

For: FSA Offices

Establishing Temporary Key Program Technician (KPT) Pilot Program

Approved by: Administrator



1 Overview

A Background

As a result of the County Office Program Technician Review conducted in 2009, FSA is establishing a new CO-8 KPT position for County Offices. KPT's will serve as the program expert for 2 or more program areas for their assigned County Offices within the State. KPT's positions can be established to provide a central resource for program expert guidance, coordination, and assistance at the County Office level with district(s)-wide collaboration for assigned programs, including providing collaboration of farm loan activities. This position will be supervised by CED in the KPT's home office in coordination with DD.

B Purpose

This notice provides:

- policies and procedures for establishing KPT's positions
- guidance for filling and using KPT positions.

Note: These positions will be filled by **temporary promotions** during a 1-year trial period. This position will be evaluated at the end of the trial period by DAFO and HRD to determine the effectiveness and benefit of the position.

Disposal Date	Distribution
February 1, 2012	FSA Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices
11-15-10	Page 1

2 Trial Period and Processing

A Length of Trial Period

States **must** notify DAFO and HRD by **December 15, 2010**, whether they plan to participate or decline to participate in the KPT trial. E-mail notification is acceptable and **must be submitted to both of the following**:

- john.chott@wdc.usda.gov
- cynthia.fallin@wdc.usda.gov.

All:

- vacancy announcements **must** open by **January 3, 2011**
- selections **must** be effective by **February 15, 2011**.

B Recruitment Process

Each State's KPT position **must** be filled as a temporary promotion, not-to-exceed 1 year. The temporary promotion may be extended 1 additional year with approval by DAFO.

All positions shall:

- be filled using merit selection principles and EEO guidelines
- be filled within current ceiling and budget
- continue to be headquartered at the employee's current County Office.

3 Filling KPT Vacancies

A Establishing KPT Positions

FSA has determined that all KPT vacancies will be at the CO-8 position level **only**. For this trial period each State may have 1 KPT position; however, States with 8 or more districts may have up to 2 KPT positions.

Note: All KPT positions **must** be filled within established ceilings for the State.

State Offices may **not** establish KPT positions until DAFO approval is received.

Notice PM-2783

3 Filling KPT Vacancies (Continued)

B Advertising KPT Vacancies

After receiving approval from DAFO to establish a KPT position, State Offices will prepare and open vacancy announcements for the KPT temporary promotion for non-Federal, County Office positions. The area of consideration will be for current full-time permanent non-Federal County Office employees **only**. All vacancy announcements **must** include a statement that KPT positions are temporary promotions, not to exceed 1 year, which may be extended 1 additional year.

Notes: An MOU acknowledging the nature of the temporary promotion will also be required after selection (subparagraph 4 A).

States must obtain DAFO approval to extend for the additional year.

State Administrative Officers will prepare and administer KPT vacancy announcements. Vacancy announcements **must** be:

- posted electronically through USAJobs
- FAXed or e-mailed to each County Office by State Offices.

Note: The e-mail can be a link to the USAJobs posting.

C Application Review Process

An interview panel shall be established to review applicants. The membership shall include CED's who do not supervise any of the applicants and DD and any others deemed appropriate as panel members. The panel shall provide its recommendations to SED. SED's will make the selections and notify DAFO and HRD of selectee for tracking and evaluation purposes.

4 Actions Upon Selection

A MOU's

All selected applicants and applicable approving officials shall sign MOU **before** the official start date of the temporary promotion to document the nature of the temporary promotion (Exhibit 1).

B Performance Element

A specific performance element about the duties of the KPT position shall be added to the performance plan for all selected KPT's (Exhibit 2).

4 Actions Upon Selection (Continued)

C Position Description (PD)

A sample PD (Exhibit 3) is provided for KPT activities; additional duties from existing PD's about KPT's specific work in the local County Office may be added.

D Evaluation Feedback

Feedback from PT's and CED's who receive assistance from KPT's is needed for the supervisory CED to evaluate the success and workload demands of the employees in KPT positions. A sample evaluation sheet is provided in Exhibit 4. This evaluation should be completed and provided to the supervisory CED after receiving assistance from KPT. If routine and regular assistance is received, then a monthly evaluation may be sent. Evaluations may be transmitted by e-mail or FAX, a signature is **not** required.

