



Approved for Release  
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Date

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT  
HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) BULLETIN #130, FY11

**SUBJECT:** Hiring Reform Implementation

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** November 1, 2010

**BACKGROUND:** The Presidential Memorandum dated May 11, 2010, "Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process," is part of the comprehensive initiative to address long-standing impediments to recruiting and hiring top talent into the Federal civilian workforce. The 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 GS-15 or equivalent levels when public notice is provided, and rating and ranking procedures are applied.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this HR Bulletin is to establish Department-wide policy for implementing this 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 questionnaire.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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 his/her 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.

**Vacancy Announcement Posting Requirements:** In accordance with Departmental policy, all vacancies that are advertised must be posted under competitive examining and merit assignment procedures, unless a waiver to this requirement is provided by the Director for Human Resources Management and Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer (Director). Vacancy announcements must remain open for a minimum of seven calendar days. Waivers to the minimum posting requirements will not be granted. In addition, 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; however, the 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.

**Resume Format:** Servicing human resources offices (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 (for example, 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 (for example, to determine minimum qualifications, to verify general/specialized experience, for selective placement factors, to validate self-assessment questionnaire).

**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, SHROs have the option of only referring preference eligible candidates in the highest quality category when it appears likely that non-preference eligibles will not be within reach for consideration. For example, this would occur when 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 HR Bulletin on "Category Rating":

[http://hr.commerce.gov/Practitioners/ResourcesAndTools/HumanResourceBulletins/DEV01\\_00608](http://hr.commerce.gov/Practitioners/ResourcesAndTools/HumanResourceBulletins/DEV01_00608)  
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**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 Consideration:** 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"; Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 300; Delegated Examining Operations Handbook; HR Bulletin on "Category Rating"

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