

# AMS Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Strategic Internal Communications Plan

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## Background

Developing a highly motivated, responsive, and diverse workforce is one of AMS' top priorities. By increasing our focus on employee communication and development, we will ensure that our stakeholders and the American people receive the best service our Agency can offer. These efforts will also create a working environment for our employees that are full of opportunities, making AMS a "best place to work."

This strategic internal communications plan will act as the roadmap for this effort. As a living document, it will develop and adapt as AMS leadership implements new initiatives to expand and enhance internal communication and employee engagement.

AMS has already implemented numerous initiatives to enhance internal communications, such as focus groups, brown bag lunches, town hall meetings, employee ideation, training opportunities, developmental assignments, and a mentoring program.

The priorities will reach all AMS employees regardless of location. This plan also places special emphasis on enhancing communication and employee engagement between headquarter (HQ) and field employees.

## Situational Analysis

Despite these initiatives and excellent support from AMS leadership, when senior AMS leaders travel to field locations, they often find there is still a communication divide between headquarters and field staff. Field employees are often not aware of strategic plans or other important Agency initiatives, and say they feel excluded from the conversation, under recognized for their work and uninformed about training and opportunities.

The headquarters staff also feels it is not getting the most relevant information and that they are being "spammed" with irrelevant information.

As a whole, all groups feel like they need but are not receiving information on topics important to them. They also feel as if they are not able to communicate all their issues.

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## Opportunity

AMS leadership recognizes that an improved flow of information between the headquarters and field staffs will ensure that field employees understand how their work directly accomplishes AMS' strategic goals and objectives, and will provide the headquarters staff a better understanding of the communication challenges, needs, and preferences of field employees.

## Key Groups

1. Internal
  - a. Staff-Field
    - i. In AMS or other offices with government e-mail/phone/computer access
    - ii. In work settings outside of a government office with limited e-mail/phone/computer access
  - b. Staff-HQ
  - c. Leadership (all levels, including supervisors and managers)-Field
  - d. Leadership(all levels, including supervisors and managers)-HQ

## Themes & Messages (All Audiences)

The AMS 2016-2017 Strategic Internal Communications Plan is our Agency's road map for increasing employee communication and development. Its goal is to ensure our stakeholders receive the best service AMS can offer and our employees enjoy a work environment that is full of opportunities.

Message 1: We are listening to you. We are making changes and implementing new initiatives based on your feedback.

- We are asking employees for feedback, listening carefully, and taking action based on employee input. We have:
  - Visited field offices and work sites;
  - Held field town hall meetings;
  - Held focus groups and brown bag lunches;
  - Studied the recommendations of our Field Employee Engagement Advisory Committee and Federal Employee Viewpoint Surveys; and,
  - Made improvements to recruiting, hiring, onboarding, diversity, employee development, and succession planning.

Message 2: Your development as an individual is important to the success of Team AMS

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- At AMS, we are committed to offering opportunities for training and development. We know that an educated employee is an effective employee that will better serve our stakeholders. That is why we recently conducted a thorough training needs assessment by holding focus groups with employees at all levels of the Agency. In addition, we listened to your desire to reinstitute AMS' former Professional Skills and Tools Leadership development program, and assembled a team to conduct a feasibility study. As a result, we will be launching the new AMS LEAD program at the top of Fiscal Year 2017.
- We want you to achieve your career goals and your personal goals. This is why your Individual Development Plan is a key component for tracking your development and encouraging your lifelong learning experience.

Message 3: We are always looking for ways to improve Team AMS.

- The internal communications plan directs how we communicate these initiatives to you, update you on their progress, and let you know the resources you can use as soon as they become available. These initiatives include the:
  - Leadership Transition Plan
  - Field Employee Engagement Advisory Committee Action Plan
  - AMS Administrator Virtual Town Hall
  - What a Great Idea Employee Suggestion Program
  - AMS Employee Engagement Surveys
  - New Onboarding Program

Message 4: We are one Team.

- In the end, the overarching purpose of the strategic internal communications plan is to help AMS build stronger connections between our employees at every level and location.
- Employee effectiveness is crucial for our Agency to accomplish its mission.
- Internal communication is an essential element for developing an exceptional workforce that can accomplish this mission.
- Our field employees must be an equal partner in this effort. You are our boots on the ground, the people closest to our customers.

