



# WINNING PERSPECTIVES

Winter, 2013

**The WiN Vision:** High performing, diverse, innovative and motivated female employees who transform the workplace.

## Special points of interest:

- What WiN is
- Why you should be proud to have joined the WiN team
- Support for and why the Chief recognizes WiN.
- How you can get involved with WiN
- What the WiN team is currently working on
- How you can help

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## How WiN Became an Organization

By Sharyn Alvarez

In 2008 I joined with the National Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager (HEPM) and held a joint Special Emphasis Program Manager (SEPM) training workshop for the Federal Women Program Managers (FWPMs) and the HEPMs at the annual National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCS) Conference. Why did I do this? FEW (Federally Employed Women) cut the training days for agencies from two days to one day. The Department of Agriculture FWPM would take the morning to host an FWPM event, and I had the afternoon to provide training to their FWPMs.

The reduced time and high registration fee (\$800 - \$1,000) provided me with the motivation to think differently about how to provide cost-effective training to the FWPMs of NRCS. By 2008 budgets were beginning to become an issue. I networked with Gilbert Guerrero, the National HEPM at the time, and we came up with a plan to form a workshop for both the FWPMs and the HEPMs.

As a result, this conference was the first time many FWPM's had attended a NRCS Employ-

ee Organization Conference. The SEPM portion was held on Monday, and they were able to stay the rest of the week to experience the NOPHNRCS Conference. The evaluations very positive. Some FWPMs said, "Why don't women have an employee organization?"

In 2009 the Asian/Pacific Island National SEPM, Angela Biggs, invited the FWPMs to host a joint conference with them and the NRCS Asian Pacific Island Organization (APIO). The FWPMs were also invited again to join the HEPMS. The FWPMs wanted to experience another NRCS Employee Organization so we accepted APIO's invitation.

Halfway through the APIO conference in Sacramento, California, the FWPMs stated again, "Why don't we have a women's employee organization?" An impromptu meeting was held and twenty-two women present agreed to begin planning the development of a NRCS Women's Employee Organization.

## Where We Are Now

At this time our organization is officially incorporated in the state of New York and we are in the process of applying for non-profit status. We have opened a bank account and have begun to accept membership.

In early April 2012, Ron Alvarado, the Acting Deputy Chief, was briefed and provided with information to brief NRCS Chief Dave White on our current status. We have since received a letter from the Chief expressing his support. We have interim officers, by-laws, a website, a Facebook account, a logo, a fact sheet, and a brochure. The other NRCS employee organization presidents are aware of the organization and we are part of the monthly meetings they hold.

Our goal is to become an employee organi-

zation that is recognized by USDA as per Department Regulation 4020-251-01, Welfare and Recreation Organizations. To meet this requirement we must do the following:

- Be a non-profit organization whose membership is primarily made up of USDA employees;
- Have a current constitution and by-laws that includes a non-discrimination statement;
- Adhere to relevant law and regulations pertaining to use of government property, ethics and conduct;
- Not discriminate in terms of membership or treatment of its members because of race, col-



## Where We Are Now (continued from page 1)

- color, religion, sex, national origin, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, familial status or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program;
- Not assist or participate in any strike, work stoppage or slowdown against the USDA, or advocate the overthrow of the constitutional form of government of the United States.



## President's Message

After three years of working to establishing WIN, we are writing a message to you in our first WIN Magazine. It is small, but we are *thinking big* by calling it a magazine. This is what we encourage all of you to continue to do--to think big. We say *continue* because you were thinking big when you joined WIN. We have had conversations with people who asked us, "Why are you starting an organization now when budgets are tight, people don't have funds for membership dues, and we won't be able to host an annual conference anyway?" Yes, all of this is true, but the era of tight budgets is the genesis of this organization's beginning. When the FWPMs made the decision in 2008 to merge their annual training with other NRCS employee organizations, it was because the registration fee was \$600 (per person) lower than the group with whom we normally held training. We were trying to save money. After two years of working with two employee organizations of NRCS, the FWPMs said, "Why don't we have an organization of our own so we don't have to link up with other employee organizations?"

In spite of tight budgets, a group of women thought we could *do something new*. We started organizing, and here we are. So how are we going to manage a new organization during these tight times? By *acting smart* and taking advantage of ALL tools available to us. We have technology on our side. We will use it to communicate with you, and you can use it to communicate with us. This magazine will be one vehicle of communication. We have a website and a Facebook account with over 2,500 hits. We can use technology such as teleconferences, net meetings, webinars, and VTCs to provide career development tips, discuss retention issues, recognize the accomplishments of our members, provide training, and host forums where we exchange ideas. Most importantly, we can hear your views and concerns to make this organization stronger and, ultimately, to make NRCS stronger.