E Terminating KPT Temporary Promotions

KPT positions are **not** temporary appointments. They are temporary promotions. The employees selected for KPT positions retain permanent status. KPT's will be returned to their original position of record at the end of the trial period. The temporary promotion does **not** entitle the employee to grade or pay retention. Unless the temporary promotion is extended beyond 1 year, highest previous rate will also **not** apply when setting the step when returning to their former position. The employee will return to the grade and step they were in before the temporary promotion. If a within-grade step increase was due during the period the employee was on the temporary promotion, then they return to the step they would have held had they **not** received the temporary promotion.

Temporary KPT Positions

All selected applicants and applicable approving officials shall sign the following MOU **before** the official start date of the temporary promotion to document the nature of the temporary promotion.

Memorandum of Understanding

The below named employee will be given a temporary promotion to a higher grade as a Key Program Technician, CO-08 by the USDA, Farm Service Agency (FSA). FSA will process an SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, effective _____ and thereby pay this employee for the duration of the competitive temporary promotion. The action will not exceed one year and will end with an SF-52 for change to lower grade processed by FSA. However, an agreement could be reached to terminate the temporary action at an earlier date or to extend for an additional year. Extending the appointment must be a mutual agreement between the employee, their supervisor, the Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, and the Human Resources Division.

It is understood that at the end of this temporary action, the employee will be returned to their permanent positions at the same grade and tenure in the same FSA County Office with any increases that would have been received if not temporarily promoted. The signed copy of this MOU and all SF-52's will be placed in the employee's Official Personnel Folder (OPF).

Program Technician
Farm Service Agency

Date

County Executive Director
Farm Service Agency

Date

District Director
Farm Service Agency

Date

State Executive Director
Farm Service Agency

Date

Michael L. Wooden
Deputy Administrator for Field Operations
Farm Service Agency

Date

Performance Element

The following specific performance element shall be added to the performance plan for all selected KPT's.

Non-Critical Element	Individual Program Contributions to the State
	<p>ELEMENT: This employee serves as an initial contact point for Program Technicians within the State for resolving operational and policy program questions and problems in their assigned program areas. Develops and contributes creative ideas and solutions to program operations and/or issues resulting in added value to the State's products and services. Works with County and State Office coworkers to appropriately implement decisions. Collaborates with Program Technicians, CED's, and Farm Loan staff throughout assigned County Offices to ensure consistency with programs' execution. Willingly accepts and acts on constructive criticism.</p>
	<p>STANDARDS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regularly cooperates with coworkers and others in meeting commitments and accomplishing assigned work on time; such as, sharing information freely with no more than one to two exceptions. 2. Responds constructively to feedback within 24 hours, seeking ways to improve with no more than one to two exceptions. 3. Updates records that affect other programs in the office within timeframes established by management with no more than one to three exceptions. 4. Monthly initiates contact with County Executive Directors of assigned County Offices to proactively assess programs' status with no more than one to two exceptions. 5. Fosters productive and cooperative working relationships by showing understanding, courtesy, tact, and politeness to others with no more than one to two valid complaints. <p>NOTE: Zero exceptions alone for these standards does not mean that you "exceed fully successful" for this element. In order to obtain "exceeds fully successful" for this element, there must be additional supporting evidence that shows you excelled beyond the fully successful requirements.</p> <p>RESULTS: The achievement of these standards will result in increased cooperation and cross training between employees fostering a harmonious and productive work environment. This aligns with "Crosscutting Management Objectives Supporting FSA Strategic Goals".</p>

PD

The following sample PD is provided for KPT activities; additional duties from existing PD's related to KPT's specific work in the local County Office may be added.

Title: Key Program Specialist
Grade: CO-8

A. INTRODUCTION

Five to thirty percent of the time, the incumbent provides assistance to multiple County Offices by serving as the initial contact point for Program Technicians within the State resolving operational and policy program questions and problems. In addition, the incumbent serves as a program expert for two or more programs. This is the full performance level of the position. The position is FLSA nonexempt.

B. MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Receives, researches, and responds to assigned programs policy and operational problems, questions and issues originating in assigned County Office in the State. Such matters may include, but are not limited to, those involving program policies and legal, regulatory or policy requirements; contracts and other program documents and forms; program calculations and payments; GIS issues; and automated procedures ranging from those related to major software releases to individual error messages.