Message 5: The next step to success starts with a mouse click.

- By using the Center for Training and Organization Development (CTOD) group, their training team and other provided training websites, you can chart your success to the next stage of your career. The website is easy to use and provides training specific to your needs and grade level. The training can go a long way in your professional and personal development as a Team AMS member. This site will also highlight specifics training is based on the AMS leadership Road Map.

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- The path for success at AMS is at your fingertips.
- With courses targeted towards specific competencies, you can take the next step in your professional development journey. You can visit the AMS employee resource page to start or log in directly to CTOD. The information provided is easy to access and vital to your success at AMS.

## Goals, Strategies, and Tactics

**Goal 1:** Improve communication between Headquarters and Field employees.

### Objectives

- 1.1. Public Affairs will reorganize the AMS Voice e-newsletter based on surveys by December 2016 to increase open rate by 20%.
- 1.2. AMS senior leaders and other AMS managers and supervisors will host face to face or all-hands meetings within their respective program areas on a regular basis whenever possible, senior leaders will include visits to their program field offices when they are in travel status.
- 1.3. The Office of the Administrator will organize focus group sessions with special emphasis groups that include both Headquarters and field employees in order to get employees' ideas and feedback on how to improve the workplace.
- 1.4. The Office of the Administrator will organize teambuilding events such as, Diversity Day, which will be held October 2016, and a "One AMS" day which will be held in the spring of 2017. The Agency is leading several initiatives to showcase the Agency's workforce to educate employees and stakeholders about the important work our employees perform, such as "The Day in a Life" and AMS employee profiles.

### Strategy and Tactics

Strategy: Create and support engagement platforms across AMS.

- Utilize user-generated surveys to implement changes to the AMS Voice. We will establish an initial base line this year and will use benchmarks to gauge participation and determine the future pattern.
- PA will reformat the look of the AMS Voice. (example below)
  - Message from the AMS Administrator
  - Topic(s) of the Month—short items about observances, OC/AMS priorities
  - Field Focus—roll-out of "A Day in the Life" showcasing relevant career info, Photo Gallery with captions only—no story
  - Headquarters Info— roll-out of "A Day in the Life" showcasing relevant career info, Photo Gallery with captions only—no story

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- Telling the AMS story—headlines from press releases and blogs that are links to the info...no excerpts of the press releases and blogs.
- Create a monthly podcast (video/audio) series based on video content to discuss specific topics.
  - Create video/audio archive requiring E-Auth to review past episodes.
  - Create content from stakeholders, customers, and employees.
  - Tap employees and deputy administrators to co-host podcasts. Assign each program area be responsible for topic and content per month.
  - Tie current AMS specific events and major news events.
  - Poll the field for future topics.
- Create an Employee Question inbox where people can pose questions to be answered via podcast, video or AMS Voice. The questioner can request anonymity when published with no fear of reprimand.
- Continue to host monthly Brown Bags and quarterly Focus Groups. Gather feedback to be addressed using the most appropriate method.
- Start holding listening sessions in headquarters and the field in order to hear firsthand from employee about their concerns.
- Create a LinkedIn group for employees
- -Implement and Promote the What a Great Idea Employee Suggestion Program.
- Hold AMS Diversity Day and One AMS Day and encourage field locations to hold similar events.
- Host All Hands Town Hall
- Host Virtual Town Hall in November 18 2016
  - Administrator opens with discussion of current events
  - Announces recent improvements
  - Holds a 30-minute live Q&A

