

**OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
PERSONNEL NEWSLETTER**

March 1998

*The Telecommuting Experience*  
by Sandy Nagy

In November 1996, NASA Lewis Research Center engaged in a telecommuting initiative and a team was formed for the purpose of establishing a formalized telecommuting program for employees. This initiative was spurred on by the President's Management Council which endorsed a National Telecommuting Initiative earlier that year. Results have shown that telecommuting, or working from one's home, can improve the quality of work and family life. Morale is improved and stress can be reduced by balancing the demands from work and family.

Members of the Lewis Telecommuting Team were carefully chosen so that various aspects of NASA life and activity would be represented. The team was lead by Lori Manthey and the areas represented included the following: computer services, finance, legal, logistics, human resources, office space, security, supervisors, and AFGE and IFPTE Unions. A questionnaire was developed and interviews were performed by the team to tap into the insights gained by Lewis' "Work-at-Home" participants and their supervisors. To add to this insight, all members of the team agreed that it would be a good idea for someone on the team to also personally experience what telecommuting was all about. The team then planned to use the information and data gathered to develop and recommend useful policies and guidelines in establishing a telecommuting program for Centerwide use. I was enthusiastically "volunteered" by fellow team members to be this "beta" telecommuter. I completed the necessary paperwork under the former "Work-at-Home" program that existed at Lewis since 1991. After obtaining the appropriate signatures, I became a legally recognized telecommuter! It was an interesting experience applying different types of work in this new environment.

Now, telecommuting doesn't necessarily mean that you need to use a computer. Some of the work I did was reading and/or writing for different aspects of my tasks. The telecommuting arrangement proved to be highly beneficial, for it created a quiet and distraction-free environment. As a result, more work was completed per hour than if this same work was performed at the office. Another aspect of my work was Remote Access Service (RAS) consulting. This type of work was customer, computer, and telephone intensive. I had two telephone lines at home, which alleviated the problem of being logged onto the Lewis network and then needing to call someone on the phone at the same time. I found myself working non-stop because: (1) the success of this program will impact the work environment options available to Lewis employees, and (2) I didn't want anyone to think that I was sitting around all day eating bon-bons. I confess, though, I did wear those fluffy doggies slippers throughout my work day! In order not to lose communication with customers or co-workers, I systematically checked office voicemail. I later obtained a Government calling card because at times it was necessary to contact customers who were either at Plumbrook or another long-distance location. A good bit of trivia to know is whether dialing long distance from NASA or using the calling card, the cost is the same. (If you begin to telecommute and will need a calling card or a pager, contact the CSD Help Desk at PABX 3-9800.)

I kept a log of all the people I spoke with and what their concerns were and kept my supervisor informed of what went on during my work days from home. Suggested methods of keeping supervisors informed of a telecommuter's work progress includes voicemail, E-Mail, in-person communication, or through a weekly or monthly report. In-person visits worked best for my circumstances. However, if you telecommute, choose the most effective method that works for you and your supervisor.

Well, now it was 5:30 p.m.! Yes, quitting time and time to go home! Well, almost. It was a shock to my system to have had a stressful day at "work" and then not be able to unwind with the 30-minute drive home. Isn't home supposed to be the haven from the jungle? In some cases, with telecommuting, it may not be so! After a few days of telecommuting, I was ready to go back to the office. Although my work days were productive, I missed the interaction with colleagues and learned not to underestimate the value of those impromptu hallway conversations!

Based on the recommendations of the Telecommuting Team, the Lewis Telecommuting Program was approved and became effective on January 5, 1998. This program supersedes the previous Work-at-Home program.

Since circumstances vary, three different categories of telecommuting were designed for the Telecommuting Program at Lewis: Ongoing, Temporary, and As-needed. An example of "Ongoing Telecommuting" would be work that is project-oriented and beneficial to the Government by providing the employee with uninterrupted "quiet time" to accomplish labor intensive tasks. (The employee may be approved to telecommute up to 4 days a week.) Ongoing Telecommuting has a specific beginning date, but no specified ending date. Before an employee can begin to telecommute on an "Ongoing" basis, he/she needs to apply by completing both the Telecommuting Application and the Telecommuting Agreement forms. Supervisors are responsible for approving these requests and the Personnel Officer is responsible for authorizing these arrangements.

