

RPES Advisory Committee

FY 15 – Quarter 3

In-Person Meeting

New Orleans, LA

May 13-14, 2015

Attendees: Steve Naranjo, Ann Callahan, Dana Lamberti, Amy Hegarty, Jungmin Lee, Jim Harnly, Brian Wienhold, Mike Grisham, Kyoung Ro, Steve Huber, Christi Swaggerty

Agenda:

1. Introductions

- 2. Share copy of Committee charter and discuss our role within each Area** – the charter reflects the new Area Office configuration, two members from each Area; addition of “junior” members to provide for more diverse perspectives on the Committee; as charter evolved in development, we agreed to be more transparent (majority of our meetings are not confidential) and post our meeting minutes on the RPES website; Committee members serve as a resource for scientists in each Area – we are the conduit for questions and concerns from the field, bring those issues forward to the group. We also try to be forward thinking, try to put things out there to be proactive (see around the corner). We also serve to advise the RPES Team with concerns they may have.

We have a website that is used to house all of our policies, procedures, including the Committee Charter, a list of our members, our meeting minutes, forms for cases and panels, etc. We will also use Share Point for our Committee shared documents as needed.

There seems to be a prevalent lack of understanding that this Committee exists. In order to help with this, each Committee member should reach out to the Area when meetings are held (e.g. leadership meetings and conference calls, new SY training, etc.).

Sidebar conversation about virtual panels: In FY 2014, we were mandated to hold 10% of panels virtually. Now, we are no longer mandated to hold a specific number of virtual panels each year but we are using the technology for a few mandatory panels (including all ad hoc panels and Supergrade panels). This allows us to stay abreast of the technology and be ready in those situations where a panel member experiences travel difficulties so that the cases do not have to be rescheduled.

ACTION ITEM: Dana will add the Committee Charter to the memo that she is going to start sending to new SYs – this will help disseminate information about the Committee; cc RL so he/she is aware; cc the two Area representatives and add their names to the memo; within the first six months of coming onboard.

TABLED ITEM: Someday, let’s look at mentorship programs that each Area might offer to SYs; each Area is currently operating differently, is this something we want to look at on an Agency wide basis?

3. **Panel updates:** For FY 15, 23 panels (one was convened by teleconference) are scheduled, and one Supergrade Panel was held in November 2014. Next Supergrade Panel is scheduled for November 2015. Discussion about promotion to ST and those who were previously placed in Supergrade as RA (this is the SSTS/SSRS that is no longer used for promotions by panel beyond GS-15). Discussed the new policy (signed by Dr. Jacobs-Young on 8/1/14) regarding the criteria for selecting the scientists when there is a queue. There are 23 ST slots that are currently filled, with five scientists waiting in the queue to be promoted. There are 14 scientists in RA pay plans (SSTS/SSRS) that remain from before.

Dana briefed the Committee on how we train new panelists (we make suggestions to the Areas based on peer group and need; and the Areas have some they want trained). In FY 15, we will be training in person, in Beltsville (June). In FY 16, we will be training in November 2015 (in Beltsville), may add another session later in the FY.

4. **Update on brainstorming ideas to improve RPES** – Handout of consolidates notes collected from previous meeting and input from members at that time (this started about a year ago); want additional input from new Committee members, and now that we've had some time to think about these, are there any new solutions or actions to take.
- a. Review of past brain-storming activities and outcomes
 - b. Additional brainstorming from the new committee – not action items yet, but some things discussed
 - i. How many RLs do not serve on panels? Many became an RL without ever having served – not a requirement, logistically this is a lot of people to train, this is where some mentoring will help; this is ultimately the responsibility of the SY and we are assisting by providing the information when they are hired.
 - ii. How do we assess the RPES Program? How well is it working? Are people who are deserving promotion getting promoted? How is the data trending over time? Are upgrades happening more frequently? How to assess the effectiveness? Can be a way to get SYs engaged.
 - c. Status of Evaluations of Panel Operations and Panelists – handed out a copy of the first two quarters' feedback that RPES Team provided to the Area Directors, some ADs shared with the Area RLs and SYs. This shows the importance of collecting the information and provides management a realistic view of the challenges the panelists face.
 - d. RPES Training session in Albany – next one in Peoria and Ames; should this be combined with the summer session that goes into more specifics for case writeup preparation?
 - e. Summer 2015 webinar for cases due in FY 16
 - f. Team research – the Manual has a fair amount of guidance to scientists as preparing their case writeup; role statements seem to have taken a back seat in current cases being submitted so this is something for us to advise the scientists and RLs, where to find the guidance, etc. When we talk about updates to the Manual, we will add information and examples to enhance the role statements.
 - g. Panel Reports
 - i. **ACTION ITEM:** RPES Team add in the cover memo for the panel review notice and panel reports a paragraph to management to counsel scientists that the

panel review is not a promotion panel but a classification panel, it is the responsibility of management to counsel employees on the process.

- h. Enhancing the RPES Website -
 - i. **ACTION ITEM:** Amy/Dana talk to AXON people to get RPES onto their hot links; talk to web designers to better organize the site - add a banner at the top for new announcements; highlight where to go when you have questions; work with web designers to add training material to the site, move "Tips for First Timers" higher to garner more attention

- 5. **Complete proposal on streamlined ad hoc process to submit to Dr. Liu** – don't want to sacrifice the integrity of the system for speed; goal to find balance between the two. With the proposal, Dr. Liu would have to set up criteria for what qualifies for "Fast Track."
 - i. **ACTION ITEM:** Amy call Dr. Liu to inform him that a new/alternate process might only save two weeks in the process – the majority of time to get to this stage is in management's hands (give stats for how long it is taking for them to get the cases in to us).
 - ii. **ACTION ITEM:** If he wants to proceed, Amy redraft the proposal, adding in the feedback (any comments from the new members?), reformat into memo from Steve N. to Dr. Liu on behalf of the RPES Advisory Committee.