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<b>Task/Activity</b>	<b>Audience(s)</b>	<b>Desired Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Frequency/Timeline</b>	<b>Champion/Lead</b>
* Reorganize the AMS Voice e-newsletter so it more directly supports this internal communications plan and allows employees to find the information they need more quickly and easily	All employees	By December 2016 to increase open rate by 20%	Ongoing	AMS Public Affairs with OA input
Create a Monthly Podcast Series	All Employees	Get a 10% follower rate within 1 year	Monthly starting in October	Ken Melton, AMS Public Affairs with OA input
Create an Employee Questions Inbox	All Employees	Get and answer at least 1 question per month	Ongoing/Complete	Ken Melton, Erin Morris, Karen Comfort
Establish Schedule/List of Agency and Program Headquarters and Field Town halls.	All Employees	Produce a consolidated list where all programs broadcast their Town Halls	October/Ongoing	OA/Dep Adm
Host Monthly Brown Bags	All Employees	At least 1 brown bag hosted monthly	October/Ongoing	OA/Dep. Adm/Civil Rights/Programs
Host Quarterly Focus Groups	All Employees	Host one focus group quarterly	Ongoing	OA
Create and Implement WAGI	All Employees	Maintain Program and produce at least 4 Pilot Ideas	October/ongoing	OA/WAGI Committee
Hold Annual Town Hall and Administrator Awards Ceremony	All Employees	Create Format and address AMS Employees	Summer 2017	OA/PA
Host a Virtual Town Hall	All Employees	Create a three person virtual panel with live question	Nov 18	OA/PA
Host a Diversity Day and One AMS Day	All Employees	Execute Event focusing on nine affinity groups	October 12, 2016/Spring 2017	OA/HQEEAC/SEPMS
Hold Listening Sessions	AMS Employees	Hear how employees really feel about the workplace and what changes they'd like to see implemented	TBD	OA/PA

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## Goal 1: Measurement:

### Quantitative-

Number of average listeners per podcast

Number of Questions Asked and Answered through employee inbox

Number of users of LinkedIn Group

Number of employees attending/participating at Agency-hosted events, brown bag, focus groups, town halls, listening sessions, etc.

### Qualitative-

Feedback from Town Halls or All Hands meetings

Feedback from Brown Bags or Focus Groups

Feedback from Listening Sessions

**Goal 2:** Strengthen employee effectiveness, diversity, and job satisfaction, enabling us to deliver the best service possible to our customers.

## Objectives

- 2.1 Ensure all employees (including leaders) are informed and aware of training and career development opportunities.
- 2.2 Highlight improvements in the hiring
- 2.3 Highlight onboarding processes
- 2.4 Educate employees about the many paths to recruitment (including relationship building with colleges and universities).
- 2.5 Raise employee awareness of AMS succession planning by educating employees about the Agency's Human Capital Plan. Hold webinars on various parts of the plan.

## Strategies and Tactics

Strategy 1: Publicize and Promote training and career development opportunities across all platforms

- Use AMS Voice to distribute initial plans for all training events.
- Send emails to appropriate audience for training opportunities advertised by the Virtual University or via USDA's Training Officers Consortium.
- Use AMS Hot Updates via Govdelivery to announce time sensitive and routine issues
  - Use AMS News to send reminders regarding critical announcements
- Ensure training facilitators publish printed visuals for mass dissemination.
- Show IDP Completion goals based on monthly report set by Department.

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- Conduct a webinar to continue to educate employees on where and how to access various training opportunities.

#### Strategy 2: Educate and Inform Public Regarding Human Capital Plan (HCP), Employment

- Promote webinars regarding HCP
- Promote webinars about Recruiting and Employment Initiatives
- Highlight changes to the AMS career pages via AMS Voice.
- Highlight and educate employees about AMS' use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram to promote AMS' presence at Pathways onsite application events, and career fairs.
- Unveil AMS recruitment tools as they are produced, such as AMS recruitment banners, tabletops, and recruitment video.

<b>Task/Activity</b>	<b>Audience(s)</b>	<b>Desired Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Frequency/Timeline</b>	<b>Champion/Lead</b>
Use Gov Delivery to deliver messages via Voice and AMS Updates	All employees	Transition to using Govdelivery for 80% of communication messages	Ongoing	AMS Public Affairs with OA input
Show IDP Completion Goals	All Staff	Give specific examples of completed IDP goals to increase both employees and supervisors effective use of IDPs.	Quarterly starting in October	OA
Promote knowledge of HCP	All Staff	Create easy to use platforms that employees can access to get information	October/Ongoing	PA
Showcase AMS recruitment plan via Special Edition(s) of the Voice	All employees	To increase employees' knowledge of AMS' brand "See Yourself at AMS" and strategy to recruit the right people with the right skills	November/ongoing	OA/PA

#### Goal 2: Measurement

Qualitative-

Feedback from surveys

**Goal 3:** Further, develop skills in AMS managers and supervisors that will help them more effectively engage with employees.

#### Objectives

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- 3.1 Ensure supervisors and managers carry the message down the chain of command and motivate people under their leadership.
- 3.2 Continue to grow and develop AMS employees.

