

Meeting Minutes

February 4, 2014

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS)
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Peter Lee, 2014 Council Chairman, U.S. Department of Treasury, opened the meeting and welcomed the members at 9:11 a.m. and thanked HHS for hosting. The members introduced themselves.

Functions and Responsibilities of HHS Executive Secretariat

Mr. Lee introduced Ms. Jennifer Cannistra, Executive Secretary, HHS. Ms. Cannistra described the responsibilities of the HHS Exec Sec. It is responsible for all Departmental clearances. The heart of the office is the policy coordinator team who work across the Department to solve any differences between agencies. There are 35 staff in the office, of which 12 are policy coordinators. Agencies also have their own coordinators. Medicaid is the biggest. A major project is the regulations planning agenda, which takes place twice each year. The office is also working on a major retrospective review of regulations that are already on the book to revise and streamline regulations already in place. There is a Public Participation Task Force that works to streamline the process to encourage more comments from people in the general public not normally represented in the HHS regulatory process. Timely response to correspondence is important to the Secretary Sebelius. The office has been working on streamlining its process with reporting on quarterly statistics. It also coordinates the Plain Writing initiative in the Department. Recently the office sent out a survey to agency heads asking for input on how they could do its work better. The response provided great feedback, which was then compiled into its best practices document and published them back to agency exec secs and posted on an internal communication Web page and shared broadly with entire Department. Ms. Sheila Bayne, Director, Office of Document and Regulations Management, discussed the functions of the correspondence and regulations team. The office also includes the documents records team, which receives the documents and handles records retention and FOIA responses.

Affordable Care Act (ACA)

Ms. Cannistra introduced Ms. Mayra Alvarez, Associate Director, Office of Minority Health, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health. Ms. Alvarez worked on health reform in the White House and now serves the Department to promote ACA. Ms. Alvarez discussed the major goals of the Act, including getting health insurance to those who don't have it or don't have enough coverage. She listed some of the benefits of the law that are already in place. Ms. Alvarez talked about how the marketplace does provides an easier way for consumers to shop for insurance and to find out what the costs are and what benefits are available to the consumer. The Department is working with states to expand Medicaid or use some other way to get more people insured. There are a variety of plans that work for different ages and incomes. She mentioned the fact that those who are insured now already pay to share the cost of covering the uninsured in their current premiums. Ms. Alvarez discussed some of the outreach efforts the Department has made to get the information to people who need it at the local level through partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, governments, and schools. She also discussed the work across the federal government on this issue. Members asked questions about the ability of the government to pay for the effort. Ms. Cannistra discussed the huge increase in the amount of incoming correspondence and the large numbers of regulations that had to be issued due to the law.

White House Update

The White House Agency Liaison provided updates and guidance on White House case work.

Best Practice Discussion: Survey Results

Mr. Lee reported on the results of the survey he circulated at the January meeting. The survey was a brief one page with a few yes/no questions and opportunities for written comments. Mr. Lee reviewed the answered to each question item by item. Most members who responded agreed that the meetings hosts should rotate, the Agency specific presentations are helpful, and the best practices are good. The member discussed the representation of the Departments in the Council. The members mostly agreed that the issues discussed in the Council are relevant to a member's work. About a third of the members reported that correspondence is not their primary roles. More members were neutral on whether the committees play an important role, which Mr. Lee stated may be due to a lack of knowledge about the committees. Most members agreed that the council could do more or just neutral. Individually more people said that they individually that are neutral on whether they individually should do more. Attach PowerPoint.

Committee Reports

Membership and Meetings – Ms. Pat Morgan, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, said the purpose of the committee is to reach out and attract more members, recruit hosts for meetings, and pick the best practices topics. The committee meets the third Thursday of every month by phone. Ms. Morgan asked members to contact her if they wish to join. She noted that the next meeting is March 4, 2014, at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which will include a best practice on the oversight of telework.

Web – Ms. Tracy Catoe, U.S. Department Education, reported that the Web site needs an updated meeting schedule. She asked that any new members that do not see their logo on the members page to please send it to her at tracy.catoe@ed.gov. She asked for any ideas on what should or should not be on the site. She noted that the committee's goal is to have the meeting minutes and other resources up by the March meeting. Mr. Lee discussed the need for an updated directory of Executive Secretariats and that he has a goal to release a revision in the spring and fall.

Plain Writing – Ms. Terry Layton, U.S. Department Commerce, reported that the Plain Language compliance report is scheduled to be posted in April. Mr. Wachter asked if it is required in April or just an annual report any time during the year. She also reported that there will be a Plain Language best practice with Anetta Cheek from the Center for Plain Language at an upcoming meeting.

Technology – Ms. Eric Wachter, Environmental Protection Agency, reported that he will not have time to work on the committee this year. He noted that the committee had circulated a survey about the different tracking systems in the Agencies in the past. Mr. Lee asked for a volunteer for to be the new chair of the committee and for anyone interested to contact him.

Open Forum

Ms. Anette Vietti-Cook opened a discussion of the Council's charter. Ms. Patrice Allen-Gifford, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, discussed the history of the council charter and asked the members to review the charter changes that have been suggested by some members. She asked member to suggest more changes but would like to have a final vote held at the next meeting. A member asked the Council for the amount of time is given to the drafting office to write a starting draft for a congressional response. The members discussed the amount of time given, which varies widely from 3 days to 20 days. A member asked about how agencies deal with overdue items. Members discussed the variety of positive and negative actions that can be done with reporting and meetings to try and keep the overdues from getting out of control. Also, members discussed the help that the input of senior leadership. A member

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*Peter Lee, Chairman
Treasury Department*

*Annette Vietti-Cook, Vice Chair
Nuclear Regulatory Commission*

asked about the types and variety of tracking systems around the various agencies. Mr. Wachter, EPA, offered the list that was developed a couple of years ago, and Mr. Lee said it could be a future best practice.

Adjourn Meeting

Mr. Lee adjourned the meeting at 11:38 a.m.