

RPES Advisory Committee Conference Call

FY 15 – Q1, December 9, 2014

Attended:

- Chair – Steve Naranjo, PWA
- Ariel Szogi, SEA
- Ann Callahan, NEA
- Steve Huber, MWA
- Mike Grisham, SEA
- Brian Wienhold, PA
- Amy Hegarty – RPES Team
- Dana Lamberti – RPES Team

Absent: Jim Harnly, NEA and Jean Steiner, PA

Agenda:

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| • Call to order and welcome | Steve |
| • Status report of old business | Amy |
| • New business | Steve/Amy |
| • Next meeting and adjournment | Steve |

Old Business:

- Supergrade Panel was held March 10, 2014 – Three promotions to ST were effected 10/4, two recommendations are still in queue waiting for an ST slot to open at the Department.
- Committee Charter and updates were added to RPES Website, Panelink
- Ideas generated from Amy’s meeting with the Area Director meeting in October:
 - Amy presented anecdotal evidence that an average of one case from every panel is identified as “poor quality” by the panel members. Unfortunately, we have no hard data to back this up so Area Directors agreed that they would like feedback on specific case writeups that are deficient in quality, format, etc. This would allow them to address the concern directly with the RL and the scientist. To fulfill this request, Amy added a question to the RPES Evaluation of Panel Operations that solicits feedback on specific “poor quality” documents/cases to provide to the Area Directors for this purpose.
 - Amy also solicited ideas from the ADs on ways to improve the RPES Program, improve case writeup quality, and improve panel service commitment. A few ADs recommended that the RPES Program host an annual webinar for scientists whose cases are coming due the following fiscal year. This would be similar to the OSQR Program webinars that are hosted each year, so Amy and Dana met with OSQR Representatives to learn more about their process. Amy/Dana will prepare to host one during the summer of 2015 for scientists whose cases are due in FY 16. This

session will include time for a Q&A portion (as well as a survey for feedback about the session) so should provide a gauge of how well the information is received, what else is needed, etc.

- Results of brainstorming activity - How to move RPES panel operations into the future - Amy will forward these notes to the Advisory Committee again so we can decide what items have been addressed, which require further action, etc.

New Business:

- Supergrade Panel was held on 11/19/14, nine cases were reviewed, three were recommended to ST, documentation being prepared for submission to the Department. There are still no available slots to place these employees at this time so once approved, they will be waiting in the queue.
 - Amy reminded the Advisory Committee that the criteria for selection for available ST slots were changed this summer with Dr. Jacobs-Young's recent new policy (8/1/14). The policy states that the criteria is based on 1) ARS Hall of Fame Award winners; and then 2) service computation date. It has also been determined that new "classes" of recommended scientists would not "leap frog" over those scientists already waiting in the queue for an ST slot.
- Year of the RL (YRL): Brian provided an overview of the initiative to date.
 - October 7-9, Brian and Amy attended the YRL workshop at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, with about 40 other RLs, CDs, NPLs, and HQ/AFM/BSC representatives from around the country.
 - The Administrator gave an inspirational presentation on the first morning to empower the committee to "fix" the problems that have been plaguing the RLs for quite a few years now. She will provide whatever is needed to support the recommended solutions that the committee will present at an All-RL Conference, December 2015.
 - Three sub-committees have been formed from the committee members: Role of the RL, Business Processes, and Webinar Coordination
 - Dr. Jacobs-Young formally launched the YRL initiative on October 30 at an All-RL Webinar, and outlined her expectations and hopes of the YRL Committee, as well as engagement from all RLs. Cohort groups were invited to meet for about an hour after the webinar to provide feedback which has since been collected, analyzed, and posted to the RL Advisory Council share point site.
 - The next webinar was hosted by the Role of the RL Subcommittee on December 4, and presented the team's perspective on the current core duties of the RL, as well as site-specific supplemental duties (=defining the RL). The cohort groups that met after the December webinar were asked to provide any information that might be missing or need to be considered when defining the role of the RL. The next steps for the Role of the RL Subcommittee are to re-define or refine the role of the RL, and align with performance measures, compensation/incentives, etc.
 - The next webinar will take place in January and will be hosted by the Business Process sub-committee.
 - There are about 250 RLs in ARS; initial session was met with skepticism from participants, however with the December webinars, the feedback is becoming more optimistic and people are engaging. People want to see this issue "fixed."

- To the RPES Advisory Committee: Amy and Brian both continue to emphasize - when possible – that the RPES Program (and the RGEG) are only a portion of the issue with the RL positions – contrary to some of the suggestions already surfacing – however we will remain open as the process continues to unfold.
- In addition, the webinars are issued to all RLs (and committee members) however they are open to anyone who wants to join. Steve N. asked Amy to send these invitations to the rest of the RPES Advisory Committee so that they can attend as well.
- Posting minutes on Panelink: The Committee agreed to post only current and future minutes of RPES Advisory Committee meeting minutes. Since previous meetings were held under a different confidentiality agreement, it is not reasonable to post the minutes of those meetings. Minutes will be posted for the current fiscal year, and will be archived (but available) at the end of each fiscal year.
- Committee membership and tenure:
 - Steve drafted and shared a schedule to propose rotation of members that are due to transition off the RPES Advisory Committee in 2015 and 2016. Jean Steiner and Ariel Szogi will be departing in early 2015.
 - Those two vacancies plus the two new slots from the newly organized Areas creates four vacancies to fill in 2015: one each in MWA, PA, PWA, and SEA, all to be junior research scientists.
 - It was recommended that we synchronize effective dates so that they all transition at the same time. It was agreed that new members would start effective March 1, and that Ariel and Jean’s last day of service would be February 28.
 - Amy will begin to communicate with Area Directors to solicit recommendations for new members, and approval of current members to stay on longer than originally approved.
 - Amy will also investigate the process for determining when/how a new Advisory Chair is selected.
 - The Committee will revisit this process next December to determine if anyone remaining can stay on one more year to allow for reduced turnover happening at the same time in 2016.

Next Conference Call
 FY 15 Q2 – March 3, 2015 – 11:00 am ET