



Andrea Brooks

Elevation Through Coordination

With well over thirty years of hind sight, Andrea Brooks can now fully appreciate how important becoming the first Women’s Coordinator in her local was “as a vehicle for my own leadership development.”

Brooks now serves as American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) National Vice President, the union’s third ranking position, working side-by-side with President John Gage and Secretary-Treasurer J. David Cox.

Back in 1974, with only previous experience as a steward under her belt, she “was not as aware as I should have been of the difficulties women faced in progressing in the union.” She would learn.

What she was aware of was how excited she felt. “The women’s movement had started,” she says. “But the common attitude still was that men needed higher salaries than women because they had families to support and we didn’t.”

She and other AFGE women tapped to become Local Women’s Coordinators (LWC)—

and the women they organized and mobilized over the years—began to appreciate their own power and ability to lead. Brooks says that serving as a local women’s coordinator “became a training ground for many women leaders.”

Every local is supposed to have a Women’s Coordinator and a Local Fair Practices Coordinator (LFPC). Sometimes the two roles are handled by a single person, and they are either elected or appointed by the local president.

At the District level, both Fair Practices and Women’s Coordinators are elected for three-year terms.

And how the overall program functions in practice—and the emphasis put on it—varies “based on the culture of the local,” adds Brooks, who heads the AFGE National Human Rights Committee, composed of the Fair Practices and Women’s Coordinators from each of the union’s 12 districts.

One member of that committee is Local 3028 President Kevin McGee, whose story illustrates the continuing potential of the overall program.

Though he has served as local president at the Veteran’s Administration (VA) Anchorage, Alaska, facility for 15 years, his local did not have local coordinators until he was elected District 11 Fair Practices Coordinator in 2005.

McGee “jumped in with both feet,” and quickly understood the program’s potential.

He appointed both a LWC and a LFPC for his local. “They are both people who might not otherwise have become so active,” he says. “A commitment to diversity makes the union stronger for everyone.”

Seeking to get local coordinators in action throughout his district, he’s started with its eight other VA locals. Starting from scratch, they now all have at least a combined LWC/LFPC. Some have one of each.



Kevin McGee