



# ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Management, Executive Office  
400 Maryland Avenue; Washington, DC 20202

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*Distribution:* All ED employees                      *Distribution Approved:* /s/  
*Directives Management Officer:* Tammy Taylor

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*Action:* Pen and Ink Changes

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*Document Changing:* OM:1-101, *The Administrative Communications System*, dated 08/05/2003

*Summary:* The ACS informs employees of the Department's policies, procedures, requirements and other important information of general applicability through the use of directives and handbooks

*Pen and Ink Changes:* The following pen and ink changes have been made to reflect the contact information change.

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<i>Page</i>	<i>Section</i>	<i>Changed</i>	<i>To</i>
All	Date	08/05/2003	08/08/2005
1	Superseding Information	Information described above	Information described above
5	VI. C. 5.	<b>Meet quarterly</b> with DLOs to keep them abreast of changes and improvements in the ACS;	<b>Meets as needed</b> with DLOs to keep them abreast of changes and improvements in the ACS;
6	VI. E. 2.	Attend the ACS <b>quarterly</b> DLO meetings conducted by the DMO;	Attend the ACS DLO meetings conducted <b>as needed</b> by the DMO;



ADMINISTRATIVE  
COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**DEPARTMENTAL DIRECTIVE**

OM:1-101

Page 1 of 17 (08/08/2005)

Distribution:  
All Department of Education employees

Approved by:           /s/          (08/05/2003)  
William J. Leidinger  
Assistant Secretary for Management

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**The Administrative Communications System**

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For technical questions regarding this directive, please contact Tammy Taylor via [e-mail](#) or on 202-401-8548.

Supersedes OM:1-101, The Administrative Communications System (ACS), dated 08/05/2003.

## I. Purpose

This directive describes the U.S. Department of Education (Department) Administrative Communications System (ACS). The ACS informs employees of the Department's policies, procedures, requirements and other important information of general applicability through the use of directives and handbooks.

## II. Policy

- A. It is the Department's policy to use the ACS as the official means of issuing directives and handbooks.
- B. Policy Guidelines
  1. The ACS governs documents that:
    - a. Announce administrative methods or procedures that affect more than one Principal Office;
    - b. Require action or impose workloads of a continuing nature on more than one Principal Office;
    - c. Furnish information to more than one Principal Office that is essential to the operation of the Department; or
    - d. Provide documentation of internal control systems affecting more than one Principal Office.
  2. The ACS does not govern documents that deal with:
    - a. Program regulations and other rulemaking documents;
    - b. Budget-related communications that do not specify policies and procedures;
    - c. Statements of administrative policy and procedures that affect only one Principal Office;
    - d. Instructions that supplement and must be used in conjunction with government-wide regulations and that are signed by the Department official who has issuance authority for them (e.g., Personnel Management Instructions); or
    - e. Negotiated labor agreements and statements of departmental labor relations' policies, including grievance decisions, instructional and guidance materials, operating procedures, and other labor relations' materials.

### III. Authorization

The ACS is required by Federal Information Resources Management Regulation 41 CFR Subpart 201-9.103(I)(3).

### IV. Applicability

This directive applies to all Department offices in headquarters and the regions.

### V. Definitions

- A. Directive A directive initiates, governs or explains officially prescribed policies, actions, procedures and requirements that affect more than one Principal Office and includes all appendices, attachments and exhibits referred to in the text. ACS directives must be in the correct format. Please see [Appendix A – ACS Directives Format Cover Page and Topic Information](#).
- B. Handbook A handbook initiates, governs or explains lengthy procedures and requirements or provides a reference for procedures and requirements and includes all appendices, attachments and exhibits referred to in the text. There is no prescribed format for ACS Handbooks other than the ACS cover page. Please see [Appendix B – ACS Handbook Format Cover Page](#).
- C. ACS Document A term used to describe ACS directives and handbooks and includes all appendices, attachments and exhibits referred to in the text.
- D. Principal Office (PO) For the purpose of this directive, a Principal Office is an organization headed by an Assistant Secretary or equivalent.
- E. Principal Officer For the purpose of this directive, a Principal Officer is the official in charge of an organization designated as a Principal Office.
- F. Originating Office Refers to the Principal Office that is responsible for the ACS document or where the ACS document originated. For example, the originating office for this directive is the Office of Management (OM).
- G. Submitting Office Refers to the Principal Office that is submitting comments on a proposed document.
- H. Initial Clearance/ Review Refers to the ACS process when a proposed document is submitted to the Directives Liaison Officers (DLOs) for review.
- I. Final Clearance/ Review Refers to the ACS process when the ACS document is submitted to the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), Labor Relations, Union, and/or the signatory official for final signature.