- 6. **Discussion on prior recommendations for GS-15 review process** – handout of material that was issued by the RPES Advisory Committee to Dr. Rexroad March 2012, and his response May 2012.
 - a. Dr. Rexroad approved recommendation to increase panel caseloads (to a maximum of 13 per panel)
 - b. He wanted to obtain more information on an outline of possible new GS-15 review criteria
 - i. Based on this, the Committee surveyed the GS-15s
 - ii. Dr. Rexroad adopted (February 2014) the suggestion of an increased time period for the GS-15 cycle from five years to seven years
 - c. Does the Committee want to present again to the new AA to revisit the topic of an abbreviated case writeup for GS-15s, new perspective to look at the question, with the department's cultural transformation and in the theme of the Year of the RL (streamlining work for RLs)?
 - d. **ACTION ITEM:** Set up a sub-committee to investigate and propose – Steve Naranjo, Steve Huber, Brian Wienhold (to be consistent with YRL Role of the RL), Ann Callahan (Chair), and Dana Lamberti volunteered
 - i. This might include consideration of revised panel operations (panels that comprise only GS-15s, held virtually, etc.)
 - ii. Would have to investigate any impact on panel members
 - iii. Are there any unintended consequences with pursuing
 - iv. Would have to identify the business case (statistics of RIG, response from surveys, etc.)
 - v. Consider use of the previously proposed streamlined writeup and/or current ARS-229 for all GS-15s to be evaluated against (and prepare the case writeup toward), as is currently used for those being evaluated
 - vi. Consider the setup of panels of GS-15s evaluating GS-15s
 - vii. Would this be the same case writeup for those GS-15s going to Supergrade panel?

viii. Would there be an option of GS-15s submitting a “regular” case?

7. Revisions of the RPES P&P and Manual

- a. **ACTION ITEM:** Committee send Amy/Dana any further suggested edits to P&P and Manual
- b. **ACTION ITEM:** Amy and Dana will update GS-15 cycle and ST selection criteria; delete references to GS-9 Research Affiliates; other administrative edits; will include suggestions made in this meeting and will send to the Committee for any further review, suggestions, etc.
- c. Verbiage for patent issued vs. patent pending – spent time discussing what’s in the Manual, definitions, assumptions, etc. Decided to add a sentence to page 34 with reference to other parts of the Manual to help the scientist with the case writeup in these situations.
- d. One Area uses both * and ** to designate an accomplishment’s degree of recency but other Areas do not. We recognize that some accomplishments will continue to grow and the scientist will continue to publish and have impact, and those that continue to do so should be recognized with the * as “since last evaluation.” This is identified in the Manual on page 13 and we decided not to change the verbiage as it is left to the best discretion of the scientist and his/her supervisor to determine.
- e. Discussion about multi-authored documents in Manual, page 36; decided to add a sentence, “Identify co-first and corresponding authorship at end of citation in parenthesis.”

8. Year of the RL – Role of the RL subcommittee with RPES Advisory Committee members, proposals

- a. Adding space to PD (first three pages increase to four) for RL positions
- b. Additional Accomplishment for RL assignment – there was a feeling from the YRL team that leadership accomplishments are not being given appropriate weight (may be a misconception since this is covered in the Manual, page 25)
- c. Review of M. Cole’s “Another Inconvenient Truth”
- d. Amy and Brian are serving on this team and will keep the Committee in the loop as items are discussed.
- e. **ACTION ITEM:** Amy and Brian will bring the Committee’s action (sub-committee resurrecting the recommendation) to the YRL Role of the RL Team. Their initiative to add an accomplishment to the writeup may be a moot point IF the Committee recommends (and is ultimately approved) for a streamlined GS-15 writeup. AND the Committee recommends cutting out rather than adding in, as a general concept (PD).

9. Other items from the floor

- a. **ACTION ITEM:** RPES Team set up an external website to provide to contacts (from IDRs) to explain what RPES is, does, confidentiality (insert into the invitation to meet with them)
 - i. Add, if you are asked to write a letter, give recommendation, please do not reference promotion, etc.
- b. **ACTION ITEM:** Amy will ask each Area Office what they are doing throughout the year to educate/train SYs, new SYs, panel members, RL training (check with Maggie, ELDS)/meetings, etc. Add a cc with the Committee members from that area. We also want to find out what material they are using and sharing – want to be sure we have a

consistent message and training curriculum. Once we know, we will share with the Committee to participate as possible.

- c. **ACTION ITEM:** Amy updated and issued the End of Terms for Committee Membership, to all. Steve N., Mike, and Steve H. will stay until February 28, **2016**. Ann, Jim, and Brian will stay on until February 28, **2017**, that will put us in a good position to have three members rotating off in **2016**, three rotating off in **2017**, and the newest four members rotating off in **2018**. We will then have everyone rotating off at the same time of the year, with about a third of the committee rotating off and coming on board as new each year. Steve reminded the Committee that a replacement for the Chair position will be needed by the end of the year.

Just FYI - Amy would like to hold an annual in-person meeting – again about a year from now. We will schedule this with much more notice.

Next meeting – FY 15 Q4, August 25, 11:00 am ET.

Adjourned, 12:35 pm Thursday, May 14, 2015