UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

Notice AO-1667

For: State and County Offices

Bridges to Opportunity Implementation

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Field Operations

1 Overview

A Background

Bridges to Opportunity (Bridges) is a service offered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) that gives customers access to a wide range of agricultural resources and connects customers with local agricultural partners. Bridges leverages FSA's expansive County Office infrastructure, staff knowledge of local agriculture, and established network of partners to provide customers with information that meets their needs. Bridges has been introduced in FSA County Offices in phases, and is scheduled to be implemented nationwide.

The pilot phase was conducted from late 2014 through early 2015 in 12 County Offices within five States (CT, MN, NC, OR, and TX). The pilot demonstrated FSA has the capacity to offer a new service to customers as an integral part of its mission. FSA's external partners have expressed interest and enthusiasm for what the Bridges service offers in collaboratively serving our agricultural communities.

Building upon the success of the pilot, Phase 2 of Bridges was launched in early 2016 in 20 States and 210 County Offices, allowing the software to serve customers in over 300 counties total. Throughout Phase 2 employees have contributed to the refinement of Bridges to further establish its value to the agricultural community.

Note: Nationwide expansion as part of Phase 3 of Bridges implementation was recently approved. All States and FSA County Offices will be offering the Bridges service by early 2017.

B Purpose

This notice provides:

- general information on the Bridges service and software
- key roles and responsibilities, and State Office action
- Phase 3 implementation and training information.

Disposal Date	**Distribution**
June 1, 2017	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

C Contact

For questions about this notice contact Glenn Schafer, Bridges to Opportunity Program Manager, DAFO Outreach, by either of the following:

- e-mail to **bridges2opportunity@fsa.usda.gov**
- telephone at 202-236-4983.

2 Bridges Service and Software

A Bridges Service

The Bridges service includes:

- providing customers a wide range of agricultural resources
- referring customers to agricultural experts
- facilitating collaboration of agricultural organizations to address customers' needs.

B Bridges Software

A customer relationship management (CRM) information technology application has been developed to enable the efficient delivery of the Bridges service, as well as enhance routine customer service delivery of all FSA programs and services. The CRM application (referred to as "The Bridge") was designed with input from staff in the pilot and Phase 2 County Offices. All customer-facing employees will use The Bridge, which gives them the ability to:

- record and track all customer interactions
- generate a "Customer Summary" for customers that serves as their "receipt for service"
- create reports that can assist in analyzing customer service activity
- access customers through a simple SCIMS Customer Search interface
- search for, compile, and deliver a wide range of agricultural resources to customers
- refer customers to agricultural experts.

"Customer-facing employees" means all CO and GS employees serving customers directly through State and County Offices, including District Directors (DD's). Upon gaining access to The Bridge, employees shall immediately begin using The Bridge to fulfill the receipt for service delivery requirement.

Employees who do not regularly interact with customers as part of their job will be able to access The Bridge through a more streamlined "FSA Portal." These employees may include, but are not limited to, State Executive Directors (SED's), State Office personnel, and National Office staff. Guidance on accessing and using the FSA Portal is forthcoming in early 2017.

2 Bridges Service and Software (Continued)

C Access to The Bridge

Access to The Bridge will be granted **after** individual employees complete the basic training referenced in subparagraph 4 A. Employees who currently have access to The Bridge as part of Phase 2 are also required to complete the basic training but will not have their access interrupted.

Initial access to The Bridge as part of Phase 3 implementation will be managed by the National Office through a bulk permission granting process; as such, individual FSA-13A's are not required for access requests until January 2017. However, individual FSA-13A's are required for access removal. State Liaison Representatives (SLR's) will be provided guidance on the FSA-13A process for Bridges during their monthly SLR calls.

Employees with access to The Bridge will be assigned one of the following types of primary software permission roles:

- the "user-level" software role provides access to all basic functionality of The Bridge

- the "manager-level" software role provides access to all basic functionality, as well as the ability to manage partners and resources in The Bridge; this role is limited to the employees who are assigned the key roles and responsibilities outlined in paragraph 3.