### Strategy and Tactics

Strategy: Highlight and Encourage Leadership Trainings, Seminars, and Retreats

- Publicize results of the LEAD feasibility study.
- Publicize outcome of the training needs assessment focus groups, and the next steps.
- Publicize opportunities for GS-14 and GS-15 employees respectively to participate in Harvard, Brookings Institute and Federal Executive Institute Leadership Programs.
- Encourage Deputy Administrators to create engagement forums among leaders in their program areas
- Allow lower level employees to hold leadership meetings with deputy administrators to share ideas on leadership and discuss issues
- Encourage Deputy Administrators to write monthly letters to all staff in program newsletters highlighting different leadership themes.
- Highlight executive offerings (e.g., Federal Executive Institute, Harvard Fellowship Program, Brookings Fellowship Program). Continue looking for ways to add new aspects to the AMS Leadership Education and Development (AMS Mentoring program)
- Implement LEAD Program
- Implement Veterans Sponsorship Program

<b>Task/Activity</b>	<b>Audience(s)</b>	<b>Desired Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Frequency/Timeline</b>	<b>Champion/Lead</b>
Encourage Dep. Adm to create engagement forums among program areas	Leadership	Create a schedule of events	October/Ongoing	Dep./Supervisory Leads
Front office staff to hold monthly leadership meeting with deputy administrators to share ideas on leadership and discuss issues	Senior Leadership/Junior Staff	Create a forum in which employees can have a direct access forum to SES and Dep. Adm	October/Ongoing	OA/Dep Ad
Encourage Dep. Adms to write specific messages to their programs	Senior Leadership	Dep Adm (or lower level leaders) send out a monthly pulse check message	October/ Monthly	Dep Adm
Encourage all leaders to participate in Mentoring	Leadership	Leadership actively participates or encourages/recommends	As needed	Dep. Adm/OA

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Programs like AMS Mentorship and LEAD		needed support to programs listed		
Highlight Executive Level training	Leadership	Ensure all SES/GS14/15 training is distributed in a timely fashion	As needed	OA/PA

## Goal 3: Measurement

## Quantitative-

- Number of letters written held by programs and front office
- Number of monthly meetings held by programs and front office
- Number of people enrolled in AMS Mentorship program
- Number of people in LEAD program

## Qualitative-Feedback from meetings via surveys

**Goal 4:** Increase awareness and gain more participation in existing training opportunities in CTOD

## Objectives

- 4.1 Create an internal campaign that will raise awareness by 25 percent by July 2017.
- 4.2 Restructure SharePoint and AMS employee resource page to link directly appropriate websites by December 2016.
- 4.3 Raise awareness of annual employee mandatory training

## Strategies and Tactics

Strategy 1: Raise awareness of training events for all employees to ensure maximum participation in courses.

- Create a FAQ or Tips and Tricks section in Voice.
- Highlight Training in Voice column and follow up in AMS Updates for specific sections.
- Include Program contacts in Voice for CTOD.

Strategy 2: Ensure ease of use for employees accessing website to get training to increase employee engagement and job proficiency

- Restructure landing pages to synchronize on all websites.
- Develop a chart that shows how taking courses helps with gaining leadership skills
- Develop a chart that shows training requirements for supervisors and non-supervisors for the website.

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Strategy 3: Give employees instructional opportunities on the use of the system.

- Develop a webinar showing how to register for classes.
- Host one-on-one training session at major field locations and at headquarters in D.C., especially for AMS supervisors.

<b>Task/Activity</b>	<b>Audience(s)</b>	<b>Desired Outcome(s)</b>	<b>Frequency/Timeline</b>	<b>Champion/Lead</b>
Create a Tips section	All	Answer frequently asked questions and how cheat sheet for website. Publish in Voice and other internal channels	October/Ongoing	PA/CTOD/AGLEARN/OA
Create a Ease of Use section	All	Restructure site for ease of use. Develop flow charts for suggested courses.	October	CTOD/AGLEARN/OA
Create how to register for class webinat	All	Create instructional video so that everyone knows how to register.	January	CTOD/AGLARN/OA
Create how to video and host training session	All	Create how to webinars and offer one-on-one training sessions	January	CTOD/AGLARN/OA

Goal 4: Measurement

Quantitative-

Number of employees undergone one-on-one training

Number of webinar attendees

Qualitative-Feedback from Survey

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