



Approved for Release

William J. Fleming

Director for Human Resources Management and
Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer

4-1-11

Date

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) BULLETIN # 145, FY11

SUBJECT: Hiring Reform Implementation

EFFECTIVE DATE: April 1, 2011

EXPIRATION DATE: Effective until canceled or superseded

SUPERSEDES: HR Bulletin #130, FY11, "Hiring Reform Implementation," dated October 20, 2010

REVISIONS: This HR Bulletin revises the Department of Commerce's (Department) policy on the minimum area of consideration when advertising positions, and allows HR practitioners to refer only preference eligibles in the highest quality category when it appears that non-preference candidates will not be within reach.

BACKGROUND: The Presidential Memorandum dated May 11, 2010, "Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process," is part of the Obama Administration's comprehensive initiative to address long-standing impediments to recruiting and hiring top talent into the Federal civilian workforce. The President's initiative calls for eliminating written essay-style questions when applicants first apply, allowing individuals to apply with only a resume and optional cover letter when they first apply, using category rating for competitive examining, improving quality and speed of hiring, notifying applicants about their status, and ensuring manager responsibility and accountability for hiring.

COVERAGE: This bulletin applies to all competitive service positions through the GS-15 or equivalent levels when public notice is provided and competitive examining is applied.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this HR Bulletin is to establish Department-wide policy for implementing President Obama's Hiring Reform initiative.

RECRUITMENT AND APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Recruitment Procedure: The following designates the recruitment procedure for both merit assignment and competitive examining. Using a progressive hurdle (multi-phase) approach is not

available at this time as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has not provided guidance on how to apply veterans' preference to this type of approach.

Resume/Cover Letter and Occupational Questionnaire:

- Step 1. Applicants will submit their resumes, optional cover letters, supporting documentation (i.e., transcripts, licenses, etc.), along with responses to a scored occupational questionnaire¹.
- Step 2. Applicant resume and/or cover letter, and supporting documentation will be reviewed for minimum qualification requirements such as general experience, specialized experience, selective placement factors, education, etc. Once it is determined that the applicant meets the minimum qualifications, his/her responses to the occupational questionnaire will be reviewed and validated through their resume and/or cover letter. HR practitioners have the ability to change a response on an applicant's self-assessed occupational questionnaire based on information contained in their resume and/or cover letter.
- Step 3. The best-qualified candidates will be referred to the hiring manager and may be invited for an interview. However, when applying competitive examining procedures, HR practitioners have the flexibility under the Department's category rating policy to refer only preference eligibles in the highest quality category when it appears likely that non-preference eligibles will not be within reach for consideration because the number of preference eligibles in the highest quality category either exceeds the number of jobs to be filled or equals the number of jobs to be filled.

Vacancy Announcement Posting Requirements: It is the policy of the Department to use available hiring flexibilities when filling positions. However, when a position is advertised the following policy applies:

Vacancy announcements must remain open for a minimum of seven calendar days. Waivers to the minimum posting requirement will not be granted. However, the open period may also be defined in terms of a specific number of applications received.

HR practitioners, in consultation with hiring managers, have the flexibility to advertise positions for longer periods of time, but OPM's 80-day hiring timeline requirement still needs to be met.

NOTE: It is recommended that vacancy announcements not close on a holiday or weekend.

In the event of a conflict between a provision of the Recruitment Plan and applicable provisions of negotiated collective bargaining agreement, the provision of the collective bargaining agreement will apply.

¹ Occupational Questionnaires are questionnaires that are related to the competencies or knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the duties of the position. They may consist of True/False, Multiple Choice, Yes/No or any combination thereof. They cannot require long answers or essay responses.

Minimum Area of Consideration:

One-Grade Interval Jobs

Vacancy announcements for one-grade interval positions at the GS-7 through GS-10 (or equivalent) levels can be advertised under merit assignment, competitive examining, or both (all sources). Vacancy announcements for one-grade interval positions at the GS-6 level (or equivalent) or below, must be advertised under all sources procedures.

