

# ACES

## Enrollee Handbook



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August 31, 2011



*Dear Enrollee,*

*Senior Service America, Inc (SSAI) has developed this ACES Handbook as an informational tool for the purpose of acquainting you with the policies, procedures, benefits and restrictions that affect your participation in the Agriculture Conservation Experienced Service (ACES) Program. This Handbook is also a source of information for USDA Coordinators and Monitors. It includes an Appendix of forms for duplication. It is important to keep your handbook nearby for frequent reference.*

*Provisions outlined in the ACES Handbook are not intended to bestow any rights or privileges on Enrollees or guarantee employment for any definite period of time. Enrollment in the ACES Program is a temporary one-year position. The enrollment relationship between SSAI and the Enrollee is an at-will relationship. This means that an Enrollee is free to terminate his/her enrollment at any time during the enrollment period, and SSAI and USDA have the right not to renew an Enrollee's enrollment agreement.*

*SSAI will review the ACES Program's policies, procedures and benefits contained herein on a regular basis. In making revisions, the ACES Program will consider the need for/and desirability of changes. SSAI may enhance, modify or delete any policy, procedure or benefit described in this manual at any time.*

*As a guide, this handbook is not intended as a document to cover all circumstances or situations. SSAI may find it necessary to handle a situation in a manner not specifically outlined in the ACES Enrollee Handbook. For this reason, an Enrollee with special circumstances may require individualized treatment to resolve a particular issue. In those situations, it may be appropriate for the ACES Program to treat an Enrollee in a manner different from the general rules specified in this handbook.*

*If you have additional questions regarding personnel policies, practices and procedures, please contact the SSAI-ACES Program Office at 301-578-8900.*

*Sincerely,*

*John Smith  
Director, ACES Program*

# ***SENIOR SERVICE AMERICA, INC.***

## ***SENIOR SERVICE AMERICA, INC.***

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Senior Service America, Inc. (SSAI) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that provides employment and training opportunities to individuals age 55 and over. SSAI, located in Silver Spring, MD., works with a wide range of community and faith-based organizations, government agencies and institutions of higher learning to provide employment opportunities for older workers. SSAI operates the following programs; Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) funded by the U.S. DOL, the Senior Environmental Employment Program (SEEP) funded by the U.S. EPA and the Agriculture Conservation Experienced Service (ACES) Program, funded by the USDA which was authorized by the Farm Bill of 2007.

## ***THE AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION EXPERIENCED SERVICES PROGRAM***

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The Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services (ACES) Program is a grant-funded employment program for older workers initiated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and modeled after the Senior Environmental Employment (SEE) Program operated under the direction of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In June 2005, in partnership with the National Older Worker Career Center (NOWCC), the project concept was enacted as a demonstration. Thirty-six states and centers participated in the project providing full-time, part-time, and temporary employment opportunities for administrative, technical, and professional older workers. Over a 39-month period, the demonstration project created more than 220 positions that were filled by 365 older workers. Enrollees in the program assisted with the work of NRCS in Conservation Districts and NRCS centers throughout the

country, as well at the national headquarters in Washington, DC. The ACES Program was authorized in The Food & Energy Security Act of 2007 (the Farm Bill) with the permanent program beginning in May, 2008.

### ***THE MISSION FOR THE ACES PROGRAM***

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The ACES Project was initiated for two purposes:

- (1) To provide an additional tool for USDA Agency workforce planners to take advantage of the large cadre of experienced workers in the marketplace; and
- (2) To provide opportunities for older workers to utilize their skills in meaningful work.

This program was not intended to, and does not compete with the Civil Service system.

To implement the ACES Program, USDA entered into cooperative agreements with four National Aging Organizations. They include:

- National Association for Hispanic Elderly (NAHE)
- National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)
- National Older Worker Career Center, Inc. (NOWCC)
- Senior Service America, Inc. (SSAI)

## ***ACES PROGRAM GLOSSARY OF TERMS***

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<b>Applicant</b>	<i>A person who applies for a position with the ACES Program.</i>
<b>Candidate</b>	<i>A person selected from the pool of applicants for further consideration (interview, testing, etc.) for a specific Task Agreement.</i>
<b>Enrollee</b>	<i>A person enrolled in the ACES Program. Enrollees are not Employees of the USDA and are not to be used to displace agency federal personnel. Enrollees are also not Employees of the Grantee organization; they are Enrollees in the ACES Program.</i>
<b>USDA-ACES Coordinator</b>	<i>A federal USDA Employee who serves as the primary point of contact between the USDA office, headquarters and SSAI, with responsibility for verbal and written communications between USDA and SSAI, regarding budget requests, assignment descriptions, grant requests, quarterly reports, etc.</i>
<b>USDA Monitor</b>	<i>The federal USDA Employee who provides day-to-day work direction to assigned Enrollees.</i>
<b>USDA Alternate Monitor and Designee</b>	<i>A person authorized by USDA to exercise the responsibilities of an USDA Monitor in the USDA Monitor's absence.</i>
<b>USDA Participating Office or Project Site</b>	<i>An USDA office which has Enrollees assigned and/or has committed funds for the execution of specific activities with the SSAI-ACES Program.</i>
<b>USDA Funding Office</b>	<i>The USDA office that provided funds for the execution of specific activities via a grant/cooperative agreement with the SSAI-ACES Program.</i>
<b>ACES Grantee</b>	<i>A private, non-profit organization, designated by the Secretary of Labor under Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965, that has entered into a Task Agreement with USDA to utilize the talents of older Americans in providing technical assistance to Federal, State and Local environmental agencies. An ACES Grantee may also be called a "Recipient" or "Sponsor."</i>
<b>Director, ACES Program</b>	<i>The person responsible for the overall administration of the ACES Program, including policy, program and personnel decisions.</i>
<b>SSAI Field Operations Officer</b>	<i>An SSAI staff representative assigned to over ACES the day-to-day ACES Program operations of a particular region, site, laboratory or location.</i>

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It is the Agriculture Conservation Experienced Service (ACES) Program's policy to promote equal opportunity and nondiscriminatory practices in all facets of its operations. SSAI-ACES Program practices shall ensure that all persons have equal opportunity to work and advance within the ACES Program on the basis of merit, fitness and ability, regardless of color, race, sex, age, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, ethnic background, nationality, past military status or any other classification protected by law. Participants in this program must be 55 years of age or older as required by Public Law (P.L. 98-313).