- J. Proposed Document Refers to an ACS document that is to be issued through the ACS and includes all appendices, attachments and exhibits referred to in the text before being submitted or with the initial submission for initial review by the DLOs.
- K. Final Document Refers to an ACS document that is to be issued through the ACS and includes all appendices, attachments and exhibits referred to in the text after the initial review and after all changes have been incorporated.

## VI. Responsibilities

- A. **The Secretary or Deputy Secretary** will approve an ACS document when there is a change in the Department's basic mission, objectives, policies or procedures.
- B. **The Assistant Secretary for Management (ASM):**
  - 1. Has the delegated authority to issue changes to this directive that are necessary to implement and manage the ACS;
  - 2. Is the departmental officer authorized to approve in writing all ACS documents, including those used as mechanisms for delegating authority. The exception to this is ACS documents issued by the Office of Inspector General. Approval authority for these ACS documents rest with the Inspector General. The ASM's approval does not necessarily signify that he or she is the official responsible for the policies, procedures and requirements contained in the document, but rather that the document is an official departmental policy issuance that meets ACS requirements. This provision is retroactive and therefore applies to all existing issuances; and
  - 3. Is the departmental officer authorized to mediate disagreements among the Principal Officers on issues that are identified during the clearance process and cannot be otherwise resolved.
- C. **The Directives Management Officer (DMO)**, located in the Executive Office, OM, manages the ACS. The DMO will:
  - 1. Establish requirements and procedures governing the ACS and its contents;
  - 2. Develop ACS-related training materials, coordinate, and conduct training for ACS writers, reviewers, Directive Liaison Officers (DLOs), and other Department employees;
  - 3. Work with DLOs to develop listings of various Principal Office processes and policies which should be included in the ACS;
  - 4. Provide procedural advice to DLOs on developing and maintaining ACS documents;

5. Meets as needed with DLOs to keep them abreast of changes and improvements in the ACS;
6. Review and analyze ACS documents to ensure accuracy, proper format and that all minor corrections are made prior to the formal review process;
7. Provide technical assistance to DLOs throughout the ACS process, grant extensions to DLOs for comments on or the submission of ACS documents, and provide advice and/or help as needed or upon request;
8. Ensure a thorough and expeditious ACS clearance process;
9. Develop and maintain an ongoing review process so that originators examine ACS documents annually for need and accuracy;
10. Convene meetings to resolve issues where disagreements persist between Principal Offices;
11. Issue the appropriate ACS document cancellation notice when notified to do so by an originating office;
12. Notify DLOs of any updates to individual ACS documents via e-mail and then notify all Department employees of those ACS updates via EDNotebook;
13. Maintain the ACS website at <http://connected1.ed.gov/po/om/executive/acs/main.html> by posting all current ACS documents and updating the website to make it easily accessible and useable by Department employees; and
14. Maintain electronic and hard copies of ACS documents, and provide status reports, updates, and hardcopy ACS documents upon request.

**D. Principal Officers will:**

1. Designate a DLO and a DLO backup to coordinate ACS documents and activities within the Principal Office and specify which ACS writers and reviewers will have responsibility for drafting and reviewing ACS documents;
2. Originate ACS documents that affect their respective functional areas and periodically review their functions and procedures to determine whether these impact more than one Principal Office and require development and issuance of an ACS document; and
3. Periodically review ACS documents within their respective functional and program areas and initiate a process to revise, update, consolidate or rescind them in accordance with this directive.

- E. **Directives Liaison Officers (DLO)** and/or their backup(s) will:
1. Represent the Principal Officer on ACS document matters, including acting as liaison between their Principal Office and the DMO;
  2. Attend the ACS DLO meetings conducted as needed by the DMO;
  3. Ensure that established deadlines are met or request an extension if necessary before the due date;
  4. Ensure all appropriate and subject knowledgeable employees within the Principal Office review the ACS documents, that internal viewpoints are reconciled, and that one consolidated response is submitted from the Principal Office;
  5. For those ACS documents that have been submitted from their office, attend and ensure that reviewers who provided comment attend any meeting concerning his or her nonconcurrency that is scheduled by the originating office DLO.
  6. For those ACS documents that reside with their originating office:
    - a. Provide procedural advice within his or her Principal Office on developing and maintaining ACS documents;
    - b. Examine those ACS documents that are subject to the ACS annual review, advise the DMO of the action to be taken and provide a submission date;
    - c. Notify the DMO when an ACS document is to be created, revised (including pen and ink changes or page changes), consolidated, or cancelled at any time other than the annual review and provide a submission date;
    - d. Review all ACS documents prior to forwarding them to the DMO for initial and final review to ensure that there are no policy, procedural, technical, grammatical, or spelling errors and to ensure that the ACS documents are in the appropriate ACS format and are written in plain language;
    - e. Schedule and attend a meeting with each submitting office DLO who nonconcur on an ACS document, and ensure that submitting office reviewers who provided comment attend those meetings; and
    - f. Provide the submitting office and the DMO with information about the disposition of “nonconcur with comment” and “concur with comment”.
- F. **ACS Writers** will:

