

Happenings at CSREES

The discussions generated from the “Hear it from the Board” forum on Capacity Building have been very thought provoking this year. However, I am going to switch gears quite a bit to present some recent developments here at the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES). In the past few months CSREES has undergone a reorganization. As a result, the Planning and Accountability unit (PA) within the Office of the Administrator was created to ensure CSREES meets the requirements of:

- The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA)
- The Agricultural, Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act (AREERA) and its mandated State Plans of Work and Annual Reports of Accomplishments and Results
- Recent Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requirements regarding Performance Assessments (PART)
- The President’s Management Agenda
- Budget justifications
- Other legal and managerial requirements as they arise (OIG and GAO audits)

PA serves as the focal point for agency and national strategic planning and accountability and policy analysis for research, education, and extension programs. In this capacity, PA will lead and facilitate planning activities that implement emerging agency policy and responds to these mandates. These activities are carried out in cooperation with the land-grant universities and other cooperators who are the recipients of Federal funds through CSREES. PA will provide evaluation results which will enable managers and decision makers to implement, manage, refine, and show the impact of the highest quality programs. PA is also responsible for the following:

- Coordinate on-site program reviews;
- Manage Multi-state research programs;
- Coordinate activities with the Extension Council on Policy’s (ECOP) Program Leadership Committee, Strategic Planning Council, and Personnel and Organizational Development Committee;
- Oversee development of the agency strategic plan and annual performance plans and reports;
- Initiate major studies and program evaluation research;
- Define impact assessment studies;
- Plan, conduct, and/or participate in workshops to facilitate a common understanding and application of impact assessment efforts;
- Prepare special reports and position papers;

- Stay abreast of developments in planning systems and techniques (to include advanced impact assessment methodologies and survey, statistical and econometric techniques);
- Design and conduct program analyses of CSREES programs; and
- Monitor reporting requirements.

New Director of Planning and Accountability

As the CSREES liaison to the Extension Education Evaluators Topical Interest Group, I am pleased to introduce to you Dr. Cheryl J. Oros. Cheryl was named as the director of PA beginning June 17, 2002. She will provide strategic planning and accountability and policy analysis for research, education and extension programs for CSREES.

Cheryl comes to CSREES from her former position as the Senior Evaluation Specialist for the Food Safety Inspection Service at USDA. Prior to that, as Chief of the Special Nutrition Evaluation Branch, she was responsible for writing the Strategic and Annual Plans for USDA's Food and Nutrition Service as well as overseeing numerous large-scale evaluations.

Prior to her work at USDA, she served as an evaluation research manager and technical advisor for several private companies, was Director of Research and Evaluation at a policy center at Georgetown University, and managed evaluations and taught evaluation methods for 10 years at the U.S. General Accounting Office.

Cheryl received her doctorate in psychology (specializing in applied research and evaluation) at Kent State University in 1981. She received her undergraduate training at the University of Dayton. Over the past 20 years, she has supervised more than 45 evaluation and policy research studies, including national evaluations as well as smaller scale efforts. She has been a long-time member and presenter at the American Evaluation Association and looks forward to working closely with the Extension Education Evaluators TIG as well as other groups.

The State Plans of Work and Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results

The USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated on January 3, 2002, a survey of the CSREES implementation of AREERA. The survey objectives are to become familiar with the provisions of AREERA, to identify and evaluate the controls implemented by CSREES as required by AREERA (particularly over the authorization, approval, and distribution of formula funds to 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions), and to identify potential audit issues. Critical AREERA

requirements that the OIG auditors have been focusing on include the implementation of the plan of work process, the merit review and scientific peer review processes, stakeholder input requirements, multistate extension requirements, integrated research and extension requirements, and matching fund requirements (particularly for the 1890 land-grant institutions). This audit survey has not yet been completed, but we hope to have the final recommendations and requirements from the OIG before year's end.

The FY 2002 State Annual Reports of Accomplishments and Results are due on March 1, 2003. Additional guidance for this Annual Report will be published on the CSREES AREERA website, (<http://www.reeusda.gov/part/areera/>) after we have the final recommendations and requirements from the OIG audit.

Future Opportunities in the Planning and Accountability Unit

In the near future the Planning and Accountability unit within the Office of the Administrator will be looking to hire two evaluators at the GS 13/14 level. We may also be looking for an IPA from a Land-Grant University for anyone interested in spending a year or two doing evaluation work for CSREES.

What is an IPA? It stands for Intergovernmental Personnel Act. Assignments to or from state and local governments, institutions of higher education, Indian tribal governments and other eligible organizations are intended to facilitate cooperation between the Federal Government and the non-Federal entity through the temporary assignment of skilled personnel. These assignments allow employees of State and local governments, Indian tribal governments, institutions of higher education and other eligible organizations to serve in Federal agencies for limited periods.

The goal of the Intergovernmental Personnel Act mobility program is to facilitate the movement of employees, for short periods of time, when this movement serves a sound public purpose. Mobility assignments may be used to achieve objectives such as:

- strengthening the management capabilities of Federal agencies, State, local and Indian tribal governments, and other eligible organizations;
- assisting the transfer and use of new technologies and approaches to solving governmental problems;
- facilitating an effective means of involving state and local officials in developing and implementing Federal policies and programs; and,
- providing program and developmental experience which will enhance the assignee's performance in his or her regular job.

When the call goes out for an IPA, please consider spending a year or two working with the Planning and Accountability staff at CSREES.

Also, we are planning to convene an advisory panel to help us with complex evaluation design and implementation. We anticipate that this panel will be made up of Land-grant University partner evaluation experts.

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