### ***101 ENROLLING PERSONS WITH AIDS***

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With respect to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), medical experts studying the disease have done a great deal of research to determine the disease is not spread through any form of casual contact with a person who has AIDS. Working with people who have AIDS, or people who have been exposed to the AIDS virus, will not cause co-workers to develop the disease.

In assuring a safe environment for all Enrollees, our policy is to enroll individuals with AIDS as long as a doctor pronounces them capable to work. Enrollees who are concerned about AIDS and would like to learn more about it are encouraged to direct inquiries to a health care provider.

### ***102 PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP***

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The SSAI-ACES Program requires all Enrollee applicants to complete Immigration Form I-9 and provide documents to establish both identity and enrollment eligibility.

As a result of the Immigration Reform and Control Act signed on November 6, 1986, SSAI is subject to penalties if they knowingly hire illegal aliens, or discriminate against current or prospective Enrollees because of their "citizenship status."

Any person legally eligible to work in the United States, who meets the age requirement for the ACES Program, may be considered an applicant for enrollment.

### ***103 DISABILITY***



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It is SSAI's policy to be responsive to any disabled Enrollees who can perform the essential functions of the assignment with reasonable accommodation(s). SSAI complies with all requirements of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

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## **104    *SEXUAL HARASSMENT***

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Sexual harassment of Enrollees in any form will not be tolerated. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to unwelcome sexual flirtations, propositions, verbal abuse of a sexual nature, requests for sexual activities, unwanted touching of an individual, graphic verbal commentaries about an individual's body, sexually degrading words, a display in the workplace of sexually suggestive objects or pictures, sexually explicit or offensive jokes, or physical assault.

No SSAI-ACES Employee, USDA employee or Enrollee shall threaten or insinuate, explicitly or implicitly, take action against another Enrollee because of his/her refusal to submit to sexual advances or cause such action that will adversely affect that person's enrollment in the ACES Program. This also applies to any performance evaluation, wage consideration or adjustments, assignment duties, shifts or any other condition of program enrollment. No SSAI-ACES Employee or USDA Employee shall promise, imply or grant any preferential treatment in connection with an Enrollee engaging in sexual conduct. Any Enrollee who feels they are being victimized as a result of sexual harassment by an SSAI-ACES Employee, USDA Employee or any person in connection with his or her enrollment status should bring the matter to the immediate attention of his or her Monitor, SSAI-ACES Field Operations Officer and/or the SSAI-ACES Program Director.

SSAI will promptly investigate all allegations of sexual harassment in a confidential manner and take appropriate corrective actions if warranted. Any questions about this sexual harassment policy should be brought to the attention of the SSAI-ACES Program Director.

Any incident or situation where an Enrollee believes he or she has encountered discrimination or harassment should be brought to the immediate attention of the Field Operations Officer. All complaints will be promptly investigated in a confidential manner. SSAI will take appropriate corrective action, when justified, to remedy all violations of these policies. Each Enrollee has the option to follow the grievance procedures outlined in Section 1003 (pg. 37) of this Handbook. An Enrollee who believes that he or she has experienced discrimination by the SSAI-ACES Program may file a complaint of discrimination within 180 days of the discriminatory act. The complaint should be filed with USDA's Office of Civil Rights located in Washington, D.C. Further specific complaint procedures are set forth in the USDA Regulations at 40 C.F.R. Part 7.

## **200 GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

Enrollees are participants in the ACES Program, not Federal Employees. Upon enrollment in the SSAI-ACES Program, Enrollees are assigned to an USDA Monitor. The Monitor will make sure the Enrollee understands his or her assignment and will provide any instructions necessary.

Monitors can provide information on assignment responsibilities, work schedules, timesheets, hours of work, and other similar topics.

### ***201 ENROLLEE RESPONSIBILITIES AND REQUIREMENTS***

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Due to the nature of the assignment, which is based upon an approved Position Description, Enrollees may be requested to:

- Hold a valid driver's license
- Travel
- Be away from home for one or more nights
- Participate in air or land travel
- Participate in Medical Monitoring examinations
- Have access to a vehicle for use on assignments
- Have access to a cell phone for use on assignments

Enrollees are required to:

- Perform only those tasks that are consistent with the Position Description assigned by the USDA Monitor and in accordance with any work restriction imposed by a physician.
- Learn and conform to the standard procedures specified for carrying out assigned tasks.
- Inform SSAI of any changes in the scope of work, unsafe working environments or work requirements.
- Inform SSAI when job duties are substantially changed.
- Inform SSAI when their Monitor or Alternate Monitor change
- Wear appropriate attire for the assignment.
- Take responsibility for prompt and accurate submission of timesheets and any

required written activity reports.

- Provide SSAI with a bi-monthly report detailing their tasks and accomplishments for the time period being reported.

## ***202 USDA MONITOR RESPONSIBILITIES***

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There will be one primary person designated as the Enrollee's USDA Monitor. An Alternate USDA Monitor will also be assigned to fill in when the primary Monitor is not available. The USDA Monitor's responsibilities include:

- Develop the Position Description
- Screen resumes for potential candidates
- Conduct at least three in-person interviews for each vacancy (exceptions may be approved by SSAI)
- Recommend candidates to be enrolled by SSAI
- Respond to the annual renewal of each Task Agreement (This may include revising the Position Description as necessary. Enrollee duties shall not be altered without prior approval by SSAI)
- Oversee the Enrollee's activities, providing direction, task assignments and feedback
- Review the Enrollee's bi-monthly activity report for accuracy before submission to SSAI
- Ensure that Enrollees are permitted the same amount of time for lunch, coffee breaks and time to attend scheduled meetings as all Employees in the office to which the Enrollee is assigned
- Verify, sign and correctly date Enrollee timesheets. Verifying timesheets involves reviewing hours worked, total hours, proper program charged and making sure the Enrollee & Monitor signatures and date are on the timesheet
- Retain copies of Enrollee timesheets for three years
- Ensure that new Enrollees receive a "ACES Program Enrollee Orientation" from SSAI
- Recommend specialized training for Enrollees when appropriate
- Ensure the use of protective clothing (i.e., safety glasses, coveralls, mask, etc.) if recommended by the Health and Safety Officer
- Determine whether Medical Monitoring is necessary for the safety of the Enrollee for the duties being performed, and ensuring that the designated