We now have 79 members and each week that number grows. Do you know the most valuable resource WIN has? It is you. If the average years of work experience of our members is 10 years, then we have access to over 790 years of professional experience. If the average age of a WIN member is 30, we have access to over 2,370 years of life experience! This kind of experience should inspire us.

By thinking big, thinking new, and acting smart, we can and will make a success of this organization regardless of tight budgets, difficult times or any adversity that may come our way. We are excited and we are ready to work with you, finally, to have an organization of our own. We cannot thank you enough for committing to WIN by joining. We look forward to sharing many rewarding experiences with you as we join the ranks of the NRCS employee resource groups.

Sharyn Alvarez  
Co-President, WIN

Angela Biggs  
Co-President, WIN

FOR MORE

INFORMANTION:

[WWW.WINNRCS.ORG](http://WWW.WINNRCS.ORG)

[FACEBOOK](#)

[WOMEN IN NRCS  
\(WIN\)](#)



# Letter of Support from Chief White

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
P.O. Box 2890  
Washington, D.C. 20013

Sharyn C. Alvarez  
Co-President  
2300 Pimmit Drive  
Unit 216W  
Falls Church, VA 22043

JAN 14 2011

Dear Sharyn,

The task you have undertaken of forming a group to encourage and mentor the female employees of NRCS sounds exciting. The employee groups at NRCS have added great value to our workforce as I am sure the new Women in NRCS (WIN) will do.

NRCS continues to focus on diversity and cultural transformation. The leadership team is committed to having a workforce that represents the diversity of the nation we serve.

I am happy to support your efforts to form this group, recognizing that through professional organizations such as WIN, our workforce will have opportunities to grow and work collectively to support the mission of NRCS. Please follow up with Eloris Speight to share the group's plan. Thank you for your efforts to make this happen and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Dave White  
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Our Customers

Taken from Charter document

Primary customers - NRCS Women

Other customers include:

- \* Partner organization women
- \* Women landowners and operators
- \* Prospective female employees
- \* NRCS Agency Leadership
- \* Anyone interesting in supporting the mission and vision of WIN

## WiN—Who are we?

The WIN Team and its membership is an organization comprised of members who are supportive and nurturing of each other; who foster and promote diversity from membership to leadership; who reach out to and welcome a diverse membership; who embrace differences of opinion across all sectors, including political and religious; who serve to inspire and motivate women to inspire and motivate others; who are respectful of each other and others; who foster honesty and integrity within the organization and among partners; who develop strong leaders; who promote the development of an assertive membership; who promote an environment that "first seeks to understand before seeking to be understood"; who seek membership feedback regularly; and who bring their "best" selves to the organization in order to achieve a greater good for the organization and the membership. The WIN Team will meet with its membership annually and evaluate its operating practices.

Additionally, the WIN Team develops a strong foundation by furthering the education of its members for opportunities of advancement and personal growth, through a scholarship program funded by donations, and collaborates with like-minded organizations to sponsor training opportunities.

8 WiN Regions: 91 members

Caribbean (dark green) - 0

East (purple) - 14

Midwest (yellow) - 19

Northern Plains (blue) - 17

Pacific Islands (dark green) - 1

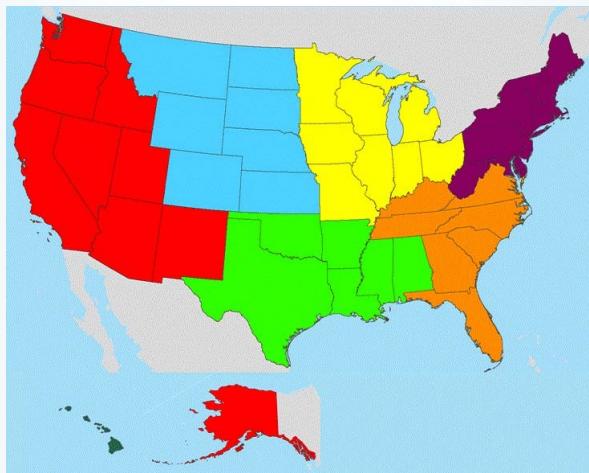
South Central (green) - 11

South East (orange) - 12

West (red) - 17

Numbers behind region name are the current members as of October 2012.

## Win Regions



## WiN Membership Drive



This is your opportunity to participate in a brand new NRCS employee organization and be a part of an historical event for NRCS women! We hope you will become an active, participating member of WiN and consider running for office and serving on committees.