3 Roles and Responsibilities

A Summary of Duties

Key roles and responsibilities are defined to enable effective administration of the Bridges service. SED's shall assign these roles to appropriate individuals at the State and County Office levels according to subparagraph 5 B. A summary of Bridges roles and responsibilities include:

- **State Bridges Coordinator (SBC) –** The SBC role should be assigned to the State Outreach Coordinator when possible. The SBC:

  - serves as the primary point of contact on Bridges for the State
  - provides guidance and training to County Bridges Coordinators on Bridges policy
  - works with the SED to ensure the effective delivery of Bridges throughout the State
  - works with the State Resource Manager to manage State-level partners and resources
  - is granted "manager-level" software permissions for The Bridge.

- **State Resource Manager (SRM) –** The SRM role should be assigned to a STO employee when possible. The SRM:

  - serves as the primary point of contact on the use of The Bridge for the State
  - provides guidance and training to County Resource Managers on using The Bridge

3 Roles and Responsibilities (Continued)

A Summary of Duties (Continued)

- works with the SBC to manage state-level partners and resources
- is granted "manager-level" software permissions for The Bridge.

Note: SED's shall assign SBC and SRM roles to separate individuals. SED's in Phase 2 States may reassign SBC and SRM roles for Phase 3 implementation.

- **County Bridges Coordinator (CBC) –** The CBC role should be assigned to a County Executive Director or Farm Loan Manager when possible. The CBC:
  - serves as the office point of contact for Bridges
  - provides guidance and training to office staff on Bridges policy
  - works with the County Resource Manager to manage county-level partners and resources
  - is granted "manager-level" software permissions for The Bridge
  - may be assigned to one person to cover multiple offices under shared management

- **County Resource Manager (CRM) –** The CRM role may be assigned to any employee in the office. The CRM:
  - serves as the office point of contact for the use of The Bridge
  - provides guidance and training to office staff on using The Bridge
  - works with the CBC to manage county-level partners and resources
  - is granted "manager-level" software permissions for The Bridge
  - shall be designated for all physical FSA office locations.

Note: CBC and CRM roles shall be assigned to separate individuals for each office.

4 Phase 3 Implementation

A Training

Employee training for Phase 3 will be provided through a variety of means using a stepped approach over the coming months. Initial training will be provided on the basic functionality of The Bridge, followed by additional training on delivering the Bridges service in early 2017. Types of training to be provided include:

Overview Training A brief overview of Bridges to Opportunity AgLearn course provides FSA employees a common understanding of Bridges. Overview Training is required for all FSA employees and prior to any subsequent Bridges training.

4 Phase 3 Implementation (Continued)

A Training (Continued)

State Orientation	Introductory State Orientation video-teleconference (VTC) sessions outline Bridges roles and responsibilities, governance, and expectations for SED's, SBC's, SRM's, and other State Office leadership.
Basic Training	A basic training AgLearn course includes four modules that provide basic instruction on using The Bridge for day-to-day customer service; basic training is required prior to gaining access to The Bridge and any subsequent Bridges training.
Webinar Sessions	As a follow-up to basic training, supporting webinar sessions will provide an opportunity for employees to enhance their understanding of Bridges and adoption of The Bridge.
Advanced Training	Training will be provided on advanced aspects of the Bridges service referenced in subparagraph 2 A. A "train-the-trainer" approach will be used for this training; a national training session will be held for designated State Office personnel, followed by state training sessions in each State. Information is forthcoming regarding training format and dates.
FSA Portal Training	Training will be provided through AgLearn for employees who will use the FSA Portal as referenced in subparagraph 2 B; supporting webinar sessions will be held as a follow-up to AgLearn training to enhance understating and user adoption. Training is required prior to gaining access to the FSA Portal. Information is forthcoming regarding training availability.
Continuing Education	Training on specific aspects of Bridges will be offered periodically through AgLearn, webinars, and other formats, as needed. Information is forthcoming regarding training availability.