Enrollees have been assigned to participate in Medical Monitoring by SSAI

- Notify the SSAI Field Operations Officer if an Enrollee misses three consecutive workdays for any reason including, but not limited to, illness or accident
- Resolve previously addressed but unresolved minor performance or conduct problems, and formalizing the counseling process with an SSAI Field Operations Officer
- Advise the SSAI Field Operations Officer of problems or difficulties with an Enrollee and documenting those concerns

### ***203 USDA — ACES COORDINATOR RESPONSIBILITIES***

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For each Task Agreement, one primary person will be designated as the ACES Coordinator. The ACES Coordinator serves as the principal point of contact with the ACES Program Manager in the Office of Human Resources (OHR) and serves as the principal point of contact for the SSAI-ACES Program's funding office. The ACES Coordinator's responsibilities include:

- Process new funding or amendment packages for existing Task Agreements
- Be responsible for the overall programmatic and financial management of the ACES Task Agreement
- Sign or initial all funding notices relating to the particular Task Agreement as the official representing the funding office
- Resolve all disagreements relating to the Task Agreement between sub-offices within the funding organization and forwarding a written summary of the disposition and the final determination to the ACES Program Manager
- Complete a quarterly reconciliation between office or regional records and the SSAI-ACES Programs' Quarterly Report
- Provide and maintain a current roster of ACES Monitors and Alternates. The roster should include the current organizational mailing addresses, room numbers, email addresses, fax numbers and telephone numbers
- Provide Monitors with ACES policies and procedures
- Sign all paperwork and establish new position descriptions by approving the Position Description forms
- Refer the ACES Monitor to the SSAI-ACES Field Operations Officer for

- unresolved Enrollee problems/issues
- Assist new ACES Enrollees in adapting to the USDA work processes

## ***204 SSAI-ACES PROGRAM STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES***

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The National SSAI-ACES Program office is responsible for the general administration of the program including fiscal management, personnel policy development and implementation, and coordination with USDA and various state offices.

The SSAI-ACES Program staff responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Providing a full range of human resource services, Enrollee relations and fiscal management
- Submitting required and ad-hoc reports to USDA headquarters, handling all payroll and travel transactions, and overseeing the administration of Enrollee benefits
- Developing and maintaining ACES Program policies and procedures for staff and Enrollees
- Coordinating with USDA headquarters and various state offices and other national sponsors in the operation of the overall program

Your assigned SSAI-ACES Program Staff will:

- Serve as the first point of contact for SSAI Enrollees and USDA Monitors
- Initiate and guide recruitment efforts by assisting USDA Monitors in developing a Position Description, drafting and placing vacancy announcement(s), completing applicant enrollment in the program and processing all enrollment documents
- Pre-screen all applicants, participate in interviews as needed, verify selected candidates' references and work closely with USDA staff
- Respond to Enrollee issues; assist with performance improvement and process terminations in a fair and equitable manner
- Perform periodic on-site visits and monitor programmatic activities to ensure working conditions, treatment and the work of the Enrollee is consistent with the provisions of the Task Agreement and Position Description
- Ensure the Enrollee's safety, making certain he or she has not been assigned to buildings or surroundings that are unsanitary, hazardous or a danger to the Enrollee's health or safety

There are many diverse assignments within the ACES Program. All positions are instrumental in helping USDA fulfill its mission of protecting the health and welfare of citizens of this country and the environment in which we all live. While assisting USDA in its mission, ACES Program Enrollees may not be used to displace individuals currently employed by USDA as part of its federal workforce.

Positions in the ACES Program are ***not*** permanent positions. They are temporary positions that will vary in duration depending on continued funding by USDA, changing needs or Enrollee performance.

### ***301 ELIGIBILITY***

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Participation in the ACES Program is open to individuals age 55 and over as outlined in the public legislation governing the program. There are no income limits for eligibility in the program.

Proof of age must be presented during screening.

The skill levels required vary with the positions to be filled. For example, a local USDA office will assess its needs and, in conjunction with SSAI, design positions to be filled by Enrollees. Persons with the appropriate skill levels will be recruited to fill these designated positions.

SSAI ACES Program is required to check the Excluded Parties Listing System (EPLS) prior to enrollment to assure Enrollee's name does not appear as an ineligible person.

### ***302 POSITION DESCRIPTION / SCOPE OF WORK***

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Upon entry into the ACES Program, Enrollees are assigned to a specific position and given a Position Description or Scope of Work stating the duties and responsibilities of the assignment. The Position Description may not list all duties an Enrollee will be called upon to do, but rather indicates the range of typical assignments. Enrollees are not to accept responsibilities outside the scope of work described in their Position Description without prior SSAI approval.

The Position Description is not meant to limit an Enrollee's initiative or the number of specific tasks that may be required. An Enrollee's duties may be modified to help better support the division to which the Enrollee is assigned. If new responsibilities are to be added, the Position Description must be changed by the Monitor to reflect

the new duties and be approved by SSAI. The Monitor should discuss any changes in duties with the Enrollee and provide him or her with a copy of the revised Position Description.

### ***303 ASSIGNMENT CATEGORIES AND WAGE LEVELS***

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Assignment levels and pay ranges have been established by USDA's policies and procedures manual. Wage levels in the ACES Program are intended to be supplementary in nature and are not intended to be equivalent to the federal workforce or to the private labor market. Assignments in the ACES Program are divided into four levels, each with its own pay scale.

