

Newly Appointed Scientist Professional Development Program

USDA-ARS- Northern Plains Area

Revised April 27, 2010

GOALS

1. To assist all newly appointed Category 1 and 4 scientists attain standards of performance that will enhance their opportunity for success within ARS.
2. To ensure fairness and equity in evaluating professional scientific development.

SCOPE

The Newly Appointed Scientist Professional Development Program (NASPDP) provides a 3-year period to enhance a newly appointed scientist's transition into an ARS scientific position and to carefully monitor and evaluate their progress. This program covers all newly appointed Category 1 and 4 scientists, thereafter referred to as new scientists [including research leaders (RL)], within the Northern Plains Area (NPA).

RATIONALE

The leadership of the NPA has a responsibility to provide our new scientists with the tools and opportunities necessary to achieve a high level of success within ARS and within their chosen scientific field. Every new scientist should be presented with a consistent set of standards and opportunities to become a productive and effective ARS scientist, and to develop a long-term sustainable research program. Feedback received from a number of on-site program reviews, as well as from responses of randomly selected scientists, emphatically states that mentoring and development of newly hired scientific staff is a necessary and vital step in retaining a talented pool of world-class researchers. The NASPDP establishes an environment in which our new scientists are welcomed to ARS and acknowledged as valuable members of the organization. The program helps each new scientist lay a foundation for their entire career with ARS, assists with the challenge of adjusting to a new job and work place, and fosters a commitment to conduct quality science that addresses the mission of ARS and meets customer expectations.

The NASPDP provides a standardized development and evaluation process for all new scientists within the NPA. It provides appropriate guidance for the new scientist and supervisor to jointly outline and discuss various expectations and concerns such as: career enhancement and development, research program development, performance expectations, and other relevant issues. Additionally, the NASPDP establishes the guidelines for a Newly Appointed Scientist Mentoring Program. The complete NASPDP process assures uniformity of orientation, mentoring, and assessment activities across the NPA.

NASPDP COMPONENTS

1. ARS Orientation

On the first day of employment the location Administrative Officer or RL administers the oath of office to the new scientist if previously not a Federal employee. The new scientist is also provided with information related to ARS, the Northern Plains Area, and location procedures, employee benefits, safety programs, labor contract, if appropriate, etc. After this initial introduction the employee will meet with his/her supervisor, typically the RL, LD, or Center Director (CD) to discuss supervisor/employee expectations, including conduct and performance. If the supervisor is the Area Director (AD), then a teleconference will be held.

Within the first month of employment, the supervisor will discuss and will provide the employee with a written copy of the following:

- Letter from the AD welcoming the new scientist to ARS and the NPA and introducing the NASPDP.
- Follow-up letter from the Associate AD outlining the NASPDP.
- Research Position Evaluation System (RPES) guidelines for Category 1 scientists (see P&P 431.3 “Research Position Evaluation System” and Manual 431.3-ARS “RPES Case Writeup Preparation & Guidance for Panelists”).
- ARS P&P 431.0 “Assessment of Impact of Person on the job for ARS Category 4 Positions” to Category 4 scientists.
- Current position description.
- NPA generic annual performance standards for Category 1 scientists and/or RLs; or specifically developed annual performance standards for Category 4 scientists.
- Information on the development of an Individual Development Plan (IDP).
- P&P 418.2 Appraisal of Probationary and Trial Period Employees, if applicable.
- Approved current CRIS project plan.
- ARS Code of Scientific Ethics.
- ARS and NPA EEO Policy Statement.
- Information on NPA ethics website and contents of site.
- REE 152.2 Authorship of Research and Technical Reports

Employees are expected to conduct themselves with the highest integrity and treat other employees with dignity and respect. Appropriate administrative actions, which may include removal, can be taken at any time by the supervisor to address conduct or performance problems. Administrative actions will be discussed and coordinated with the AD, supervisor, and if appropriate, the REE Employee Relations staff of the Human Resources Division in Beltsville, MD.

The supervisor will provide information on the activities and functions of the Area Office, National Program Staff, and ARS Headquarters, and will provide instruction on how to navigate the NPA and ARS websites. A list of key agency contacts (AD, Area Office Staff, National Program Leaders, etc.) will also be provided. Supervisors of new scientists may also be provided with a list of additional topics, as appropriate, to discuss

by the Area Office. These topics can be used to enhance the orientation experience of the new employee.

