



MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF CREDIT SPECIALISTS – FSA

1485 Industrial Drive NW
Rochester, MN 55901
507-289-7843 ext. 104 Fax: 507-536-0176



December 8, 2005

TO: John Monson, SED
Dan Hockert, EO
Stuart Shelstad, FLC
Farm Service Agency
375 Jackson Street, Suite 400
St. Paul, MN 55101

FROM: Mark E. Drewitz, MACS President

SUBJECT: Employee Relocation Notice and Related Issues

We appreciated our discussion last month and your willingness to examine the employee relocation issue and work towards improving the process. Relocation is a significant issue particularly with the newer employees in training. Working with them to improve the process will assist in efforts to retain these employees. Your inquiries have raised this to a greater level of concern for MACS.

Upon receipt of the draft updated notice and accompanying material I consulted with employees who have been relocated in the last few years. They were able to provide me with better insight into the relocation process and the difficulties they encountered because of their recent experiences. On the accompanying report, I have summarized the results of these contacts - both on the general process of relocation and on the notice itself.

A common comment received was a hope that the process will now improve as newer employees in the Administrative section become more experienced in dealing with these issues. They were also appreciative of the efforts in the draft documents and web site info as a good beginning in this process.

You may want to consider providing some basic relocation training materials to those offices that routinely have employees transferring in and out of their offices. This would provide another level of assistance for the more frequent issues that arise freeing the state office admin specialists for those more "interesting or unique" issues.

If you have specific questions please let me know and I will attempt to elaborate.

General Over-all Suggestions on Relocation

1. Ensure the person(s) in the State Office are available to support and assist employee(s) being relocated. Consideration needs to be given to the schedules of leave, etc. of both relocating employee and the State Office specialist to ensure the contact person is available to provide the necessary assistance.
2. Ensure sufficient support, training and direction is given to appropriate Admin section employees to be fully knowledgeable and supportive in the relocation process, paperwork, RIT claims, etc. The most frequent concern about assistance from the State Office mentioned was slow or no responses to questions, the State Office not being fully aware of relocation services and expenses offered, delayed payments (these are before and after the hurricanes) and the RIT claims.
3. Avoid winter relocation of employees if possible. Moving in winter is just more difficult than at other times of the year.
4. The relocating employee needs to get the official notice promptly to begin the move process. There have been instances of delays up to two weeks to get the official letter out. This official notice appears to get the whole process moving and this shortens the time available to complete the actual move. A copy of the notice is recommended to be sent to both the receiving supervisor and losing supervisor.
5. The relocating employee needs to be notified by State Office or State Office representative promptly of the relocation. Many comments were that the employee got unofficial word via the "grapevine" up to two weeks before being officially told. Typically this contact is made prior to the official notice memo with the memo expected to follow within a couple days.
6. There is not a good understanding of the process of moving office equipment such as computers, training manuals, etc. that will need to be used immediately at the new office. It seems most have done this with their actual final drive from their old location to new location; however, that leaves them little room for their own personal effects, especially if they need that space for items to live while in temporary quarters. Is there a process/procedure to otherwise move these office items?
7. Additional clarity on the policies on temporary quarters - what is and what isn't allowed is needed. Where you can locate, how far away, etc. Apparently you can not get paid for temporary quarters when you are attending a training meeting? This brings up the question of what you do with your personal effects if you are in temporary quarters for a month or so and have to go to an overnight training meeting.
8. Question on what happens when the actual cost of the move exceeds the estimated cost as determined from bids? There have been cases where the employee lost money due to the move because of this.
9. Do a follow-up survey with the relocated employee after relocation is completed to determine what worked well and what still needs improvement.

Relocation Notice

- A. Most relocating employees were not “put off” by the harsh tone of the notice; however, there is a desire to refine the language of the notice to put it in to less “governmentese”. Most of the relocating employees are newer to the Agency and are not as comfortable with the government language. A few examples:
- *This reassignment is necessary to achieve an equitable balance of personnel and workload in the farm loan program area to better serve our customers. This reassignment is being done in the interest of economy and efficient use of employees and for the good of the service. In our view it is needed to enhance customer service. In addition, it will further your training through exposure to a different management style and additional agricultural practices.*
 - *~~These regulations also stipulate that~~ You must notify us in writing by no later than _____ of your decision to accept or decline this reassignment. Complete and sign the statement on page 2 of this memorandum and return the original to:*
 - *Your failure to reply in writing by the deadline specified above will be ~~accepted as your~~ interpreted as a decision ~~not to accept~~ to decline this reassignment. Failure to report for duty at your new duty station on September 4, 2005 will result in ~~your~~ being placed in absence without pay leave (?? hence the “L” and not “P”) (AWOL) status until further action is taken.*
- B. Continue and expand the relocation checklist to include items the employee needs to ensure are completed for the move as well as related issues of computer network reconfiguration, Finance Office permissions, address changes for the Agency, employee files to go to new office, etc.
- C. The brochure and web sites are an improvement; however, also provide as much “hard copy” assistance in the original notice with the necessary forms as possible.
- D. Include the consequences of leaving the government before the 1 year service agreement is up (have to pay back the relocation expense reimbursement).
- E. Allowing a greater time to complete the move (up to 60 days) was especially appreciated. The common response was the more rushed the move was the more difficulties that were encountered.
- F. Is the “Relocation Information” summary still provided to the employee with the notice? If not, the suggestion is that it should be, updated as necessary and customized to that employees circumstances.