- A. Level I — TECHNICAL – No Degree
- B. Level II — TECHNICAL – Non-Specific – Degree or Associates Degree required
- C. Level III — PROFESSIONAL - Degree or Master's Degree required
- D. Level IV — Professional – Expert – Advanced Degree or Doctoral required

### ***304 RECRUITMENT, INTERVIEWING AND SELECTION***

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SSAI makes every effort to successfully match applicants to position vacancies. To achieve this standard, an enrollment and recruitment process has been established. The SSAI-ACES Program Director or designee is responsible for contacting the USDA-selected applicant(s) and is the sole party authorized to make an assignment offer.

### ***305 RIGHT TO PRIVACY***

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ACES Enrollees have a basic right to privacy when interviewing for new positions within the ACES program. This is the same privacy afforded applicants who do not wish to have their present employer contacted during the interview process.



## **306 ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES**

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Enrollment period is usually for one year; length of service is dependent on funding for the projects described in the Scope of Work and/or Position Description. Agreements may be terminated when the work is completed, allocated funds are depleted, or non-resolvable issues arise concerning performance.

Once a selection has been made, the new Enrollee will receive an orientation from their SSAI Field Operations Officer and an assignment-related orientation by their USDA Monitor. A copy of the approved Position Description and an ACES Enrollee Handbook will also be provided.

The following documents (original or .pdf file) must be submitted to SSAI prior to the first day on the assignment:

- Application for Enrollment
- Enrollee Profile and Emergency Contact
- Enrollment Agreement
- Medical Monitoring Form (if required)
- Local, State and Federal Withholding Certificates as applicable
- I-9 Employment Verification Form with supporting documents
- Enrollment Activity Form (EAF)
- Confidential Business Information Agreement (CBI)/Conflict of Interest Statement (CIS)
- Direct Deposit Form and copy of voided check for checking account or bank form showing account number for saving account
- Driver's License with Picture ID
- Proof of age documents (passport or birth certificate)
- Valid Social Security Card

An Enrollee may not begin work until all enrollment forms are completed and submitted to the SSAI Office. If an Enrollee does not have a Social Security Card, the Enrollee must submit official documentation from the Social Security Administration that they have applied for a new Social Security Card. Once the new card is received, a copy must be submitted to SSAI.

The enrollment agreement outlines the terms and conditions of ACES assignments. Enrollment in an ACES position is considered temporary and may be discontinued at any time.

### **307 PROBATIONARY PERIOD**

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All new Enrollees are subject to an informal 90-day probationary period. The probationary period may be extended at the discretion of the USDA Monitor in consultation with the SSAI Field Operations Officer.

During the probationary period, the Monitor will observe an Enrollee's conduct and work performance and will decide whether the Enrollee has satisfied the requirements of the position. If the Monitor ascertains that the requirements of the position have not been met, the assignment may be terminated or the probationary period may be extended.

Termination may occur at any time during the probationary period. Should a termination be warranted, a termination letter will be provided to the Enrollee. Efforts will be made to assist Enrollees in meeting the requirements of the position before termination.

The USDA Monitor and Enrollee are encouraged to contact their Field Operations Officer for guidance and assistance during this process.

### **308 JOB-RELATED TRAINING**

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ACES Enrollees are considered to be fully qualified for positions when enrolled. However, technological changes, new equipment or revised program requirements may require additional training. If such training will incur costs, the USDA Monitor or Coordinator must submit a completed Enrollment Activity Form (EAF), travel authorization (if necessary) and paperwork registering the Enrollee for the training. These documents should be submitted to the SSAI-ACES Program three weeks prior to the training date. EAF's may be faxed or mailed. Only job-related training will be approved.

Payments for job-related training will be processed by SSAI.

## **400 ENROLLEE BENEFITS AND LEAVE POLICIES**

All Enrollees in the SSAI-ACES Program are entitled to the benefits listed in this section.

### **401 WORKERS' COMPENSATION REPORTING WORK-RELATED INJURIES AND ILLNESSES**

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SSAI provides Workers' Compensation benefits in the event of a work-related injury or occupational illness or death to Enrollees that occurs while on assignment in an USDA facility or conducting other authorized assignments on behalf of USDA. All injuries must be reported within 24 hours to SSAI. In case of an emergency, the Enrollee is responsible for immediately notifying his or her Monitor and SSAI Field Operations Officer as well as seeking medical care.

It is essential that all information surrounding an injury or occupational illness be obtained. This enables the SSAI Field Operations Officer to report the incident accurately.

The Enrollee is responsible for the following:

- Submitting all necessary documents pertaining to Workers' Compensation claims for the State in which the Enrollee resides
- Ensuring that documents are properly filled out and submitted as soon as possible (not later than 24 hours after the occurs of the incident)

SSAI will provide the Enrollee with a "First Report of Injury" Form to be completed and submitted directly to the Field Operations Officer. A copy of the form can be found in the Appendix of this ACES Enrollee Handbook. Enrollees who have filed a "First Report of Injury" form, and are unable to perform their duties because of the work-related injury, may become eligible to receive income benefits under the Workers' Compensation benefit.

There is a statutory waiting period before income benefits are payable under Workers' Compensation. During the "waiting period," Enrollees may use sick or vacation leave. After the waiting period expires, the Enrollee may become eligible to receive income benefits under Workers' Compensation if they are still unable to perform their duties.

## **402 UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

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SSAI pays into Unemployment Insurance programs in every state where ACES Program Enrollees currently work. An Enrollee who terminates and wishes to file for Unemployment Insurance must file with the Unemployment Office within the state they worked. Each state sets different eligibility standards for collecting Unemployment Insurance. For questions relating to eligibility criteria, the Enrollee should contact the Unemployment Office in the state where his or her work site is located.

## **403 LEAVE TIME (VACATION AND SICK)**

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### **Vacation Leave**

Full-time Enrollees (working 40 hours a week) accrue .0577 hours of annual leave for each paid hour ... earning up to a maximum accrual 120 hours (or 15 days) of vacation leave ... at any given time. Persons working fewer than 40 hours per week will accrue pro-rated leave time based on the rate described above.

Because enrollment in the ACES Program is temporary, Enrollees are encouraged to use their vacation leave within the Task Agreement period. Terminated Enrollees will be paid for unused vacation leave.