We have worked diligently to establish WiN! In order for WiN to be successful and achieve our goals, we need you. Please join WiN today! You will find our membership form and fact sheet on our web site:

[www.winnrcs.org](http://www.winnrcs.org)

## WiN Membership Dues\*

**Regular yearly membership \$50.00**

**Student yearly membership \$10.00**

(Student: a person enrolled in high school or secondary education pursuing a bachelors degree)

**Lifetime Membership \$350.00**

(Payment plan available upon request)

**Associate Membership—non-voting yearly \$20.00**

(For retirees or partners)

**Make checks payable to WiN and mail to WiN, c/o Wendy Mears, 102 Tanoak Court,**

**Suffolk, VA 23434**

**\*Use of Official government envelopes, postage and letterhead is PROHIBITED! Please use personal means of stationery and postage for all correspondence and membership payments. Thank you!**

# Committees

WiN conducts its business through the use of the following standing committees: Finance, Communications, Elections and Nominations, Scholarship, and ad hoc committees as appointed by the National Council annually.

Descriptions of what the committees will be tasked with doing have been taken from the bylaws. If you have interest in being on a committee, please let any of the WiN interim officers know via email at their WiN addresses (link to the WiN website).

Chairpersons of these committees shall be members of the Organization who are appointed each year by the President. The selection of committee chairs may be subject to an application process. Each chairperson may select their own vice-chairperson and secretary. Any member in good standing may volunteer to serve on any committee.

## Audit Committee

- Audit the books of the Organization annually by February 15 of each year and report the findings to the National Council

## Training Committee

- Work with the membership to provide training opportunities to the membership using teleconferences, face to face meetings and web net meetings.
- Work with the National Council to establish the overall training budget for submission to NRCS and other sources of funding.

## Awards Committee

- Develop and recommend guidelines that lead to the implementation of the annual awards program
- Serve as the Awards Team and Judging Panel
- Request nominations from members for these awards:
  - Award of Excellence in Natural Resources Conservation
  - Leadership/Visionary Award
  - Special Achievement Award
  - Outstanding Federal Women's Program Manager (FWPM) or FWP Committee Award
  - Award of Excellence in Community Outreach
  - Outstanding Member Award
  - Conservationist of the Year Award -

## Communications Committee

- Enhance awareness of the role women have in impacting agriculture, conservation and natural resources through various forms of communication
- Oversee the publication of a magazine and website
- Provide input on training topics to the Conference Planning Committee

### **Immediate needs– Volunteers to assist WiN with:**

- ◆ Completing organizational policy documents
- ◆ Developing a member survey
- ◆ Developing member training materials
- ◆ Website Master

Contact Katrina Thompson at [Katrina@winnrcs.org](mailto:Katrina@winnrcs.org)



## Why an Organizational Charter?

A charter is a document that can help an organization grow effective teams. The main benefit of a charter is that it provides a quick overview of the organization, the boundaries of its scope, and reinforces the purpose of the team. A charter is similar to a job description for an entire team. It provides structure for how a team operates, who its members are and what responsibility the team has to the organization, to the team and to each other. It is important for a team to have a shared sense of purpose. A clearly defined sense of purpose will help our team focus on its mission and goals and therefore, will help our teams' success. Regardless of the size, duration, and purpose of a team, a charter is helpful for team focus and productivity.

Using a charter guides a team toward meeting its goals, but this is only part of the benefit a charter will bring! A charter will help others in the organization to understand the purpose of the team. Why is this important? The more aware members are of the team's function, the more supportive and engaged they will be of the work. It may increase your team membership and involvement of team members, as well as commitment from others in your organization to support your goals. Ultimately, a clearly defined and communicated charter will provide a solid foundation for success!

A charter is different from an organization's Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation. Bylaws are rules that govern the management of the organization, are passed and approved by the governing body of the organization, and are submitted to the IRS for incorporation purposes. Articles of Incorporation are the primary rules of governing the management of a corporation and are filed with the state where the primary office of the organization resides.

On the following page you will find our Charter for WiN and we hope it resonates with you, our members!



## The History and Basis of Your WiN Logo

Thank you to Deb Surabian, Soil Scientist in Connecticut, who came up with the first draft of the butterfly logo for WiN (see above). The butterfly was kept, and modified to incorporate the NRCS water drop. The design was developed by Graphic Artist Stephen Oosterling of Walworth, NY.

Colors are the Traditional NRCS blue and green, with some WiN purple incorporated into the design.

We have two different designs, as seen below and throughout the publication.



## Charter for WiN

WIN has been formed for the charitable and educational purposes of aiding professional women in the field of natural resources conservation through education, training, mentoring, leadership development, and networking opportunities.

WIN provides its members with education and training programs aimed to increase the professional development and to promote access and increase participation in natural resource conservation programs and services for women farmers and ranchers. WIN actively works to identify and resolve barriers to employment, leadership development, and retention of women employees, as well as provides higher education opportunities through scholarships. Through these activities, WIN aims to do the following:

- promote the recruitment, retention and professional development of women in natural resources
- provide a support network for its members
- improve outreach, access, and services for women farmers and ranchers interested in natural resources conservation.