Next, an example of "Temporary Telecommuting" would be for an employee who is recovering from an illness or surgery yet he/she can complete one's work assignment in a productive and timely manner from home (i.e., the employee is not incapacitated to perform work, but may not be able to travel to and from work.) Temporary Telecommuting has a distinct beginning and ending date. Before an employee can begin to telecommute on a "Temporary" basis, he/she must apply for it by completing both the Telecommuting Application and the Telecommuting Agreement forms. As with Ongoing Telecommuting requests, supervisors are responsible for approving Temporary Telecommuting requests and the Personnel Officer is responsible for authorizing these arrangements.

The third type of telecommuting, and perhaps the most popular, is called "As-Needed Telecommuting." As-Needed Telecommuting permits a person to do just that...to telecommute from home, when it is in the best interest of both the Government and the employee, on spur of the moment occasions. This type of telecommuting is normally exercised to accommodate one day situations such as completing a report that may be due the next day. Supervisors are responsible for approving and authorizing such requests. Employees need to complete the Telecommuting Agreement form, but *do not* need to complete the Telecommuting Application form in order to participate in the As-Needed Telecommuting arrangement. The Telecommuting Agreement may be completed in anticipation of needing to telecommute on an as-needed basis. This agreement will remain in effect for a 1-year period and must be renewed on a yearly basis. The "begin date" on the agreement should reflect the first day you telecommute. The renewal date of this type of telecommuting arrangement would be 1 year from the "begin date." In order to ensure accurate record-keeping, As-needed Telecommuting Agreements should not be forwarded to the Office of Human Resources until the "begin date" is established.

Several people from the Computer Services Division are in this program. At times, some of the programmers are telephoned or paged at midnight for the simple purpose of having to reset some type of computer program that could be done remotely from their home computer. It is more efficient and effective to the Center and for the employee to do this work from home.

This past February, Telecommuting Briefings were held for Lewis supervisors and employees. A video tape of the briefing is available at the Learning Center. Background of the telecommuting initiative, as well as personnel, legal, and computer issues, and supervisor/employee responsibilities were discussed at the briefings.

There are definite benefits to telecommuting. Its success can depend on what type of work you are doing and what type of personality traits you possess! If your work is not people intensive nor requires special facilities that are only accessible from on-site and you could get more work done from home, then you may want to consider telecommuting. Be sure to take a look at the Telecommuting Web Site at <http://www.lerc.nasa.gov/WWW/TC>. By reviewing the section on *Suitable Telecommuting Work Arrangements*, you can conclude if telecommuting is for you and your circumstances.

If you have questions regarding the Lewis Telecommuting Program, contact Lori Pietravoia of the Program and Policy Office, Office of Human Resources, at PABX 3-2506.

You may be quite surprised to find out that your telecommuting experience differs from what you initially anticipated.



## ***Where is your TSP money?***

Many employees confuse the functions of Thrift Savings Plan TSP-1 and TSP-30 forms. This article provides a better understanding of these two forms.

TSP-1 - Election Form (commonly known as the "green form"), is used primarily during open season (May 15-July 31 and November 15-January 31) to change the percentage of your contribution. It can also be used to change the mix of your FUTURE contributions. Completing and submitting a TSP-1 DOES NOT change the mix of the money currently in your account. The TSP-1 form also can be used outside of open season if you wish to stop contributing to the plan.

All of these TSP-1 changes to the plan can also be made by using Employee Express.

TSP-30 - Interfund Transfer Request, changes the mix of the money CURRENTLY in your account. You can make a change using this form once a month, 12 times a year. Changes received by the National Finance Center by the 15th of any month will be effective at the end of that month. Changes received after the 15th will be made at the end of the following month.

You can also make an Interfund Transfer using the TSP Thriftline at (504) 255-8777. You will need your TSP PIN Number and your SSN. The Thriftline can also provide you with your personal account balance.

Netscape can be used to access TSP forms and information at [www.tsp.gov](http://www.tsp.gov). This website does not have the ability to give you personal account information.