### **Sick Leave**

Full-time Enrollees (working 40 hours a week) accrue .0462 hours of sick leave for each paid hour, earning up to a maximum accrual 96 hours (or 12 days) of sick leave ... at any given time. Persons working fewer than 40 hours per week will accrue pro-rated leave time based on the rate described above.

Sick leave should be used when illness prevents regular attendance at work. In such cases, the Enrollee must notify his or her Monitor of the illness no later than two hours following the Enrollee's scheduled starting time. A doctor's signed statement must be presented for an Enrollee to resume his or her normal assignment after an absence, related to illness or injury, of three (3) consecutive days. After five (5) consecutive days, a completed Enrolment Activity Form must be submitted to the SSAI Field Operations Officer. This statement must be submitted to the USDA Monitor and the SSAI Field Operations Officer before the Enrollee returns to their assignment. The SSAI-ACES office is the only office permitted to authorize the Enrollee's return to their assignment.

There is no arrangement for advancing sick leave. Once earned leave is exhausted, Enrollees must be placed in a LWOP status.

Sick leave may also be used for prearranged visits to a physician, dentist or medical facility. Sick leave may not be used for vacation or for other reasons, except for bereavement leave. If an Enrollee has used all of his or her sick leave, he or she may use vacation leave in the event of an illness.

Enrollees who are terminated for any reason will not be paid for unused sick leave.

#### **404 HOLIDAYS**

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Enrollees are entitled to the following 10 paid federal holidays:

New Year's Day	Labor Day
Martin Luther King's Birthday	Columbus Day
President's Day	Veterans Day
Memorial Day	Thanksgiving Day
Independence Day	Christmas Day

Enrollees are not permitted to report to work on the above-mentioned holidays. When the holiday occurs on the Enrollee's day off, the Enrollee will not be paid.

When the holiday occurs on the Enrollee's work day, the Enrollee must show paid hours during the week of the holiday in order to be entitled to holiday pay. For example: if an Enrollee takes LWOP during the entire week of a holiday, they will not be paid for the holiday

Enrollees working 64 authorized hours per pay period will be paid 6.5 hours for holidays.

Enrollees working 40 hours a week on a schedule other than eight hours a day (i.e., 10 hours a day, four days a week) will be paid eight hours for holidays.

Enrollee's who work part-time will be paid pro-rata holiday pay based on their authorized work hours.

#### **405 BEREAVEMENT LEAVE**

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SSAI-ACES Program Enrollees will be allowed to use up to three (3) days of sick leave to attend the funeral of an immediate family member. Immediate family is defined as mother, father, husband, wife, children, sister, brother, grandchildren and grandparents (including in-laws).

## **406 JURY DUTY**

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In the event an Enrollee is summoned for jury duty, he or she should report his or her normal work hours on the timesheet for up to ten (10) days spent on jury duty and attach a copy of the proof of service. The Enrollee must inform a Monitor upon being called for jury service. Jury duty leave will not be paid unless proof of jury service is attached to the original timesheet.

## **407 LEAVE WITHOUT PAY (LWOP)**

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An Enrollee may be on leave without pay for a maximum of one month (30 calendar days) in a given calendar year.

A formal written notice and a completed Enrollee Activity Form (EAF) must be submitted for approval prior to leave without pay status. If the Enrollee is unable to return to work after the 30-day period and is not eligible for the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993, his or her status will change to a voluntary termination from the ACES Program.

Vacation leave, sick leave, and holiday pay will **not** be accrued or paid while on Leave Without Pay status.

An Enrollee on leave is entitled to time off for certain types of active or inactive duty in the National Guard or as a Reserve of the Armed Forces. In the event an Enrollee is summoned for military duty, he or she should report Leave Without Pay on his or her timesheet for those days. A copy of the military orders should be attached to the timesheet. If the Enrollee will be out more than five consecutive days, a completed NPA with a copy of the military orders should be sent to SSAI.

## **408 FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

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The Federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) provides up to 12 weeks of non-paid leave in any 12-month period of time to care for a family member or for an individual's medical purposes. SSAI's FMLA policy follows the Federal FMLA policy. If an Enrollee is working in a state that has a more liberal Family and Medical Leave Act, then SSAI will follow that state's rules.

An Enrollee must have been enrolled in the SSAI-ACES Program for a minimum of one year and worked at least 1,250 hours during the 12-month period immediately preceding the request for FMLA leave. Once approved for FMLA, SSAI requires that all available leave, both sick and vacation, is used first.

An Enrollee wishing to use FMLA should submit an EAF and a written request to the SSAI-ACES Program Director with all necessary supporting documentation, including reason(s) for taking the planned leave and information or documentation from a medical or legal professional. Contact your SSAI Field Operations Officer for questions regarding FMLA.

## **500 TIME AND ATTENDANCE REPORTING**

### **501 PAY PERIODS**

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SSAI-ACES Program Enrollees are paid every two weeks on alternate Tuesdays. Pay schedules will be provided annually. To obtain a current pay schedule, contact the SSAI-ACES payroll office. Timesheets are due in SSAI's payroll office by noon (12:00 PM, EST/EDT) on the Monday immediately following the end of the pay period.

### **502 TIMESHEETS**

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An SSAI-ACES timesheet is provided to Enrollees:

Below are the timesheet codes that should be used to indicate the type of time off the Enrollee has taken.

Pre-Assigned column (on the timesheet)

L – Leave without pay

S – Sick Leave OR - Bereavement Leave (please manually indicate relationship to deceased)

V – Vacation / Annual Leave

Codes to be used in "Other" column on timesheet

A – Administrative Leave

F – Family Medical Leave of Absence

H – Holiday

J – Jury Duty

Enrollees and Monitors/Designee should sign and date the timesheet on the last day of attendance for the pay period or the due date. Timesheets received by SSAI before the last day of attendance will be returned and must be resubmitted.

It is the Enrollee's responsibility to make sure timesheets, along with any Overtime Authorization Form are submitted accurately and on time. Original timesheets are to be submitted to SSAI's payroll office. If original timesheets cannot be submitted to SSAI's payroll office by noon (12:00 PM, EST/EDT) on the Monday immediately following the end of the pay period, copies should be faxed to SSAI. Originals then can be mailed or delivered by over-night courier. Sample timesheets may be found in the forms section of the Enrollee Handbook.