Membership is open to all interested parties in support of WIN's mission, vision, and purpose.

The **WIN Team** consists of the National Council (which includes the Executive Board and Regional Representatives) and its membership. The National Council is comprised of seven elected officers and eight elected representatives from eight regions of the United States. The Executive Board consists of the seven elected officers.

The terms of the newly elected officers shall commence January 1, following the election. No one person will serve more than eight consecutive years as a National Council member (two consecutive terms).

The position of President is successive over the four-year term. The Vice-President is elected annually and serves a one-year term as Vice-President then succeeds into the office of Executive Vice-President for a one-year term. The Executive Vice-President then succeeds into the office of President and serves for a one-year term, and then succeeds into the office of Past-President for a one-year term.

Any member of the organization seeking the office of Vice President, Treasurer of Finance, Treasurer of Membership, Secretary, and Regional Representative shall file an "intention-to-run" in writing with the Elections and Nominations Committee by September 30. The ballots will be distributed to each member 60 days prior to the election. Elections will be held via US Mail or electronic ballots. The votes will be submitted by ballots postmarked or electronically stamped by December 1 to Chair of the Elections and Nominations Committee. Election results will be communicated to the membership prior to January 1.



"It is only the farmer who faithfully plants seeds in the Spring, who reaps a harvest in the Autumn."  
BC Forbes



## Activities and Operating Methods *(Taken from the Charter)*

The WIN Team meets monthly, quarterly, and annually, either face-to-face, by conference call, or net meeting. The WIN Team's focus is to support Women in NRCS.

The WIN Team is charged with the responsibility to

1. advocate for a gender diverse workforce and leadership.
2. identify and resolve barriers to leadership development and retention of female employees.
3. serve as a liaison to promote greater female participation in NRCS programs and services.
4. shape the future of natural resources management.

## Methods Used by the WiN Team *(Taken from the Charter)*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* Teamwork</li><li>* Education and training</li><li>* Use of technology tools</li><li>* Communications (magazine, email, Facebook....)</li><li>* Consultation, discussion and collaboration</li><li>* Meetings</li><li>* Conferences, including face to face, teleconferences, and video conferencing</li><li>* Personal interactions</li><li>* Recruitment</li><li>* Audio/visual tools</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* Research</li><li>* Evaluation</li><li>* Monthly and quarterly teleconferences</li><li>* Electronic calendar</li><li>* Website: <a href="http://www.winnrcs.org">www.winnrcs.org</a></li><li>* Member mailing lists</li><li>* Regular communication of goals and accomplishments</li><li>* Sharing of employee statistics</li><li>* Evaluation of operating procedures for efficiency</li><li>* Solicitation of feedback</li></ul>
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## At annual, quarterly and monthly meetings, the WiN Team will focus on:

- ◊ Being a participatory organization.
- ◊ Development of positive reinforcement that brings about win-win solutions.
- ◊ Development of a cooperative spirit that leads by example.
- ◊ Strategic thinking and planning.
- ◊ Setting training and employee development priorities.
- ◊ Providing professional, visible leadership.
- ◊ Identifying educational materials and/or programs to be developed.
- ◊ Discussing concerns, issues and feedback from the National Council.
- ◊ Reviewing employment statistics.
- ◊ Developing the Business Plan.
- ◊ Developing methods and tools to recruit and retain female employees.
- ◊ Revising the membership list.
- ◊ Developing methods/strategy to recruit new WIN Team Members.
- ◊ Monitoring and evaluating progress towards meeting goals.
- ◊ Assigning issues and tasks to subcommittees.
- ◊ Hearing reports from subcommittees.

Address CHANGE:  
Due to Hurricane  
Sandy

WiN  
c/o Wendy Mears  
102 Tanoak Court,  
Suffolk, VA 23434

Like us on Facebook!  
Women in NRCS (WIN)

Follow us on Twitter!  
@WomenInNrctsWIN

Find us on the web: [www.winnrcs.org](http://www.winnrcs.org)

### NOTE:

WIN does not provide advice about EEO complaints or advise employees who want to take action regarding discrimination. WIN focuses on items and issues solely related to promoting WIN's mission and vision.