Identifies specific nature of problem or question and determines appropriate action to effect problem/question resolution. Provides clarification of handbook materials and detailed instructions for completing specific tasks. Issues verbal or written instruction and guidance and follows up to assure problems were correctly resolved. Keeps appropriate officials informed of problems and questions received as well as solutions provided. Refers questions for which an answer cannot be found to the County Executive Director, Farm Loan Manager or Officer, District Director, or appropriate State Office specialist.

Promotes consistent and uniform program interpretation and operations within the State. Issues e-mails to Program Technicians within the State to provide guidance on commonly recurring questions, citing handbook references when available. Conducts conference calls with Program Technicians within the State to share questions, comments and concerns. As needed, travels to other County Offices to provide assistance with complex problems and hands-on training.

Interprets and applies draft procedures. Determines actions needed for implementation when final procedures are issued. Participates with State Office specialists in developing and testing operating instructions, State notices, checklist and similar issuances. Recommends changes to clarify instructions, identifies better ways to accomplish program tasks and assures consistency of operations. Notifies appropriate officials of repetitive or recurring problems. Consults with State Office specialists to resolve conflicts between program notices and handbooks based upon personal experience and problems and questions referred by others.

PD (Continued)

Serves as the training specialist for assigned programs within the assigned County Offices in the State. Leads training sessions and/or travels specific County Offices to provide onsite training. Recommends training for new procedures and for refresher courses. Maintains awareness of knowledge and experience levels of Program Technicians in the State so as to provide guidance and assistance and to assess training needs.

Duties apply to all commodity programs as assigned. May also be assigned to provide the same type of assistance for FLP.

Performs other duties as assigned.

C. EEO AND CIVIL RIGHTS RESPONSIBILITIES

The employee is responsible for knowing and supporting equal opportunity and civil rights policies; performing assigned duties in full compliance with the letter and spirit of equal opportunity and civil rights laws and regulations; ensuring bias-free written and oral communications; and respecting and valuing differences of other employees and clients.

D. SUPERVISION RECEIVED

Assignments outside the incumbent's headquarters County Office are coordinated with the County Executive Director, who keeps the District Director informed on issues of district-wide concern. Because one of the major objectives of the position is to provide assistance to multiple County Offices by responding to technical program issues, the employee works with a high degree of independence, setting assignment priorities, exercising judgment and initiative to research and respond to problems and questions, and referring to a higher level only those matters which are unusually complex.

E. KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

The work requires thorough knowledge of assigned programs policies and regulations, operating procedures and precedents and skill in applying this knowledge to a wide variety of complex problems and issues referred by Program Technicians within the State. Such knowledge may have been gained through additional training and/or extensive practical experience in the assigned program areas. The incumbent must have the knowledge and skills to accurately identify the nature of problems presented, conduct necessary research to determine the appropriate means for resolving the problems and communicate the necessary procedures for problem resolutions to Program Technicians with varying levels of expertise.

The incumbent must also have excellent communication skills to work with State Office Specialists and to provide training to Program Technicians within the State.

Sample Evaluation Sheet

The following sample evaluation sheet is a method for receiving feedback from PT's and CED's who receive assistance from KPT's. This information is needed for the supervisory CED to evaluate the success and workload demands of the KPT positions.

Mail, e-mail, or FAX to the supervisory CED of KPT's headquarters County Office.

Key Program Technician Evaluation

Key Program Technician name: _____
 County Office from: _____

Who (individual or group) helping: _____
 At which County Office: _____

Why requested KPT: _____

When (date) and how long (days/hours) worked together: _____
 Please circle to indicate if the help was: In Person or By Phone

On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the following.
 1 - complete disagreement with the statement as situation not addressed; 2 - dissatisfied; 3 - acceptable;
 4 - fulfilled/addresses issue; 5 - excelled.

Problem/Confusion Addressed	1	2	3	4	5
Adequate Time Spent	1	2	3	4	5
Clear Communication	1	2	3	4	5
Came Prepared	1	2	3	4	5
Preparatory Conversation (before onsite) (N/A)	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of Topic	1	2	3	4	5

Did the Key Program Technician check-back 2-5 days later to ensure understood and/or issue resolved? Yes or No

Any other comments regarding this Key Program Technician and/or their expert knowledge or guidance: _____

Sample Evaluation Sheet (Continued)

Comments/Suggestions regarding the Key Program Technician position trial in general:	
<hr/>	<hr/>
Program Technician Farm Service Agency	Date
<hr/>	<hr/>
County Executive Director Farm Service Agency	Date