Two-Grade Interval Jobs

Vacancy announcements for two-grade interval positions at the GS-11 level (or equivalent) or above can be advertised under merit assignment, competitive examining, or both (all sources). Vacancy announcements for two-grade interval positions at the GS-9 level (or equivalent) or below must be advertised under all sources procedures.

SHROs requesting an exception to the “area of consideration” policy must submit a written request to the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) with a detailed justification for the waiver. SHROs must receive approval in writing from the Director for Human Resources Management and Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer prior to posting the vacancy announcement.

Resume Format: SHROs **must** accept applicant resumes and cover letters in any format. However, the vacancy announcement must state what information is required in the resume and/or cover letter (i.e., U.S. citizen, selective service registration status, dates of employment, number of hours worked per week). In addition, the vacancy announcement must state what the resume will be used for (i.e., to determine minimum qualifications, to verify general/specialized experience, for selective placement factors, to validate self-assessment questionnaire, etc.).

Essay-Style (KSA) Questions: Essay-style questions may no longer be asked during the recruitment process described above.

EVALUATION AND APPLICANT RATING

Category Rating: SHROs **must** use category rating for evaluating all competitive examining applicants. The purpose of category rating is to increase the number of eligible candidates from which a hiring manager may choose, while preserving veterans’ preference rights. Applicants who meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position, and whose job-related competencies have been assessed, are ranked by being placed in three pre-defined quality (gold, silver, bronze) categories instead of being ranked by individual numeric score order. The names of all eligible candidates in the highest quality category are referred on the Certificate of Eligibles to the hiring manager for consideration. However, HR practitioners have the flexibility to refer only preference eligibles in the highest quality category when it appears likely that non-preference eligibles will not be within reach for consideration because the number of preference eligibles in the highest quality category either exceeds the number of jobs to be filled or equals the number of jobs to be filled. Hiring managers may select from among the candidates in the highest quality category, without being limited to the top three eligible candidates (rule-of-three), while adhering to veterans’

preference regulations. Preference eligibles are listed ahead of non-preference eligibles within each quality category; and non-preference eligibles may not be selected over preference eligibles. The Department's category rating policy provides general guidance on the score ranges for the gold, silver, and bronze categories. SHROs can modify these ranges on a case-by-case basis prior to the opening date of the announcement. Documentation justifying the modified score ranges must be maintained in the case file. For more information regarding category rating, please refer to the Department's category rating policy at:

http://hr.commerce.gov/s/groups/public/@doc/@cfoasa/@ohrm/documents/content/prod01_009474.pdf

Merit Assignment Procedures: SHROs must adhere to Department Administrative Order 202-335, Merit Assignment Program, as well as their individual merit assignment program plans. Category Rating does not apply when filling jobs through the merit promotion process.

Evaluating Applicants: Applicants will be evaluated on eligibility and minimum qualifications criteria, including any selective placement factors. Applicants found to meet both will be further evaluated through the scored occupational questionnaire on the extent to which they possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities and/or other competencies of the position. The assessment method must be described in the vacancy announcement advertising the position.

Four Points of Applicant Notification: Applicants who apply through USAJOBS must receive notification through USAJOBS at each of the following points during the application process: application received, application assessed for qualifications, applicant referred or not referred to selecting official, and applicant selected or not selected for the job. SHROs must determine how to notify applicants who apply using alternative methods.

REFERENCES: The Presidential Memorandum dated May 11, 2010, "Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process"; 5 CFR 300; Delegated Examining Operations Handbook; HR Bulletin #066, FY07, "Category Rating"; HR Bulletin #144, FY11, "Creating a Vacancy Announcement"

OFFICE OF POLICY AND PROGRAMS: Pamela Boyland, Director, PBoyland@doc.gov, (202) 482-1068

PROGRAM MANAGER CONTACT INFORMATION: Valerie Smith, vsmith@doc.gov, (202) 482-0272