## ***CSRS or FERS?***

This is just a heads up to let you know that an open season, for all CSRS employees to have the opportunity to transfer to FERS, may be between July and December 1998. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has not issued guidance concerning the Open Season to transfer from the Civil Service Retirement Systems to Federal Employees Retirement System. NASA did seek OPM's unofficial guidance on what to offer employees interested in doing an initial evaluation. OPM suggested interested employees might find the OPM publication, "F E R S - Federal Employees Retirement System Transfer Handbook - A guide to Making Your Decision" (RI 90-3) a useful resource. This product can be downloaded from the OPM website under the retirement publications site at [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov).

For Employees interested in maximizing participation in the Thrift Savings Plan, they can review the publication, "Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan for Federal Employees," or visit the TSP website for plan data at [www.tsp.gov](http://www.tsp.gov).

More information will be provided as it becomes available from the Office of Personnel Management. If and when this open season is approved, a seminar will be held to provide you with all the information needed to make an intelligent decision.

## ***Restored Leave from the 1995 Furlough***

The deadline for using restored leave from the 1995 furlough is December 31, 1998. If that restored leave is not used by the end of the 1998 leave year, you will lose it and it will be returned to the Federal Government on January 3, 1999. If you do not want to lose that restored leave, you can use it this year, donate it to someone in the leave transfer program, or take it with you if you leave the Federal Government by January 2, 1999.

## **EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION PROGRAM**



The Suggestion Program is an important part of the Center's Incentive Awards Program. It is intended to recognize and reward employees, either individually or collectively, for ideas which, if adopted, contribute to increased productivity, economy and effectiveness in carrying out NASA or Government programs. As an employee of this Center, you are empowered to make suggestions to change and improve Center operations. Since 1993, your ideas have saved the Center \$1,090,905, and suggesters were awarded a total of \$60,027 for tangible and intangible ideas.

The next time you and/or a group come up with an idea which will contribute to increased productivity, efficiency, or economy, submit it on an "Ideas at Work" form (NASA C-9034) and send it to the Awards Office, M.S. 500-314. Forms can be found on suggestion boards located in key areas around the Center, or call PABX 3-2848, for a copy of the form.

If your suggestion is eligible, it will be evaluated by the appropriate organization. If adoption of your suggestion is recommended, it will be investigated by the Suggestion Committee. Even if your suggestion is not recommended for adoption, it provides valuable information to the reviewing organization.

We are looking for a few employees to serve on either the General Schedule (GS) or Wage Grade (WG) committee. If you are interested in participating, please contact one of the committee members, or call Terry Ross, PABX 3-8550, or Jennifer Cyrill, PABX 3-2848.

Current committee members:

**WG**

Gerald Bockmiller  
Joseph Flowers  
Gregory Kelbach  
Ronald Sobolewski  
Martin Stupiansky

**GS**

Susan Gott  
Linda Yavoich  
Robert Manly  
Mark Manthey  
Frank Savino



### ***HUMAN RESOURCES INFORMATION SYSTEM (HRIS) TIP FOR MANAGERS***

Frequently, the Office of Human Resources receives call from managers questioning the due date of an employee's Within Grade Increase (WGI). This information is available through the HRIS. Managers are encouraged to access this information from this system. This information can be particularly helpful when you are initiating a career promotion action for your employee, as the WGI may have an impact on the setting of the step of the higher grade.

## NEW VETERANS' PREFERENCE ENTITLEMENTS

As part of the Defense Authorization Act for FY98, Congress has approved two new veterans' preference laws granting five-point veterans' preference. They are effective retroactively to November 18, 1997.

Under the law, veterans' preference is now accorded to anyone who served on active duty during the Gulf War from August 2, 1990, through January 2, 1992. The law grants preference to anyone who is otherwise eligible and who served on active duty during this period regardless of where the person served or for how long. ("Otherwise eligible" means that you must have been released from the service under honorable conditions and must have served a minimum of 2 years on active duty, or, if a Reservist or member of the National Guard, must have served the full period for which called to active duty.) Therefore, if you were released under honorable conditions, served at least 2 years active duty, and, at least 1 day of your active service fell between August 2, 1990, and January 2, 1992, you are eligible for five-point veterans preference.