## Your WIN Interim Officers 2013

<b>Sharyn Alvarez, Co-President</b> National Federal Women's Program Manager and Acting Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager, National Headquarters Rosslyn, VA	<b>Angela Biggs, Co-President</b> Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Area 5 Charleston, IL
<b>Christine Taliga, Co-Vice President</b> Plant Materials Specialist Denver State Office Denver, CO	<b>Katrina Thompson, Co-Vice President</b> Pennsylvania State Office Management Analyst Harrisburg, PA
<b>Wendy Mears, Treasurer</b> Area Administrative Coordinator Smithfield Area Office Smithfield, VA	<b>Karin Sonnen, Secretary</b> Rangeland Management Specialist Homer Field Service Center Homer, AK

### WiN Interim Team Accomplishments:

1. Bylaws finalized
2. Articles of Incorporation filed
3. Organizational Charter developed
4. Facebook created and active
5. Twitter account set up and active
6. Fact sheet completed and is located on the website
7. Membership form completed and is located on the website
8. Interim budget created and approved
9. Membership cards and welcome letter created
10. Website developed and committee created
11. Developed necessary policy documents for 501C-3 designation

### What's Next:

- Develop membership survey
- Organize our accounting processes and purchase accounting software.
- Fill the National Board by appointing 8 regional representatives.
- Organize the nomination committee in anticipation of the first election
- Finalize organizational documents

**“Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.”** Helen Keller

# CAREER DEVELOPMENT:

## Helpful tips, ideas and resources for self improvement!



### **Career Development Through Reading**

We encourage you to develop your career through reading. Have you ever written a technical paper? Have you ever taken a public speaking course? Do you really understand what the senior executive service is all about? What are ECQs and how can they help you focus your accomplishments throughout the year? We challenge you to set aside 2 hours a week (in 15-20 minute increments) to read a professional development book to help you improve your skills. Below are a few suggestions:

#### **Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide**

by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever

#### **The Leader in You: How to Win Friends, Influence people and Succeed in a Changing World.**

by Dale Carnegie

#### **Managing Difficult People: A Survival Guide for Handling Any Employee,**

by Marilyn Pincus

#### **How to Work a Room: The Ultimate Guide to Savvy Socializing in Person and Online**

By Susan RoAne

#### **Speak with Power and Grace: A Woman's Guide to Public Speaking**

By Linda D. Swink

#### **Conflict Resolution: Mediate Between Your Employees, Prevent Conflicts from Escalating, Manage Conflict Strategically**

By Daniel Dana

#### **Working with You is Killing Me: Freeing Yourself from Emotional Traps at Work**

By Katherine Crowley and Kathi Elster

### **Resources: articles, books, links, etc...**

- <http://www.govexec.com/management/executive-coach/2012/07/what-leaders-can-learn-life-sally-ride/56959/#.UBBVS0bdIXo.email>
- [http://www.genderbiasbingo.com/strategies\\_proveitagain.html](http://www.genderbiasbingo.com/strategies_proveitagain.html)
- **Harvard Business Review Magazine November 2012: A Campaign Strategy for your career, by Dorie Clark, Page 131**
- **Harvard Business Review Magazine November 2012: Change Management Accelerate, by John P. Kotter, page 44**

# CAREER DEVELOPMENT: continued...

## Your Accomplishments -2013

Happy New Year!

We are well into the first month of our new year. Do you have a plan for how you will track your accomplishments so that when mid-year or end-of-year report time comes, you are not scrambling to get reports ready for your supervisor? Remember: if it isn't written down, it didn't happen. To avoid rushing and leaving out much of what you do, follow the steps below:

**Step 1:** Set aside an hour a month to update your accomplishments document. Make it a recurring meeting notice in Outlook calendar.

**Step 2:** Use your Outlook calendar to note your accomplishments on a daily basis. State specifics: dates, times, location, purpose, results, contacts, numbers, acres or any information that will make this accomplishment complete and unique.

**Step 3:** Create two file folders. In one put copies of flyers, agendas and programs of events that you participated in as an attendee or provider. Create another folder to keep copies of thank you emails, letters and notes that compliment the work that you do. You can scan these documents and save them to be attached to your accomplishment report.

**Step 4:** Create a computer document to begin writing your accomplishments. Each page should begin with one performance element so that when you are updating this document throughout the year, you place each accomplishment under the appropriate element. This will save you time at mid-year and at the end of the year.

When stating your accomplishments, follow the journalistic process of who, what, when, where, why and how. Make sure you also state the results of your activity or project. State savings, increases, decreases, percentages, number of customers/employees served, and other relevant data that will show you in the most positive light. Remember the accomplishments you state will also be KSA material for future positions.

**Step 5:** Review your performance plan periodically. Don't get pushed into performing tasks that are not part of your performance plan or your professional goals. Even though you will be asked to assist others, there is nothing wrong with making sure that you are meeting your goals as well.

**Step 6:** Special Projects: Write about the training you took, as well as the training you gave to others; list the professional journals or work-related articles that you read as well as the ones you wrote. Discuss your role as a mentor, as well as the times when you were asked to share your opinion or expertise on a work-related subject.

