This is one of the most anticipated events of the ARS calendar every year. The employee recognition awards are meant to showcase the best of ARS. They spotlight particularly outstanding accomplishments and show appreciation for going above and beyond to execute the ARS mission. This year our very own MWA, PSA Amy McNamara, from the Plant Science Research Unit located in St. Paul, Minnesota, was the recipient of the Agency's 2021 Office Professional of the Year Award. For exceptional mentoring of new Program Support Assistants in preparing FY21 ARMPs documentation and training in program support and customer service. Congratulations to Amy, and thank you for setting an excellent example for the MWA Office Professionals with your outstanding contributions to the Midwest Area and to the Agency.

Congratulations

RPES Notice

The RPES Template changed several times over the past year, and currently has been discontinued until further notice. Brittney Jones is sending updates as quickly as she receives them, so please continue to be flexible as this process is in transition.