The law also authorized the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for service in Bosnia during Operation Joint Endeavor (November 20, 1995 - December 20, 1996) and Operation Joint Guard (December 20, 1996 - to be determined). The Secretary of each military department will decide which members are eligible. The award of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal is qualifying for five-point veterans' preference.

If either of these new provisions apply to you, be sure to submit the following appropriate documentation to Ms. Carol J. Mehallick, Operations Office of the Office of Human Resources, M.S. 500-301.

- a. A copy of your DD-214; or
- b. If you were a Reservist or member of the National Guard who was called to active duty, a copy of your mobilization orders and a copy of your demobilization order for time spent on active duty during the period of August 2, 1990, to January 2, 1992; or
- c. For service in Bosnia in Operation Joint Endeavor or Operation Joint Guard, any type of notification you have that shows you have been awarded the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for service in Bosnia.

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## NASA EXTERNAL AWARDS

Every quarter, the Center receives requests for nominations for a wide variety of non-NASA awards. A call letter with nomination criteria summaries is sent to the directorate offices for distribution. Please call the Awards Office at 433-2848, for specific information.

The following is a list of non-NASA External Awards solicitation due this quarter, April to June 1998:

William A. Jump Memorial Award  
National Medal of Science  
Katharine Wright Memorial Award  
Admiral Luis De Fábriz Flight Safety Award  
National Air and Space Museum Trophy  
Government Technology Leadership Awards  
Dr. Nathan Davis Awards



Federal Environmental Engineer of the Year Award  
Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy  
Mary D. Pinkard Leader in Federal Equity Award  
Federal Property Manager of the Year  
AIAA Fellow, Associate Fellow, and Honorary Fellow  
Laura Taber Barbour Air Safety Award  
Nevada Medal

Hispanic Engineer National Achievement Award

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## COMPETITIVE PLACEMENT PLAN (CPP) AND CLOSE OF BUSINESS

You want to compete for a CPP announcement that you believe your background, work experience, and qualifications make you qualified. You start preparing as soon as you see the announcement. You begin by assembling all the required forms and drafting your written responses to the advertised requirements for this position. If the area of consideration block identifies this position as a bargaining unit position, you will give your supervisor a Supervisory Rating Statement (NASA-C-4012) in adequate time for it to be completed and back to you prior to the date and time you are to submit your application package to the Office of Human Resources (OHR). Please keep in mind that only your supervisor can be granted up to 5 additional workdays beyond the closing date of the announcement to complete the Supervisory Rating Statement for CPP announcements. You now carefully review, for the final time, your application package before submitting it. The critical end step for you is to get it into OHR as soon as possible, but no later than 4:30 p.m. on the closing date, which is indicated in the top right side of the CPP announcement. Your application will not be accepted after that time or date. If you should have any questions about closing dates, please contact your OHR specialist or assistant.

# CAREER TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



**Wednesday, March 25**  
**9 a.m. - 12 Noon**

**Start Your Own Business**

**Thursday, March 26**  
**9 a.m. - 12 Noon**

**Negotiations Workshop**

**Tuesday, March 31**  
**9 a.m. - 12 Noon**

**Designing and Writing the Right Cover Letters**

**Thursday, April 9**  
**9 a.m. - 12 Noon**

**Interviewing Skills to “WOW” ‘em**

**Wednesday, April 15**  
**9 a.m. - 12 Noon**

**Re-Thinking the ol’ Resume**

**Tuesday, April 21**  
**9 a.m. - 4 p.m.**

**CTAPC 1-Day Career Management Workshop**

**Thursday, April 23**  
**9 a.m. - 12 Noon**

**Influencing Skills Workshop**

**Tuesday, April 28**  
**9 a.m. - 12 Noon**

**Electronic Job Search and the Internet**

**Thursday, April 30**  
**9 a.m. - 12 Noon**

**ABLE: Adult Balanced Life Enhancement Inventory**

**Please E-Mail Ms. Cindy Cox at ([Cynthia.A.Cox@lerc.nasa.gov](mailto:Cynthia.A.Cox@lerc.nasa.gov))  
if interested in attending any of the above events.**