Ask your supervisor early in the fiscal year how he or she likes reports written, i.e., in the third person, bullets, paragraphs. The sooner you know your supervisor's style, the easier it will be to track. Don't put off updating your

accomplishment document, no matter how busy you get. You owe it to yourself to track your accomplishments.

## Creating job searches in USA Jobs

Did you know that you can receive email notification about federal jobs for a specific state or area of a state, and/or in a specific area of expertise? You can even narrow it down further to a certain GS-scale range. It's all there for you to utilize at the USA Jobs web site <https://my.usajobs.gov/>

To utilize the search engine and have the job postings emailed to you, you simply need to create an account on the site. All this involves is setting up a user ID and a password. You can store up to 10 individual searches with their own parameters.

The instructions for setting up a search are pretty straight forward, but there are a few things to watch out for. To begin establishing a search you must enter information into at least one of the following: Key Word, Title, Location, Occupational Series, or Agency.

You can limit yourself pretty quickly by entering a key word. Title is also very specific, but may be something you find useful. Location can be as broad as the entire US or as narrow as a county within a state. For the Occupational Series option you can select up to 10, but you can also leave it blank and get them all. The list is extremely long to go through, and you can likely get what you want out of the search by leaving this blank and limiting the search in other ways. Agency is a straightforward and safe one to use to form your job search. This can also be broad, by Department, or more specific, by agency.

After selecting a parameter for at least one of the five options above, you can then further refine your search to certain GS levels, and further filter your search to include only those jobs that are part time, full time, seasonal, term, or permanent. You can also exclude job postings that are open year round, as they may or may not be filled within your timeframe.

You can receive these "job search results" notification emails daily, weekly, or monthly. If you are serious about finding a new job you will probably want to receive your search results weekly, as many jobs are open for just a few weeks. It is always a good idea to run your search to see how many results you may get. It will help you know if you need to limit your search and if so, where to place the limits.

# Meet Your Interim WiN Officers

## Sharyn Alvarez—WiN Co-President Washington, DC

When Sharyn began her federal career, she worked for U.S OPM and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She began working for Soil Conservation Service/ NRCS as an Area Office employee in North Carolina and when the office was closed she joined the State Office Engineering staff in Raleigh. Committed to NRCS and knowing that a key to career advancement is being mobile, she came to HQ 16 years ago. She spent many years as a Legislative Research Specialist in Legislative Affairs and many years in the Civil Rights Division as an EEO Specialist.

Sharyn currently serves on the Outreach and Advocacy Division as the agency's National Federal Women's Program Manager. Her role is to determine barriers to the recruitment, hiring, career development and retention of women in NRCS and make recommendations to overcome them. She is an integral part of the National Special Emphasis Managers Team and serves as the HQ Mentor Program Co-coordinator. She was a vital part of a team effort that made NRCS history when they established a new NRCS Employee Organization – The National Organization of Professional Women in NRCS (WIN). She serves as the Interim Co-President of this organization. She supports NRCS employees organizations and is a lifetime member to all but one of the organizations, which she plans to rectify by the end of 2012.

Sharyn, the oldest of five siblings, was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She moved to North Carolina where she was an "Army Wife," and raised her two children.

Sharyn believes you cannot have a balanced life without hobbies and she has many of them. She enjoys jewelry making, decorative painting and photography and is well known for baking coconut pineapple cakes for CFC campaigns and chocolate truffles. She enjoys mentoring and has six more trips to plan to complete her goal of visiting every state in the U.S.A. Her most cherished hobby is crocheting, and she will be doing a lot more of that now that she has acquired a new title, "Grandmother" to twins.

### Why Sharyn became involved in WIN:

"Little did I know that in an effort to save the agency money, a new



employee organization would be born. Once the FWPMs experienced two years of joint FWPM training with other SEPMs at NRCS Employee organizations, they decided that they wanted one of their own. I was asked to help them, and I could not say no. I have learned many things in my life and have been helped many times, so this was a chance to share my knowledge, skills, and experience by giving back. I am proud of the women who stayed with this project. It took three years (and counting) to come this far, and they didn't give up. I have learned a lot from them. They have tremendous hearts, knowledge and skills of their own to share. I salute them."

## Angela Biggs—WiN Co-President Illinois



Angela currently has been in east-central Illinois for three years, where she serves as the Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Area 5. She began her professional career with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil Conservation, as an Environmental Specialist working on a water quality project involving 276,000 acres in four counties. Angela joined NRCS in Iowa, as a soil conservationist, through the Career Intern Program in 2002. She worked in multiple offices in Iowa: the Indianola Field Office and the Independence Field Office as a Soil Conservationist and the Harlan Field Office as the District Conservationist before moving to Vermont as the District Conservationist for the Northwest Zone. Angela also served in a collateral duty position as the Iowa Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Emphasis Program Manager for five years before serving as the National AAPI Program Manager for three years.