### **503 DIRECT DEPOSIT/PAYCHECK AVAILABILITY**

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An Enrollee may elect to direct deposit his or her paycheck to more than one account, providing the appropriate information for each account is given to the SSAI-ACES Payroll Office. Direct deposit to checking accounts require a voided check, showing your name and address. Direct deposit to savings accounts require documentation from your bank showing the correct ABA/Routing and account numbers.

Paychecks/pay stubs will be mailed to the Enrollee's home address on the second Tuesday after the pay period ends.

Any changes in banks, account numbers or ABA/Routing numbers require written documentation. It normally takes two pay periods to process changes to your direct deposit account. Direct Deposit Authorization Forms are located in the Appendix of this ACES Enrollee Handbook.

It takes two pay cycles to set up an account for direct deposit of paychecks. Enrollees will receive a "live check" until the direct deposit process is completed. In addition, any changes to an Enrollee's direct deposit account will take at least two pay cycles to complete. Enrollees will receive a "live check" until the changes to their account are completed.

An Enrollee's schedule shall be established by the USDA Monitor and then sent to the SSAI-ACES Program Director for approval. Changes to work hours must be documented and submitted to the SSAI Field Operations Officer on an Enrollee Activity (EAF) Form.

An Enrollee may not volunteer to work extra hours on his or her assignment. Enrollees may not work in excess of 80 hours a pay period or 40 hours a week without prior approval from their USDA Monitor. Enrollees are prohibited from working more than 10 hours a day or 40 hours a week, unless overtime has been authorized.

### ***601 STANDARD WORK HOURS PER WEEK***

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Enrollees are required to work their approved standard hours per week. A part-time Enrollee may not exceed their standard work hour limit for the week without pre-approval from his or her Monitor to work additional hours within that week. The Enrollee must make the necessary adjustment to their work schedule to ensure they do not work over their standard assigned hours on holiday weeks. Otherwise, any time worked over an Enrollee's standard hours must be approved by their Monitor. In this event, the Monitor must initial the additional hours on the timesheet.

### ***602 OVERTIME HOURS AND OVERTIME PAY***

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To help meet programmatic needs, a Monitor may wish to authorize overtime for hours worked in excess of 40 hours per week. However, Enrollees may not be forced to work overtime.

Overtime hours are different than standard hours. Overtime hours occur only when an Enrollee works more than 40 hours in a work week. Overtime must be approved and the Overtime form must be used. A courtesy call should be made to the assigned Field Operations Officer when overtime is required. The Enrollee will be paid time and a half for any hours in excess of 40 hours per week, provided the proper authorization has been obtained.

In cases where overtime is needed, an "Overtime Authorization" form must be completed by the Monitor and submitted to the Director for approval and then submitted with the timesheet.

### **603 COMPRESSED WORK WEEK**

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At the discretion of the Monitor, a full-time Enrollee may work a compressed week of four 10-hour days. Enrollees may not work a compressed work schedule by working more than 40 hours the first week of the pay period and less than 40 hours the second week of the pay period. For example, an Enrollee may not work 48 hours one week and 32 hours the second week of the pay period. The reason for this is that even though the total hours for the pay period would be 80, the equivalent of two 40 hour weeks, overtime would be paid for the week exceeding 40 hours.

### **604 ABSENCE FROM WORK**

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Absence from work due to illness, emergency and/or other reasons must be reported to the USDA Monitor no later than two hours following the Enrollee's scheduled starting time. An Enrollee shall call in each day during his or her absence unless other arrangements have been made with the USDA Monitor.

Failure to provide notification of absence may be reason for dismissal. If an Enrollee arbitrarily leaves the assignment for three working days without explanation or contacting the USDA Monitor, this assignment abandonment would be cause for termination.

Absence from the assignment for three unscheduled workdays due to medical reasons will require a doctor's statement to permit an Enrollee to resume their assignment after illness and/or injury. The doctor's statement must be furnished to the USDA Monitor and ACES Program Field Operations Officer before the Enrollee may resume work.

### **605 WORK ON WEEKENDS**

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ACES Program assignments generally do not involve weekend work. An Enrollee cannot be forced to work on the weekends; however, weekend hours may be worked if the schedule is agreed upon by both the Monitor and the Enrollee. In such cases:

- The Monitor must authorize overtime for any hours in excess of 40 hours a week in all cases, your SSAI Field Operations Officer should be notified.

## 700 TRAVEL STATUS AND TRAINING

NRCS Staff may provide training directly relevant to the Enrollee's work responsibilities through the Task Agreement. Generally, SSAI-ACES Enrollees are considered to be fully training and experienced when enrolled and little or no training should be needed. However, technological changes, new equipment, new revised program requirements, etc., may require that Enrollees receive further training. If an Enrollee needs training that incurs costs, the Monitor (via the State ACES Coordinator) should submit a memorandum (or e-mail) to SSAI- ACES Program office requesting training. Training that would not directly incur cost can be arranged locally and should be noted in the Enrollee's file.

The memorandum (or e-mail) to SSAI- ACES Program office must include:

- Name, level, and location of Enrollee
- Vendor information, description, length, cost, and justification for the training
- Any other special circumstances that would help the SSAI-ACES Program Director understand the basis for the request. (Normally, training courses range from a few days to one week. Courses that last more than a week must be fully justified)
- Signature of Monitor and State ACES Coordinator

The SSAI-ACES Program Director and the Field Operations Officer will process the training request as outlined in the memorandum (or e-mail). All training costs are charged to the task agreement that covers the Enrollee.

Costs for training should be estimated whenever possible at the time position description and task agreement are completed. Accordingly, the training costs should be denoted in the budget for the task agreement.

The Enrollee must abide by the SSAI-ACES Program travel policies for airline, lodging, car rental, advances, and reimbursements. A Monitor (or state coordinator as appropriate) must approve travel advances or reimbursement requests prior to then Enrollee submitting it to SSAI-ACES Program office for processing.

