

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
LGBTQ+ Employee Organization

## Equality USDA

### Bylaws

#### I. Mission Statement

The mission of Equality USDA is to create and continue to foster a work environment free of discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

#### II. Vision

Equality USDA seeks to make USDA a place where you can grow your own destiny, no matter who you are or whom you love.

#### III. Name of the Organization

The name of this Organization shall be Equality USDA. Prior to 2017, the Organization was known as the U.S. Department of Agriculture Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Employee Organization (USDA GLOBE).<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. Purpose

Equality USDA is focused on enriching the work-life of LGBTQ+ USDA employees and retirees by building a Federal workplace where employees feel safe bringing their full authentic selves to work. The acronym “*LGBTQ+*” is used by Equality USDA to represent the range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions present in our world, including but not limited to: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, pansexual, Two Spirit, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, intersex, asexual, and ally.

The purpose of Equality USDA is to:

- a. Promote understanding of issues affecting LGBTQ+ employees and retirees in USDA.
- b. Advance a USDA policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

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<sup>1</sup> USDA GLOBE was established as a USDA-recognized employee welfare and recreation organization in 1994, as witnessed by then-Assistant Secretary for Administration Wardell C. Townsend, Jr. on March 25, 1994. On June 13, 2017, based on a vote of USDA GLOBE members, the name of the organization was officially changed to Equality USDA.

- c. Provide outreach to the LGBTQ+ community in the Department.
- d. Provide educational opportunities to USDA employees on fostering an inclusive workplace and issues affecting LGBTQ+ employees and customers.
- e. Serve as a resource group on issues of concern affecting LGBTQ+ USDA employees and retirees.
- f. Work for the creation of a diverse work force that assures respect and civil rights for LGBTQ+ employees.
- g. Create a forum for the concerns of the LGBTQ+ community in the Department.

## **V. Membership**

- a. No person shall be denied membership in Equality USDA due to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, genetic information, prior civil rights activity, or professional standing.
- b. Membership is voluntary. Membership and all privileges and responsibilities of membership are available to all USDA employees and retired USDA employees. USDA contractors may join for the duration of their contract.
- c. Membership covers the 12-month period of the calendar.
- d. Membership in Equality USDA is available in the following categories:
  - i. Regular Member – Any person eligible for membership shall be deemed a Regular Member upon payment of current annual dues.
  - ii. Lifetime Member – Any person eligible for membership shall be deemed a Lifetime Member upon payment of current lifetime dues.
  - iii. Associate Member – Non-dues paying members. Associate members are nonvoting members and do not have the right to hold office.
  - iv. Honorary Member – A person may receive an annual Honorary Membership upon recommendation of the Executive Board and majority vote of members. Honorary members are nonvoting members and do not have the right to hold office.
  - v. Sponsor Member – Any person(s) who donates funds to support a project or proposed activity sponsored by Equality USDA. A Sponsor Member may be considered a Regular Member if the donation exceeds the value of annual dues, as determined by the Treasurer, and the individual is a USDA employee or retiree.

## **VI. Dues**

- a. Dues will be collected by the Treasurer from all members annually, except for lifetime membership dues which shall be collected once. Electronic methods will be made available for paying dues.
- b. Dues will be determined by the Executive Board, as supported by a business plan and budget.
- c. New members may pay dues on a pro-rated basis based on remaining membership period.

- d. Only dues-paying members shall be allowed voting privileges at meetings and elections.
- e. Member privileges will be revoked if the dues are sixty (60) days past due.
- f. Special accommodations may be arranged when financial hardship is a barrier to membership at the discretion of the Executive Board, upon request.

## **VII. Government**

The laws of this organization shall consist of these bylaws and additional guidelines adopted by the membership.

## **VIII. Elections, Terms, and Service of Officers**

- a. Biennially, Equality USDA will elect six Officers from among the members. These Officers include: President, Vice President, Communications Director, Secretary, Treasurer, and Partnership Liaison. Officers will be elected by a simple majority vote of the voting members. The elected Officers will serve as an Executive Board chaired by the President. Elected Officers shall serve a term of two years. After serving their term(s), the President shall serve an additional one-year term as Past President non-voting advisor to the Executive Board.
- b. No Officer shall serve more than two consecutive terms in the same elected position. Officers wishing to serve a second term must run for re-election.
- c. All Equality USDA Regular and Lifetime members are eligible to run for office and may nominate themselves or other members willing to serve.
- d. Officer elections shall occur in the fall / winter of every odd year (2017, 2019, etc.). The term of the newly elected Board shall begin January 1<sup>st</sup> of even years (2018, 2020, etc.).
- e. In October of odd years, the President shall call for the formation of an Election Committee to oversee the nomination and election process. No individual running for office shall serve on the Election Committee.
- f. The Election Committee will:
  - i. Solicit and/or receive nominations from eligible Equality USDA members;
  - ii. Certify candidate qualifications;
  - iii. Prepare and distribute electronic elections ballots via email;
  - iv. Receive and tabulate electronic ballots. Record the official results and announce elected Officers via email.
- g. Elections shall occur using electronic ballots. The voting window shall be open a minimum of one week. Members will be notified via email to access their electronic ballot by the Elections Committee Chair. Members who are not able to vote electronically will be provided a paper ballot by the Election Committee upon request. Reasonable accommodations for voting will be accepted and processed by the Elections Committee to ensure voting is available to all members.
- h. In the event an Officer resigns or is recalled from their position on the Equality USDA Board, the remaining Officers may vote to appoint a member to fill the vacancy until the end of the departing Officer's term.