During the course of her career, Angela has also served several professional organizations in leadership positions. She is a lifetime member of the Asian Pacific Islander Organization (APIO) and has served in various positions – secretary, executive vice president, conference planning committee chair, mentoring committee co-chair and national council advisor. She is a lifetime member of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees and served on the natural resources committee for several years. Angela is also a member of the Soil and Water Conservation Society and served the Iowa Chapter as Membership Secretary for several years.

# Meet Your Interim WiN Officers



Angela comes from a large, blended family and depending upon how you decide to count the kids, is one of two or five or eight. She grew up between the Midwest and the Pacific, moving back and forth between Guam and Iowa and Missouri. As a child of both the islands and the mainland, she has many hobbies and interests, including jewelry making, scuba diving, singing, researching family genealogy and spending time with family and friends. Angela holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology from the University of Guam.

## Why Angela became involved in WiN:

Angela became involved in WIN while serving as the National AAPI Program Manager. Her passion to help people succeed in their professional and personal goals and careers got her involved in the process to establish an organization focused on providing information, resources and connections for women within NRCS. She has been working closely with the other interim officers, over the last several years, to help lay the foundation for the future of WIN.

## Christine Taliga WiN Co– Vice President, Colorado



Christine began her career with NRCS and Conservation Districts in 1991. While in college she worked as WAE, beginning as a GS-1, and later held positions as Soil Conservation Technician, Soil Conservationist, District Conservationist, and Resource Conservation and Development Coordinator in Iowa.

Her professional experience includes a hiatus from federal government during which time she started her own consulting business as restoration ecologist and botanist, developing and implementing the first prescribed burn-for-hire program in Iowa. She has also held appointments at the University of Iowa as a research botanist, resulting in two patents and was elected to serve as District Soil and Water Commissioner for two terms. She is fluent in German and received her B.S. in Environmental Science with a minor in Botany from the University of Iowa.

Christine grew up in the foothills of the Swiss Alps in Germany, where she first developed her passion for plants. She moved to rural Iowa at age twelve. Christine, her husband John and daughter Anna, own and operate a small farm in Iowa, where they are actively exploring perenni-

al crop production alternatives and where she serves as treasurer for the Iowa Hops Cooperative.

Christine currently serves as Plant Materials Specialist at the Denver State Office in Colorado. She is happy to once again live close to a mountain range and enjoys the new challenges of her position. She was a driving force in the formation of WIN and is the current Co-Vice President. In her spare time, Christine enjoys spending time with her daughter, knitting, studying plants, and in putting her organizational capacity building skills to use in supporting women in NRCS.

## Why Christine became involved in WiN:

“After serving as the FWP manager and on Iowa’s FWP committee for several years it became apparent that while the other professional employee organizations provided excellent training opportunities the focus on professional development for women could be expanded upon. Particularly, developing a support network for NRCS female employees and specifically an organization that strives to make NRCS the federal agency of choice for high performing, innovative and motivated female employees.”

## Katrina Thompson WiN Co– Vice President, Pennsylvania

Katrina is currently a Management Analyst in the NRCS Pennsylvania State Office and is on the National Civil Rights Committee.

In 1988 Katrina earned an Ag Business degree from Northern Montana College. Her NRCS career started in 1989 when she was hired by Soil Conservation Service (SCS) as a student while attending college studying Range Management at Montana State University in Bozeman Montana. In 1992 she earned a Bachelors of Science in Range Management from Montana State University. Katrina worked part time for the local SCS field office during the school year and full time during the summers. As a student trainee, she learned surveying skills, communication skills, team building and much more.



In 1992 she took a full time Soil Conservationist job in Stanford, a tiny Montana town surrounded by rangeland and cropland. In 1994 she transferred to Great Falls Montana as a Soil Conservationist. Five years later she was selected as the District Conservationist in the same office. As the District Conservationist, she worked closely with FSA, the local

# Meet Your Interim WiN Officers

Conservation District, Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service and other partners. She felt it was important to put conservation on the ground and educate landowners about all aspects of resource conservation.

Whenever possible, Katrina gets involved with outreach, promoting conservation programs not only to farmers and ranchers but to potential employees as well. She has served a three year term on the PA Civil Rights Committee as the Federal Women's SEPM and is currently on the National Civil Rights Committee serving as a female representative for the Northeast.

Katrina is married and has two children Tyler, 19 and Samantha, 17, and a stepchild, Claire, 19. She and her family moved to Pennsylvania in November 2003. Katrina and her husband are both members of a local Lions Club serving their local community. Katrina has a studio fitness business and enjoys making beaded jewelry, kayaking, gardening and biking.