## **800 ENROLLEE HEALTH, SAFETY AND MEDICAL MONITORING**

Monitors are responsible for assuring their work sites do not present safety hazards to Enrollees. Monitors will acquaint Enrollees with proper safety procedures and any special safety equipment required to perform their assignments. Enrollees are expected to use proper safety precautions in the performance of assigned duties and to wear the appropriate safety equipment as instructed by the Monitor.

### ***801 PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES***

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SSAI holds the safety, welfare and health of Enrollees in the highest regard. Enrollees are responsible for exercising maximum care and good judgment in preventing accidents. Enrollees are required to:

- Follow every precaution and safety rule to protect themselves and fellow Enrollees from injury and illness
- Immediately report any accident, involvement or witnesses, as well as, unsafe conditions, equipment or practices observed, to the USDA Monitor and SSAI-ACES Program Director
- Seek first-aid for all injuries however minor they may seem
- Read and abide by all safety rules established by the USDA office and established by the SSAI-ACES Program
- Use any and all personal protective equipment required by the assigned task being performed
- Take advantage of opportunities to serve on safety committees or otherwise promote safe working conditions for everyone

### ***802 MEDICAL MONITORING PROGRAM***

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Based on the duties and responsibilities outlined in the Position Description, certain assignments may require participation in the SSAI Medical Monitoring Program. Generally, only those assignments involving possible exposure to hazardous materials or those assignments involving substantial time away from USDA would require Medical Monitoring examinations.

Upon enrollment in the SSAI-ACES Program, Enrollees who are required to participate in Medical Monitoring must successfully pass the occupational standards of a medical examination. Medical Monitoring is required on an annual or periodic basis and an exit examination is required upon termination. All Medical Monitoring examinations are paid by SSAI. Enrollees in positions requiring Medical Monitoring need to complete a Medical Monitoring questionnaire. Timely and successful completion of Medical Monitoring examinations are a condition of continued enrollment.

## **900 RULES OF CONDUCT**

Although Enrollees are not USDA Employees, they are associated with the agency. An Enrollee's actions and oral representations could reflect upon USDA. Enrollees are to avoid any actions that may result in or create the appearance of using the association with USDA for private gain. Undermining public confidence in the integrity of USDA programs is also discouraged.

### **901 ENROLLEE RESTRICTIONS**

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It should be clearly understood that Enrollees are not Employees of the USDA and cannot act as authorized representatives of USDA or the Federal Government. Limitations restrict Enrollees from policy-making decisions and from managing USDA programs or budgets.

Under guidelines established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) pertaining to all Federal Grants and Task Agreements, Enrollees are not eligible to receive transportation subsidies or cash awards through USDA's Performance Award Program. Each Enrollee must sign an Enrollee Restriction Form at the time of enrollment.

SSAI-ACES Program Enrollees are not permitted to do the following:

- Conduct USDA Criminal Investigations
- Control agency prosecutions or perform USDA adjudicatory functions
- Determine USDA policy, program priorities or budget requests
- Collect, control or disburse Agency fees, royalties, duties and other public funds
- Determine the content of regulations or how they will be applied to particular cases
- Issue or sign USDA Orders or Federal Employees' time cards
- Sign USDA correspondence that commits the USDA to action or fines
- Negotiate for the USDA
- Select or non-select individuals for USDA employment
- Approve Position Descriptions and Performance Standards for USDA Employees
- Direct, control or supervise Government Employees or Contract Employees

- Determine USDA budgeted policy, guidance and strategy
- Control USDA accounts or administer USDA trust funds
- Sign financial documents as the certifying official
- Determine USDA's property to be disposed of and on what terms
- Handle Confidential Business Information (CBI) related to TSCA or contractors
- Handle CBI under other USDA statutes except where specifically authorized by USDA regulation
- Utilize the USDA Wellness Center
- Utilize USDA Health Centers except in case of emergency
- Approve USDA responses to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, except for routine responses
- Approve USDA responses to administrative appeals or denials of FOIA requests
- Approve USDA licensing actions and inspections
- Regulate industry or select program priorities
- Conduct administrative hearings or review findings concerning the eligibility of USDA employees for security clearances, or actions affecting matters of personal reputation or eligibility to participate in USDA programs
- Determine supplies or services to be acquired, assistance awards and IAGs
- Serve as voting, non-voting or technical advisory members for source selection evaluation boards on contracts or competitive assistance agreements
- Approve, award, administer or terminate contracts, assistance agreements or IAGs
- Determine whether costs incurred are eligible, necessary, reasonable, and allowable for contracts, assistance agreements or IAGs
- Receive cash awards via USDA Performance Awards Program



## **902 CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

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An SSAI-ACES Enrollee must not participate in any activity relating to USDA interests if, to his or her knowledge, any of the following persons or organizations has a financial interest in the activity:

- The Enrollee, his or her spouse or children
- A Domestic Partner
- An organization (other than a public agency) in which the Enrollee serves as an Official or Employee
- Any person or organization with whom the Enrollee is negotiating or has any arrangement concerning prospective employment

Also avoid any action that might result in, or create the appearance of:

- Using position for private gain
- Giving preferential treatment to any organization or person
- Losing independence or impartiality
- Making an official decision outside official channels
- Undermining public confidence in the integrity of USDA programs

Each Enrollee must sign a Conflict of Interest Statement at the time of enrollment.

## **903 CONFIDENTIALITY BUSINESS INFORMATION (CBI)**

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SSAI-ACES Enrollees are required to sign a confidentiality agreement at the time of enrollment to emphasize their liabilities if they willfully disclose information to any person not authorized to receive it.

## **904 EXCLUDED PARTIES LISTING SYSTEM (EPLS)**

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SSAI ACES Program is required to check the Excluded Parties Listing System (EPLS) prior to enrollment to assure Enrollee's name does not appear as an ineligible person.

The EPLS is an electronic, web-based system that identifies those parties excluded from receiving Federal contracts, certain subcontracts, and certain types of Federal financial and non-financial assistance and benefits. The EPLS keeps its user community aware of administrative and statutory exclusions across the entire government, suspected terrorists, and individuals barred from entering the United States.