The Area Office will sponsor a formal orientation program for all newly appointed Category 1 and Category 4 scientists to be held within the first 15 months of their employment with ARS. The NPA New Scientist Orientation will be held in Ft. Collins, CO and will include formal presentations from the Area Office staff and other key ARS employees on topics such as research program development, administrative processes, safety and health, EEO/Civil Rights, technology transfer, ethics and RPES.

2. Mentoring Program

The mentoring aspect is a key component of the NASPDP. The goal of the NPA Newly Appointed Scientist Mentoring Program is to foster relationships beyond that of employee-supervisor to assist all new scientists in their professional development and their integration into ARS and the NPA. Scientists who have successfully established their career with ARS are in a position to draw from their professional development experiences and relate those experiences to new scientists. Accordingly, the NPA mentoring program will align each new Category 1 and Category 4 scientist with an experienced ARS scientist.

The NPA mentoring component encompasses two general dimensions: career planning and responsible research. Career goals may range from the specific, such as becoming a world scientific authority in any given field to the more general, such as navigating particular work cultures. Responsible research includes not just the outcomes of scientific inquiry but also the ethics, social responsibility, and organizational values underlying research activities. The relationship between mentors and protégés is a powerful tool in bridging career planning and responsible research.

Although supervisors play a significant role in assimilating the new scientist into their research unit, there are myriad issues and questions about the NPA and ARS in general that may best be handled by someone who does not hold a supervisory or evaluative role over the new scientist. While it is expected that the mentoring partnership will prove to be mutually beneficial, the new scientist is fully responsible for his or her own job performance and conduct. Mentors will **not** participate in the formal evaluation of their protégé's performance.

Mentors will be solicited through a combination of an annual "Call for Mentors" from the AD to all GS 13 and higher Category 1 and Category 4 scientists in the NPA and/or individual conversations with interested scientists either within NPA or from ARS locations outside of the NPA as needed. Based on discussions with the supervisor, the AD will match mentors and new scientists. Each new scientist will be assigned at least one mentor. The Area Office will evaluate the mentoring program through use of feedback from mentors, protégés, and their respective supervisors, on an annual basis. The AD sponsors an awards program for outstanding mentors, with selection based on nominations from protégés. Also, supervisors are expected to give mentors credit for their activities during their annual performance evaluation under the Element entitled

“Special Task(s).” A booklet describing the mentoring program will be provided to all mentors and protégés.

3. Performance Standards and IDP

Performance standards with goals, along with development of an IDP should be finalized within 30 days after the start of employment as per ARS Performance Appraisal System - Policy and Procedure 418.3. It is expected that this be an interactive process between the new scientist and their supervisor (RL/CD/AD).

4. Core Competencies and Skills

Core competencies have been identified that are critical for new scientist career development within ARS. It is expected that new scientists develop a dynamic research *program* through their competency to conceive, plan, conduct and report/document their research activities. These competencies are clearly defined in their annual performance standards. Additional competencies, including financial and human resource management and technology transfer, are also detailed in the standards. Because of the uniqueness of each Category 4 scientist position, other competencies may be identified that accurately reflect duties listed in their position description. These additional competencies should be outlined in their performance standards. The supervisor will annually evaluate the new scientist’s ability to address the competencies listed above through mid-year and annual appraisals (see section 7). Frequent discussions throughout the year between the new scientist and supervisor can also assist in developing a plan to address competency weaknesses.

Skills that could assist the new scientist to effectively develop expected competencies may include: communication, continued education, creativity, organization, planning, priority setting, and supervision. RLs may also wish to develop additional skills related to leadership competencies described in their performance standards. These skills should include: business acumen, conflict management, customer/stakeholder relations, political savvy, strategic planning, and team building. Characteristics of the above skills are provided in the attached appendix.

5. Introduction and Integration of New Scientist into the Management Unit

The supervisor (RL/CD/AD) is expected to visit frequently with the new scientist during the first several months of employment. The supervisor’s role is to introduce the new scientist to other members of the management unit, discuss the expectations for the new scientist’s research program, explain the new scientist’s role and responsibilities within the overall research program of the management unit, and provide a positive work environment. The supervisor should introduce the new scientist to outside collaborators and cooperators, assist in evaluation of supply, travel and equipment needs and how to obtain those, and assign and/or initiate recruit actions for technical support. Further, the supervisor should ensure the new scientist is integrated into existing CRIS projects.