- i. When an Officer resigns their position on the Equality USDA Executive Board or separates from USDA employment, they shall notify the President as soon as possible.
  - ii. In the event the President is the vacating Officer, the Vice-President shall assume the President's responsibilities for the remainder of the term.
  - iii. An Officer who was appointed by the Board rather than elected must be nominated for election during the next regularly scheduled Fall election and may then serve for up to two full terms.
- i. An Officer may be recalled. The recall process may be initiated by any member who submits a Petition for Recall signed by at least four different members. The Petition for Recall shall describe in detail the reasons for seeking removal and be submitted to the Executive Board. The remaining Officers (i.e., those not subject to recall) shall review the Petition and if appropriate, appoint an independent Recall Committee of three members to receive, develop, examine, and present any relevant evidence to the full membership for the purpose of holding a special recall election. After presenting relevant evidence to the membership, special recall vote shall be conducted by the Recall Committee within 60 days of the receipt of the Petition. A simple majority vote of the entire general voting membership shall be required to recall an Officer.
- j. An Officer who violates these bylaws and additional guidelines adopted by the membership shall be provided written warning by the Executive Board. After three written warnings, an Officer may be the subject of a Petition to Recall.
- k. Officers will not be compensated for the performance of their duties.

## **IX. Duties.**

- a. The President, with the help of other Officers, when appropriate, will:
  - i. Develop or update a Strategic Plan that will identify specific annual goals and objectives in support of the Equality USDA mission.
  - ii. Lead, direct, and coordinate all Equality USDA activities to meet defined goals and objectives.
  - iii. Annually benchmark and assess progress made, evaluate the effectiveness of the goals and objectives themselves, take necessary actions to correct any deficiency, and report findings to Equality USDA.
  - iv. Develop the agenda and preside at all meetings of the Executive Board.
  - v. Develop the agenda and preside at all meetings of the general membership.
  - vi. Serve as the official representative and spokesperson for Equality USDA.
  - vii. Serve as the official representative for Equality USDA on USDA Civil Rights Councils and Committees, as appropriate, or delegate a representative in the President's stead.
  - viii. Coordinate and consult with USDA LGBT Special Emphasis Program Managers, or designees, in support of outreach and educational events.

- ix. Upon completing a term in office, the outgoing President will serve as the Past President non-voting advisor to the Executive Board for a period of one year. The Past President may vote in general membership votes.
  - x. Appoint Equality USDA members to positions and roles as necessary to fulfill the goals of the organization and support the initiatives and endeavors of the Executive Board. In appointing position and roles, the President shall stipulate the responsibilities and completion date.
- b. The Vice-President will:
- i. Advise and assist the President in the execution of their responsibilities.
  - ii. Execute the functions of the President in the absence, or upon the resignation or recall, of the President.
  - iii. Serve as second signature for all checks and disbursements made by Equality USDA.
  - iv. Coordinate with Equality USDA in establishing committees, assure that committee Chairpersons are nominated and assigned, and act as an oversight manager of all committees.
  - v. Function as the liaison to Equality USDA members in non-headquarters locations or designate an appropriate alternate.
- c. The Communications Director will:
- i. Establish and maintain a communications policy, including social media and web content.
  - ii. Manage the social media accounts and website for Equality USDA.
  - iii. Develop or coordinate the development of reports and correspondence as assigned by the President or Vice-President.
  - iv. Develop press releases as necessary.
  - v. Serve as an additional spokesperson for Equality USDA as requested by the President.
  - vi. Notify members of all meetings and activities.
  - vii. Review and approve attendance, messaging, and materials for all outreach events attended by Equality USDA.
- d. The Secretary will:
- i. Determine quorum and record minutes of all meetings.
  - ii. Circulate minutes, agendas, and other pertinent documents.
  - iii. Preserve all official correspondence, documents, and electronic recordings.
  - iv. Maintain an electronic library of educational materials created by Equality USDA.
  - v. Maintain a list of members by category of membership and other non-financial records.
  - vi. Make available to all members and prospective members copies of the Bylaws and other related documents.
  - vii. Coordinate with the Communications Director to assist with management of the social media accounts and website for Equality USDA.