1. Analyze relevant regulations and laws prior to writing an ACS document;
  2. Confer with all offices that implement and manage the processes covered in an ACS document, so that all requirements are clearly addressed; and
  3. Ensure that the ACS document is written in plain language, concise and necessary.
- G. **ACS Reviewers** will:
1. Analyze relevant regulations and laws prior to reviewing an ACS document;
  2. Confer with offices that implement and manage the processes covered in an ACS document, so that requirements are clearly addressed; and
  3. Ensure that the ACS document is written in plain language, concise and necessary.
- H. **The Office of the General Counsel** will review and provide comments on proposed documents in accordance with the relevant regulations and laws and will provide approval on final documents.
- I. **The Labor Relations Team**, located in Human Resources Services, OM, will review all final documents 1) for conflicts with applicable provisions of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and 2) to identify changes in conditions of employment of bargaining unit employees which may require negotiation under law with the Union and the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

## VII. Procedures and Requirements

### A. Directives

1. Initial Submission
  - a. The DLO sends to the DMO an e-mail that:
    - (1) Provides an attachment of the proposed document using the ACS format in Microsoft Word format. The document is to be written in plain language with an assurance that it has been proofed so that it contains no spelling or grammar errors. Please see [Appendix A – ACS Directives Format Cover Page and Topic Information](#) or [Appendix B – ACS Handbook Format Cover Page](#);
    - (2) Briefly describes the proposed document with an assurance that the proposed document cannot be cancelled or integrated into another ACS document; indicates that the

proposed document has been through preliminary clearance within the originating office and has the approval of the Principal Officer, and requests ACS review and clearance;

- (3) Briefly states whether the proposed document is new, a revision, or pen and ink change to an existing ACS document. If pen and ink changes or any other revisions are being made to an existing ACS document, the changes made to the document are listed as well as the name, number, and date of the ACS document(s) that it will be superseding; and
- (4) Names the contact person and telephone number for technical questions in the originating office.

b. DMO Review

- (1) The DMO assigns an ACS number if the proposed document is new and provides technical assistance throughout the process;
- (2) The DMO reviews the proposed document to ensure that it conforms to ACS standards. The DMO edits the proposed document for clarity, punctuation, and format if minor changes are required; and
- (3) If extensive and/or substantive changes are required, the DMO returns the proposed document to the originating office for the necessary changes.

2. Initial Clearance

- a. When the proposed document is ready for initial clearance, the DMO e-mails the proposed document and the clearance sheet to each DLO for initial review and comment.
- b. The DMO will establish the due date for all DLOs a two or three week period (or less if needed) to provide comment. If a deadline cannot be met, the DLO must request an extension from the DMO before the due date in order for their office's comments to be considered by the originating office. Comments may not be accepted after the due date unless the DLO has requested and the DMO has granted an extension.
- c. Each submitting office DLO replies via e-mail by attaching the completed clearance sheet, and if necessary, attaching the redlined document. Each submitting office will have only one opportunity to comment. The submitting office DLO should incorporate all of its Principal Office comments into one clearance sheet and if necessary redlined document for submission to the DMO.

- d. If no reply is received within the specified clearance time and the DLO does not request an extension from the DMO before the due date, the DMO considers the lack of response a concurrence. The originating office is not required to consider comments submitted after the deadline.
  - e. The submitting office DLO may request on the clearance sheet to see the compilation of comments and a revised draft of the ACS document before submission into final clearance.
  - f. DLOs should focus their review on the substantive area for which they have functional responsibility. The DLOs will not withhold or delay concurrence because of a personal preference for writing, punctuation style, or grammar/spelling errors (although all spelling and punctuation errors should be corrected).
  - g. The DMO forwards all comments to the originating office DLO via e-mail and informs the originating office DLO that the revised document is to be returned for final clearance within 30 calendar days (or less if needed). The DMO will combine all comments into one table and the submitting office will fill in the responses to those comments into this table when retuning the final document to the DMO for final clearance. The DMO will attach a copy of the Labor Relations form for the DLO to complete and return when submitting for final clearance.
3. Clearance Types and addressing comments
- a. *No comment*  
  
The originating office does not need to address comments made by submitting offices that submit “No comments”.
  - b. *Does not pertain to this office*  
  
The originating office does not need to address comments made by submitting offices that submit “Does not pertain to this office”.
  - c. *Concur without comment* – PO agrees with information  
  
The originating office does not need to address comments made by submitting offices that submit “Concur without comment”.
  - d. *Proofing/style* – Editorial, spelling, grammar, etc. changes
    - (1) The originating office will give consideration to comments made by submitting offices that submit a clearance of “Proofing/style,” and inform the submitting office DLOs

and the DMO of the disposition of the comments via an e-mail.