6. Training

Training and guidance related to the RPES document development and scientific performance expectations will be provided by the supervisor (RL/CD/AD) to all new Category 1 scientists, and Category 4 scientists will be given a copy of the ARS P&P 431.0 within the first month of employment. If the new scientist has had no previous supervisory experience, it is suggested that supervisory training be sought as soon as reasonably possible after the start of employment. Training provided by entities such as AgLearn, SkilCraft or the OPM Management Development Centers should be considered. Training opportunities to address core competency development should be considered on an as needed basis. Additionally, new RLs are expected to participate in an ARS sponsored New Research Leader Training Program (2 years in duration). This particular Program is conducted by ARS Headquarters staff and consists of numerous training/developmental opportunities.

7. Mid-Year and Annual Appraisals

The new scientist will be required to prepare a written accomplishment statement for each performance element in their performance standards and pass it on to his/her supervisor (RL/CD/AD) prior to the end of each annual performance appraisal period. It is preferable that the document not exceed 5 pages in length. Based on the employee's written accomplishments and other information, the supervisor will prepare written comments documenting the new scientist's progress in meeting each performance element, as well as addressing other items as appropriate. At the supervisor's discretion, comments related to overall performance may be solicited from the new scientist's subordinates and co-workers. Official performance appraisal documents will be reviewed by the Area Office prior to ratings being approved and before meetings occur with the employee. The probationary period is considered an extension of the hiring process. If the new scientist is on probation and does not meet the fully successful requirements for an essential performance element, the new scientist will be removed without benefit of a performance improvement period (PIP). If the new scientist is not on probation and does not meet the minimal requirements for annual performance, he/she will be placed on a PIP. Publications documenting work done in previous positions but completed and submitted for approval through ARIS during ARS employment will satisfy annual publication requirements. However, there is an expectation that by the end of the second full year of ARS employment, at least one manuscript will be submitted documenting work done in the current assignment. By the end of the third year, manuscripts from the current assignment should appear in refereed journals. New scientists should understand that meeting the minimal annual performance requirements will not ensure promotion when they are reviewed by RPES panels. NPA fully expects that new scientists will work towards promotion and do everything they can to ensure their work will be well documented and have impact recognizable to a panel.

The supervisor will also conduct mid-year reviews of the new scientist's progress in meeting the performance goals listed within each performance element. At the mid year review, if it becomes evident that the new scientist will not meet the publication requirement by the end of the rating cycle for personal hardship or medical reasons, the

supervisor may submit a written request to the Area Director who has the authority to waive all or part of the publication standard.

8. Mid-Course Discussion

After the new scientist has been in the program at least 18 months, the Area Office will send to the supervisor a mid-course discussion questionnaire to be used as a tool to discuss professional development with the new scientist. The purpose of the discussion is to ensure the new scientist is on track for a successful RPES review. Once completed, the questionnaire will be sent through supervisory channels to the Associate Area Director for review. If there are concerns over the lack of professional development, a teleconference with the scientist, the supervisor and line management, may be held to discuss these concerns and develop a plan to address them.

9. New Scientist Three-year Assessment

Seven months prior to the end of the 3-year development program, the new scientist will be notified through supervisory channels to prepare a scientific accomplishment (SA) document. The new scientist will submit the SA to the supervisor (RL, CD, or AD) within two months of being notified. The write-up for Category 1 scientists will follow the guidelines and format as contained in ARS Manual 431.3, RPES Case Write up Preparation and Guidance for Panelists with the expectation of using it as the new Category 1 scientist's initial submission to RPES. Category 4 scientists will follow guidelines contained in ARS P&P 431.0, Assessment of Impact of Person on the Job for ARS Category 4 Positions. Accomplishments and publications prior to and after joining ARS should be clearly identified. The supervisor will forward to the AD, through line management, the SA document and the supervisor's written assessment of the new scientist's potential for sustained effective contributions to ARS research programs. The AD will forward the documents to the Northern Plains Area New Scientist Assessment Panel chair.