## **905 LOBBYING ACTIVITIES**

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Enrollees are free to engage in political activities, however, certain restrictions apply:

- Enrollees cannot engage in partisan or nonpartisan political activity during hours in which the Enrollee is paid with SSAI-ACES Program funds
- Enrollees are not permitted to engage in partisan political activity in which the Enrollee represents himself or herself as a spokesperson for the SSAI-ACES Program
- Enrollees may not be assigned to the office of a member of Congress, or a State or a local Legislator
- Enrollees cannot be assigned to the staff of any legislative committee
- Enrollees may not be assigned to the immediate office of any elected chief executive officer(s) of a State government or a unit of general local government (exceptions may be made under specific circumstances)
- Enrollees may not be assigned to perform any political activity in the office of any elected official. However, since non-political activities fall under the responsibility of elected officials, the assignment of an Enrollee to such activity may be proposed but shall not be made without the prior written approval of the SSAI-ACES Program Manager

Persons governed by Chapter 15 of Title 5, United States Code, the Hatch Act, shall comply with its provisions as interpreted by the United States Office of Personnel Management.

SSAI-ACES Program funds cannot be used in any way to attempt to influence a member of Congress to favor or oppose any legislation or appropriation by Congress.

SSAI-ACES Program funds cannot be used, in any way, to attempt to influence a member of state or local legislature to favor or oppose any legislation or appropriation by that legislature.

## **906 DRUGS AND ALCOHOL IN THE WORKPLACE**

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SSAI absolutely prohibits the use, consumption, sale, purchase, transfer or possession of any illegal or non-prescription drug by Enrollees during working hours or while on the premises of the local USDA work sites. Illegal drugs are defined, for the purposes of this policy, as any drug that is either not legally obtainable or is legally obtainable but has not been prescribed by a doctor.

Legally prescribed medications are not covered under this policy and are permitted to the extent that their use does not adversely affect the Enrollee's job performance or the safety of others in the workplace. Enrollees are also strictly prohibited from being under the influence of alcohol during working hours or while on the premises of the local USDA work sites.

SSAI will, to the best of its ability, work with Enrollees suffering from drug and alcohol addiction to provide the assistance necessary to overcome their dependence.

- Any Enrollee seeking such assistance is encouraged to discuss the matter with his or her Monitor and/or ACES Program Coordinator before problems begin to surface in the workplace
- Any disclosures made by an Enrollee will be treated as strictly confidential
- The Enrollee's decision to seek assistance will not be used as the basis for disciplinary action or used against the Enrollee in a disciplinary proceeding

Violation of this policy can result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination from the SSAI-ACES Program.

## **1000 ENROLLEE PERFORMANCE AND CORRECTIVE ACTIONS**

Enrollees in the SSAI-ACES Program are expected to demonstrate behavior on the job that reflects favorably on SSAI and the USDA. In the event performance on the job falls short of expectations, the following disciplinary measures may be used in an effort to bring about a change in behavior.

### ***Oral or Written Warning***

An oral or written statement by the Monitor expressing dissatisfaction with the Enrollee's work performance and outlining specific actions needed to improve the situation. Documentation providing the date and a summary of the warning will be submitted to the ACES Program Coordinator and the Field Operations Officer where it will become a part of the Enrollee's personnel record. SSAI-ACES Enrollee will also be given a copy of any written warning.

### ***Letter of Reprimand***

The letter of reprimand written to the Enrollee by the SSAI-ACES Program Director is the final warning. Unless the Enrollee's behavior changes by a specified deadline, the Enrollee will be terminated on a specified date. The letter should summarize the dissatisfaction with the Enrollee's behavior, the failure to improve following counseling, and an initial warning. A copy of the letter will be sent to the ACES Program Coordinator and a copy will be placed in the Enrollee's personnel file.

## **1001 TERMINATION**

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Only the SSAI-ACES Program Director may terminate an Enrollee. Most often, termination is at the request of an USDA Monitor or Coordinator. An USDA Monitor may recommend termination for good reason at any time during enrollment based on appropriate documentation. In all cases, the USDA Monitor and the SSAI-ACES Field Operations Officer should work in concert to provide the Enrollee guidance and assistance. If the disciplinary measures do not bring about the desired change within a specified period of time, the Enrollee will be discharged.

Reasons for termination may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Physical violence, disorderly conduct or disruptive behavior

- Refusal to follow directions of the Monitor during work hours
- Reporting to work under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- Sleeping while on the job
- Repeated tardiness and/or absenteeism
- Repeated violation of safety rules
- Theft, fraud, or falsifying records

Enrollees may be laid off if USDA makes a decision to abolish a position due to budgetary considerations, reorganization or changing needs. Enrollees who have been terminated may be called back to work upon reinstatement of funding for any position they are qualified to perform. If other positions are available within the same USDA geographical location, persons who have been terminated due to a reduction in force may interview for a position they are qualified to perform. A guarantee of enrollment cannot be made. Enrollees being terminated due to a reduction in force will be notified in writing by the SSAI Field Operations Officer no less than two weeks prior to the date of termination. It should be understood that SSAI-ACES Program positions are not permanent positions and may be discontinued at any time.

## ***1002 VOLUNTARY TERMINATION***

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SSAI-ACES Program Enrollees are asked to provide a two-week advance written notice of resignation to their USDA Monitor. SSAI-ACES Program recognizes there may be situations where it is not possible to give a full two-week notice. Payment for unused vacation leave is not dependent on submission of the two-week advance notice.

## ***1003 GRIEVANCE/APPEAL PROCEDURES***

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Enrollees have the right to a grievance and appeal process. If a problem is not resolved satisfactorily between the SSAI-ACES Field Operations Officer, Monitor or Coordinator, the Enrollee may submit his or her grievance in writing to:

SSAI-ACES Program Director  
Senior Service America, Inc.  
8403 Colesville Road, Suite 1200  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3314

The SSAI-ACES Program Director will review the complaint and render a final decision within 15 days. If an Enrollee believes that he or she has been

discriminated against on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status, age or handicap, and has exhausted the steps in the grievance procedure, he or she may file a formal discrimination complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Such complaints should be addressed to:

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission  
1801 L Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20507