## Why Katrina became involved in WiN:

"I saw the benefits of the other professional employee organizations and felt that women who don't belong to other employee organizations would benefit by having an organization that focuses on women's issues. The process of setting up a non-profit, nationally recognized employees organization was complicated but has proven to be successful. The WiN core team has been together for over three years working hard to create an effective women's employee organization I am very proud to be part of the team and have great respect for my teammates."

## Wendy Mears WiN Treasurer

### Virginia



Wendy is currently the Area Administrative Coordinator with the NRCS Smithfield Area Office in Smithfield, Virginia. She came to NRCS in 2005 after a ten year career with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. While working for DCR, Wendy served as the Administrative Assistant in one of the regional offices. She worked closely with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and NRCS during her time with DCR.

Conservation District, Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service and other partners. She felt it was important to put conservation on the ground and educate landowners about all aspects of resource conservation.

Wendy's professional experience outside the federal government includes work as an administrative clerk for an oil company and the assistant director of a daycare center. Wendy attended and graduated from a Virginia Community College with a two year degree in office administration.

Wendy was born and raised in Suffolk, Virginia and has five sisters. Married for over 30 years, she and husband Danny have a daughter, Marsha. She has a passion for serving in her community through church and individual organizations. She served as the Virginia Federal Woman's Program Manager for Virginia NRCS for three years, which lead to her involvement as a founding officer for the newly formed employee organization, WIN, the National Organization of Professional Women in NRCS. Wendy continues to work diligently as the Interim Treasurer of WIN and looks forward to watching the organization grow.

Wendy enjoys many hobbies in her spare time, which include singing with the HBC Praise Band, scrapbooking, and photography.

## Why Wendy became involved in WiN:

"While serving as the FWPM for Virginia, I saw a need within NRCS for the employing and promoting of highly qualified women, not just in administrative positions but technical and executive positions as well. Because of this I became involved in the creation and development of the National Organization of Professional Women in NRCS,"

## Karin Sonnen WiN Secretary

### Alaska



As a new Range Specialist in Alaska in 1996, Karin was mentored by the State Range Conservationist and her eyes were opened to the fascinating world of lichen, tundra ecosystems, and reindeer grazing. Over the last sixteen years she has become the leading NRCS technical specialist for range management in Alaska, working throughout the state from the Aleutian Islands to the vast Seward Peninsula, and all places in between.

Karin has developed several "firsts" for many grazing areas in Alaska,



## Meet Your Interim WiN Officers

including original vegetation maps, ecological site maps, and range condition maps on extremely remote areas of Alaska. These grazing areas range in size from 25,000 acres to 1.6 million acres, and much of the access to these areas is by small plane, boat, or helicopter. She developed a "Lichen Field Guide for Western Alaska" and has led several workshops on reindeer grazing of Alaskan tundra. She works with other entities in the state, including the BLM, State of Alaska, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and The University of Alaska Fairbanks' Reindeer Research Program in developing and monitoring rangeland in Alaska. Karin has served as the Alaska Federal Women's Program Manager in Alaska for the past six years, and recently has been invited to sit as a Regional Panelist on the multi-agency "Wetland Plant List" Committee for the Alaska region.

On her personal time Karin and her husband are raising their three children and keeping up with their activities. Karin has been a Sunday School teacher for sixteen years, a girl scout leader, bell choir director and player, and a soccer coach. She has held multiple positions on local school PTA boards and motivated many school administrators as an advocate for children's wellness in public schools. She and her son enjoy playing together in a locally famous marimba band in Homer, at farmers markets and other non-profit fundraising events. Karin and her family enjoy exploring the outdoors from the beaches to the mountain tops and everything in-between, in each season Alaska offers.

### Why Karin became involved in WiN:

"When I became a Federal Women's Program Manager, we FWPMs held our annual meetings jointly with one of the employee organizations, and I saw firsthand what a wonderful resource these organizations were to their members. I remember talking with another FWPM (Chris Taliga) and discussing how great it would be to have our own women's sessions. I was at that meeting in Sacramento when twenty-two of us gathered together after hours and discussed the formation of this group. Getting to know and interact with the other FWPM's was such a great experience, and I want others to be able to experience the support, advice, training, and networking we receive as FWPMs. All women should have the option of receiving that support, regardless of their current position or career goals."

### For Our Next Edition:

**What career advice would you give yourself if you could go back 15 years in time? Submit your answer for our next issue!**

### Member Highlight

**Is there an obstacle you have overcome in your career that others might benefit from hearing about? Write and submit it for publication in our next issue!**

**Send to :**

**Karin@winnrcs.org**

### What we, the group's organizers, now need from you:

### Get Involved!

- \* **Find a committee you have interest in serving on**
- \* **Run for a regional representative position**
- \* **Think about what you are looking for from WiN, and consider how you can help accomplish it**

**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."**  
~ Margaret Meade