The New Scientist Assessment Panel will be chaired by the Associate Area Director (AAD) and will consist of a representative from Employee Relations and two to four scientists (depending on the number of scientists to be evaluated) appointed by the AD, at least one of whom will be a subject matter expert in the area of the scientist being evaluated. No later than two months before the end of the 3-year Program period, the Panel will evaluate the developmental progress of the employee and provide an assessment to the AD. The assessment will focus on scientific accomplishments and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the new scientist. Past accomplishments (prior to ARS employment) may also be considered by the panel. The panel will identify strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations for the scientist's future professional development. Feedback from the Panel related to the style and content of the SA document should be provided and may be used to assist the new Category 1 scientist with their initial case write-up submission. The new scientist's supervisor and other line management (RL, CD, or AD) at the location participate in the panel meeting and will provide appropriate feedback on scientific performance and developmental progress. All panels will meet via teleconference, as needed. A written report of the panel's findings will be forwarded to the AD. The AD will send a certificate of completion and a memo highlighting panel findings to the new scientist through line

management. If significant deficiencies are discovered, the AD will consult with the new scientist's line managers to develop a course of action that will enable the new scientist to improve and succeed in ARS.

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES FOR THREE-YEAR ASSESSMENT

Months Before the End of 3-year Program	Activity	Responsible Office/ Individual
7	New SY notified to prepare Scientific Accomplishment (SA).	Area Office
5	New SY submits SA to supervisor.	New SY
4	Supervisor forwards to the AD: 1. New SY's SA 2. Supervisor's assessment of the new SY's potential for sustained effective contributions to ARS research programs.	RL, CD
4	AD appoints and forwards all the new SY's documentation to the New Scientist Assessment Panel.	AD
3	The New Scientist Assessment Panel forwards to the AD its assessment of the new SY's potential for sustained effective contributions to ARS research and technology transfer programs and developmental needs.	Panel/Associate AD
2	The AD summarizes panel findings in a memo to the new SY.	AD

10. Program Completion

At the end of the 3-year NASPDP the new scientist will receive a certificate of completion from the AD. Although the formal portion of the program will have ended, it is expected that the new scientist continue to seek developmental opportunities to enhance their scientific career within ARS. NPA also encourages the continuation of any productive protégé – mentor relationship or development of new protégé – mentor activities.

Appendix – Skill Characteristics

Category 1 & 4 Scientists:

Communication - Effective oral communication with groups of various size; ability to organize thoughts in a concise manner; ability to effectively use media tools for visual presentations; listens; thinks on their feet; writes clearly and concisely; clear understanding of technical writing styles; ability to provide clear instructions.

Continued Education - Effectively reviews pertinent scientific literature; adapts new techniques/technology to existing research program; seeks training and education opportunities on related science interests; adapts to changes in science.

Creativity – Develops new and unique research ideas; actively seeks others in implementing creative plans; thinks out of the box; looks for new uses of existing research approaches; develops new solutions to research and management problems.

Organization – Multi-tasks well; ability to identify and use needed resources for accomplishment of tasks; good verbal and written skills related to developing instructions; ability to interact with others to accomplish a common goal.

Planning – Develops research goals and objectives; ability to relate objectives to research milestones; develops functional work schedules for tasks and human capital; ability to think ahead and provide contingencies for anticipated problems; ability to manage fiscal and physical assets and human resources.

Priority setting – Relates ARS research objectives with personal research program; focuses on important components; multi-tasks and completes assignments in a timely manner; excellent time manager; sees the big picture.

Supervisory skills – Provides clear instructions and expectations; works to provide a team atmosphere; provides feedback on both positive and negative actions; provides a discrimination free and safe work place; seeks to motivate; provides learning opportunities.

Research Leaders:

Business acumen – ***Knowledge of ARS administrative and financial policies; aware of Government agendas, programs, etc (e.g. President’s Management Agenda); develops long-range goals; develops strategies to address organizational change.***

Conflict management – Recognizes and addresses problems as early as possible; develops equitable and workable agreements; understands different viewpoints; listens; provides a workplace free from discrimination.

Customer/stakeholder relations – Actively seeks out and interacts with customers/stakeholders; works to meet customer expectations; leads research programs focused on impact; fosters trust.

Political savvy – Understands how research organizations and supporters function; works effectively within the organization; maintains excellent communication with key Agency and Department offices; anticipates problem areas.

Strategic planning – Develops and communicates an organizational vision; looks toward the future; anticipates new scientific issues; tolerant of other points of view; optimistic; builds programs.

Team building – Unselfish; sees the benefits of achieving success working together; builds morale; establishes open dialogue; encourages people to be their best; shares successes and failures.