- (2) The originating office then describes its disposition of the comments and incorporates that information into the table to return to the DMO.
- e. *Concur with comment* – PO generally agrees with information in this document but has comments
- (1) The originating office will give consideration to comments made by submitting offices that “Concur with comment,” and inform the submitting office DLOs and the DMO of the disposition of the comments via an e-mail.
  - (2) The originating office then describes its disposition of the comments and incorporates that information into the table to return to the DMO.
  - (3) If revisions are made to a proposed document because of clearance comments and the revisions will impact other Principal Offices, the originating office DLO will inform the DMO so that the DMO can send the revised document to those DLOs affected for a subsequent review.
- f. *Nonconcur with comment* – PO has major issues with this document
- (1) The originating office contacts each nonconcurring submitting office DLO and copies the DMO via e-mail to attempt resolution. When the issues are satisfactorily resolved, the nonconcurring submitting office DLO reviews the revised document and informs the originating office DLO, by e-mail and copies the DMO, that the nonconcurrency is withdrawn.
  - (2) If revisions are made to a proposed document because of clearance comments or nonconcurrences and the revisions will impact other Principal Offices, the originating office DLO will inform the DMO so that the DMO can send the revised document to those DLOs affected for a subsequent review.
  - (3) If agreement cannot be reached or if assistance is needed between the nonconcurring submitting office and the originating office, the originating office DLO will inform the DMO.
  - (4) On behalf of the ASM, the DMO works with the interested parties to reach agreement and provide other assistance as

needed. If necessary, the DMO will convene a meeting with the nonconcurring submitting office DLO(s) and reviewer(s) and originating office DLO(s) and writer(s).

- (5) If an agreement cannot be reached after there has been a serious attempt at resolution, the Principal Officer of the nonconcurring submitting office signs a memorandum to the ASM, copying the DMO, detailing the areas of disagreement and giving the reason(s) for not withdrawing the nonconcurrency.
- (6) The DMO requests that the ASM take appropriate action to resolve the issue(s).

#### 4. Enforcement of Timeframes

The originating office DLO must re-submit the revised document, the completed table that indicates how all of the comments have been addressed, and the completed Labor Relations form to the DMO within the time frame established by the DMO (usually 30 days). If the originating office does not resubmit the information described above within 60 days after receiving the comments, unless an extension is granted by the DMO, the DMO may inform the originating office that the ACS clearance process will start over when the proposed document is resubmitted.

#### 5. Approval

##### a. Final submission to the DMO

- (1) The originating office DLO sends an e-mail to the DMO requesting final ACS clearance that:
  - (a) Provides an attachment of the final document using the ACS format in Microsoft Word format. The document is to be written in plain language with an assurance that it has been proofed so that it contains no spelling or grammar errors. Please see [Appendix A – ACS Directives Format Cover Page and Topic Information](#) or [Appendix B – ACS Handbook Format Cover Page](#);
  - (b) Indicates how all of the comments have been addressed in the comments table and explains:
    - The responses (and if applicable, changes made) to each of the DLO clearances received for “Nonconcur with comment”, “Concur with comment” and “Proofing/Style” and/or;

- There are unresolved nonconcurrences and sets forth the arguments for and against any suggested changes;
  - (c) Provides an attachment of each e-mail from the submitting office(s) that have withdrawn their nonconcurrence(s); and
  - (d) Provides an attachment of the completed Labor Relations form.
- b. Final submission to OGC
- (1) The DMO submits the final document to the DLO for OGC final approval; and
  - (2) OGC will review the final document within two weeks in order to determine whether any further changes are necessary for legal purposes. OGC will provide to the DMO final approval and a summary of any changes that are necessary for legal purposes.
- c. Final submission to the Labor Relations Team
- (1) The DMO submits the final document and the completed Labor Relations form to the Labor Relations Team for final approval; and
  - (2) The Labor Relations Team will review the final document within one week to determine whether it is subject to negotiations with the Union. If the Union does not need to be notified, the Labor Relations Team will provide final approval within one week. A delay may occur if the Labor Relations Team needs to contact the originating office for additional information. If the Union must be notified, the Labor Relations Team will request OM approvals within one week and the Labor Relations Team will provide weekly progress reports to the DMO on the status of any negotiations that may result until the document is finalized.
- d. Final submission to the ASM
- (1) The DMO prepares and submits to the ASM a memorandum recommending approval or other action;
  - (2) If there are unresolved nonconcurrences, the DMO forwards all relevant documentation based on information provided by the originating office, along with the decision package to the ASM for final resolution; and

- (3) If the signatory official is other than the ASM, the DMO will forward the final document through the ASM and the originating office DLO for approval to the appropriate signatory official.