- e. The Treasurer will:
  - i. Receive all funds payable to Equality USDA and issue receipt for such funds, including membership dues.
  - ii. Serve as primary signature for all checks and disbursements made by Equality USDA.
  - iii. Provide notification to members when dues are owed. Maintain a record of dues paid and those past-due. Notify the Executive Board when a member's dues are sixty (60) days past due and advise the Executive Board on revocation of membership privileges.
  - iv. Satisfy financial obligations as duly authorized by a majority vote of members present at a general meeting.
  - v. Keep a clear and accurate record of all Equality USDA receipts and disbursements.
  - vi. Maintain a checking account to store funds, issue payments, and ensure that the second signature on the account is that of the Vice-President.
  - vii. Present a report on the financial status of Equality USDA at all meetings.
  
- f. The Partnership Liaison will:
  - i. Represent Equality USDA at monthly Federal employee resource group meetings, such as Pride in Federal Service, Federal GLOBE, and FedQ. Report activities of Federal employee resource groups to Equality USDA and make recommendations for actions.
  - ii. Establish and maintain relationships with other affinity groups and employee organizations. Report activities of USDA affinity groups and employee organizations to Equality USDA and make recommendations for actions.
  - iii. Assist the President and Vice President in representing Equality USDA with external partners such as Out & Equal, Cultivating Change, and the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce.
  - iv. Assist in the development of Memoranda of Understanding and agreements to establish partnerships in support of the mission of Equality USDA.
  
- g. Together, the Executive Board will:
  - i. Attend board and membership meetings. Officers must notify the President and/or Vice President in advance if they are unable to attend Executive Board meetings and/or meetings with Equality USDA members.
  - ii. Work considerately and respectfully with all members.
  - iii. Actively recruit new members for Equality USDA.
  - iv. Develop a biennial business plan that outlines the Executive Board's goals and activities. Support the business plan objectives with an annual budget, and present to membership for input.

## **X. Senior Executive Champions**

- a. The Executive Board shall identify a minimum of two Senior Executive Champions who will serve as advisors to Equality USDA.
- b. Senior Executive Champions shall be USDA employees who are GS-15, Senior Executive Service members, or political appointees.
- c. The Senior Executive Champions shall:
  - i. Be provided an Honorary Membership in Equality USDA, if they are not current members.
  - ii. Act as an advocate for Equality USDA.
  - iii. Provide guidance to the Executive Board on best practices in effective leadership, strategy, conflict resolution, acquisition of resources, communications, and career development activities.
  - iv. Identify potential risks and suggest mitigation strategies.
  - v. Attend Executive Board meetings as requested by the Board and attend general membership meetings when possible.

## **XI. Voting**

- a. Voting mechanisms may include email, online polls, or teleconference, as determined by the Executive Board. Members who are not able to vote electronically may request a reasonable accommodation to vote by mail or other method by contacting an Executive Board member.
- b. To initiate or transact normal business presented at the meetings, a quorum shall constitute 10% of the voting membership.
- c. All issues regarding significant changes to Equality USDA, as determined by the Executive Board, shall be presented to the membership as voting issues.

## **XII. Committees**

- a. Any Equality USDA member may recommend that a committee be formed to develop a specific issue of interest.
- b. Any Equality USDA member may nominate another member to be the Chairperson of a committee.
- c. Committee Chairpersons will report the status of committee efforts at general Equality USDA meetings.

## **XIII. Chapters**

- a. Equality USDA members may form state and/or local Chapters of Equality USDA. Members wishing to form an Equality USDA Chapter shall draft a charter in accordance with the principles reflected in these Bylaws.
- b. All Chapter charters and subsequent amendments shall be submitted to the Equality USDA Executive Board for ratification.

#### **XIV. Meetings**

- a. The Executive Board shall conduct quarterly meetings with the general membership. General membership meetings are open to all Equality USDA members. Non-members may attend as guests of a member, or by contacting an Officer in advance.
- b. The President shall conduct monthly meetings with the Executive Board. The Executive Board may call additional meetings as necessary. Meeting minutes shall document decisions made by the Executive Board and shall be made available to members by the Secretary.
- c. Informational meetings open to all interested in Equality USDA shall be conducted as often as necessary, as determined by the Executive Board.
- d. Committee Chairpersons may conduct committee meetings as necessary.
- e. Meetings will generally be held virtually via teleconference and electronic methods. Meetings will occasionally be held in person when it is advantageous, such as in conjunction with trainings and outreach events.
- f. Training and professional development meetings will be conducted as appropriate.

#### **XV. Amendments**

Any amendments or changes to the Bylaws will be made by a two-thirds vote of eligible members present at general membership meetings. All proposed amendments must be emailed to members at least 14 days in advance of the meeting during which the vote will take place.

#### **XVI. Nondiscrimination Statement**

Equality USDA and its members are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, genetic information, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

#### **XVII. Dissolution**

Equality USDA is organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes, including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Upon the dissolution of the organization, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose. Any such assets not disposed of shall be disposed of by the Court of Common Pleas of Washington,

D.C. for such purposes or to such organization or organizations, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

Amended: November 14, 2019

Approved by Member Vote: December 5, 2019