B State Group Assignment

State orientation, basic training, and webinar sessions will be delivered to two separate groups of states to more effectively manage nationwide implementation, as follows:

- **Group 1** is comprised of the 20 Phase 2 states, which includes CA, CO, CT, FL, IL, IA, LA, MA, MN, MO, NE, NV, NY, NC, OH, OR, TX, VA, WV, and WI.

- **Group 2** includes all states that are not part of Phase 2, which includes AL, AK, AZ, AR, DE, GA, HI, ID, IN, KS, KY, ME, MD, MI, MS, MT, NH, NJ, NM, ND, OK, PA, PR, RI, SC, SD, TN, UT, VT, WA, and WY.

4 Phase 3 Implementation (Continued)

C Timeline

Phase 3 of Bridges will be implemented along the following timeline:

October 2016 A VTC session will be held for all SED's to review the contents of this notice on Wednesday, October 26 at 3 p.m. Eastern Time (ET); an Outlook calendar appointment invitation will be sent to SED's with the VTC access information.

Overview training will be available to all FSA employees through AgLearn in late October, with completion due by December 31, 2016.

November 2016 State orientation-Group 1 for SED's, SBC's, SRM's, and other State Office leadership will be presented through two VTC sessions for 10 States in each session, as follows:

- Tuesday, November 1 at 3 p.m. ET for CA, CO, CT, FL, IL, IA, LA, MA, MN, and MO
- Wednesday, November 2 at 3 p.m. ET for NE, NV, NY, NC, OH, OR, TX, VA, WV, and WI.

Note: An Outlook calendar appointment invitation will be sent to the respective SED's with VTC access information for each session.

Basic training-Group 1 for employees that will be using The Bridge will be available through AgLearn in November 2016; **training shall be completed by November 30, 2016.**

December 2016 Webinar sessions-Group 1 for employees who completed basic training will be offered to enhance understanding and user adoption; dates and times to be determined.

State orientation-Group 2 for SED's, SBC's, SRM's, and other State Office leadership will be presented through three VTC sessions for 10 States in each session, as follows:

- Tuesday, December 13 at 3 p.m. ET for AL, AK, AZ, AR, DE, GA, HI, ID, IN, and KS

4 Phase 3 Implementation (Continued)

C Timeline (Continued)

- Wednesday, December 14 at 3 p.m. ET for KY, ME, MD, MI, MS, MT, NH, NJ, NM, and ND

- Thursday, December 15 at 3 p.m. ET for OK, PA, PR, RI, SC, SD, TN, UT, VT WA, and WY.

Note: An Outlook calendar appointment invitation will be sent to the respective SED's with VTC access information for each session.

January 2017 Basic training-Group 2 for employees that will be using The Bridge will be available through AgLearn in mid-December 2016; **training shall be completed by January 31, 2017.**

Webinar sessions-Group 2 for employees who completed basic training will be offered to enhance understanding and user adoption; dates and times to be determined.

National advanced training for SED's, SBC's, and SRM's in all States will be provided at a date, time, and location to be determined.

February 2017 State advanced training for all customer-facing employees and designated State Office personnel will be provided in each State.

FSA Portal training will be provided through AgLearn and webinars; additional information is forthcoming.

March 2017 Periodic continuing education training sessions will be provided as necessary to ensure effective implementation of Bridges nationwide through September 2017.

5 Action

A Overview Training

An AgLearn course entitled “Bridges to Opportunity” has been assigned to the To-Do list of all FSA employees to provide an overview of Bridges; deadline for course completion is December 31, 2016.

5 Action (Continued)

B Assigning Bridges Roles

SED's shall ensure that Bridges roles outlined in paragraph 3 are assigned to appropriate employees and reported to DAFO-Outreach, as follows:

- using the following "Bridges Roles" SharePoint survey: **https://sharepoint.fsa.usda.net/mgr/DAFO/BridgestoOpportunity/Lists/Bridges%20 Roles/overview.aspx**

- by October 31, 2016, for the State-level roles of SBC's and SRM's

- by November 30, 2016, for the county-level roles of CBC's and CRM's.