## **B. Handbooks**

### **1. Format**

The Department has no prescribed format for handbooks other than the ACS cover page. Please see [Appendix B – ACS Handbook Format Cover Page](#).

### **2. Submission**

The submission, clearance, approval and distribution process for handbooks is the same as ACS directives, except that the first page is prepared with the “ACS Handbook” header. Please see [Appendix B – ACS Handbook Format Cover Page](#).

## **C. Annual Review**

Each ACS document will be reviewed at least annually for currency, need and accuracy, and to certify that the ACS document should be extended without change, revised, or cancelled. The following procedures are taken to meet this requirement.

- a. The DMO notifies all DLOs of the ACS documents scheduled for annual review. The DMO submits to each DLO a listing of the ACS documents and highlights those ACS documents originating from the DLO’s originating office for a response regarding the highlighted ACS documents back to the DMO. Within two weeks, the DLO certifies to the DMO one of the following actions (for each of the originating office’s ACS documents):
  - (1) Integrate or consolidate with another ACS document(s) and provide a submission date;
  - (2) Add a new ACS document (that is not shown on the annual listing provided by the DMO) and provide a submission date;
  - (3) Extend the ACS document without change;
  - (4) Revise the ACS document with pen and ink changes (only changes to organizational offices, titles or positions) and provide a submission date;
  - (5) Revise the ACS document and provide a submission date;  
or

(6) Cancel the ACS document and provide a justification for where guidance can be found for Department employees.

- b. If the originating office intends to revise the ACS document, it must forward the proposed ACS document to the DMO within 30 calendar days of its target date. Please refer to Section VII.A.1.a. for information regarding initial submission requirements.

**D. Training**

ACS Training will be coordinated and conducted at least annually by the DMO for anyone who is involved in the ACS process for all Principal Offices.

Appendix A – ACS Directives Format Cover Page and Topic Information



ADMINISTRATIVE  
COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**DEPARTMENTAL DIRECTIVE**

**DMO will insert number here**

**Page 1 of (insert total # of pages) (insert date)**

Distribution:  
All Department of Education employees

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Insert Name  
Insert Title

**(Insert Title of ACS document)**

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Appendix A (Insert Appendix Title).....1

For technical questions regarding this ACS document, please contact (insert contact name) via e-mail or on (insert phone number).

Supersedes (insert ACS document number), (insert ACS document title), dated (insert date of ACS document).

## Appendix A – ACS Directives Format Cover Page and Topic Information (continued)

*Header (as shown above) on all pages except first page*

### **I. Purpose**

State the intent of the directive.

### **II. Policy**

Make a statement indicating that this is the applicable departmental policy that the directive is to cover.

### **III. Authorization**

Cite the statute, regulation, or other document authorizing the policies, procedures, and requirements contained in the directive.

### **IV. Applicability**

Indicate persons or situations to which the directive applies.

### **V. Definitions**

Define technical terms.

Explain words that have a special meaning in the context of the directive.

### **VI. Responsibilities**

List the individual responsibilities of Principal Offices, positions of the departmental officers, managers, and/or staff.

### **VII. Procedures and Requirements**

List the procedures and requirements to be followed by those to whom the directive applies and how to perform these tasks. The directive should specifically explain what steps must be taken as a result of the directive for those outside your Principal Office. The directive does not need to address specific steps to be taken as a result of the directive within your Principal Office as long as it is clear that your Principal Office has responsibility for them.

**Appendix B – ACS Handbook Format Cover Page**



**ADMINISTRATIVE  
COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**DEPARTMENTAL HANDBOOK**

**DMO will insert number here                      Page 1 of (insert the total # of pages) (insert date)**

Distribution:  
All Department of Education employees

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Insert Name  
Insert Title

**(Insert Title of ACS document)**

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For technical questions regarding this ACS document, please contact (insert contact name) via e-mail or on (insert phone number).

Supersedes (insert ACS document number), (insert ACS document title), dated (insert date of ACS document).