



HR Broadcast

Marketing & Regulatory Programs
Human Resources

October 2010 Issue



Marketing and Regulatory Programs – Hiring Reform

Submitted by Brian Zingler

A Presidential Memorandum on improving the Federal recruitment and hiring process was issued on May 11, 2010 directing agencies to develop a common sense hiring process designed to attract and hire high-quality candidates in a timely manner. It also calls on agency managers and supervisors, with assistance from Human Resources, to assume a leadership role in recruiting and selecting employees from all segments of our society.

The memorandum outlines five key areas of the hiring process that require action by November 1, 2010:

1. Eliminating narrative essays and responses to KSAs during the initial application phase.
2. Increasing involvement by managers and supervisors.
3. Implementing Category Rating for case exam announcements.
4. Simplifying application submission, i.e., resumes and cover letters.
5. Providing applicants with an update on the status of their application at the key stages of the process.

Action has already taken place regarding simplified application submission and updating applicants on their application status:

- ◆ Applicants can now apply for jobs by uploading resumes in formats of their choice, as opposed to following the resume builder format in USAJOBS, which was required in the past; and
- ◆ Applicants for jobs in MRP can obtain information on their application status by accessing a website where application status is posted by HR at each phase of the application review and referral cycle. Job applicants are advised during the application process how to check for application status.

Inside this Issue

<i>Staffing Corner</i>	1-4
<i>From the Policy Branch</i>	3
<i>Benefits Buzz</i>	5-6
<i>Processing</i>	7
<i>Leave and Compensation</i>	8-9
<i>Personnel Security News</i>	10

The following information is designed to provide an overview of the changes that will take place in response to the first three of the five key areas outlined above:

Elimination of narrative essay/responses to KSAs (New Hiring Process Required)

Background

MRP is currently using either essay-style questions or KSA statements to evaluate candidates during the initial application phase. As a result of the Presidential Memorandum, the use of these evaluation methods during the initial application phase is no longer permitted. This requires HR to develop alternatives to past practice in order to make 'best-qualified' determinations.



Changes for HR/Hiring Managers

- ◆ *Recruitment Consultation/Hiring Flexibilities*: HR will continue its efforts to have more meaningful conversations with hiring officials by providing them with data on past recruitment efforts for the subject – or similar – position(s). This information will be used to help HR and the selecting official analyze and identify where highly-qualified candidates may be located and how to meet diversity goals. HR will help guide the decision to either 1) announce a vacancy, conducting targeted recruitment, as necessary, or 2) fill the vacancy using available hiring flexibilities, which include special appointing authorities for veterans, students, the disabled, etc.
- ◆ *Alternatives to KSAs*: HR developed models based on occupation, application volume, etc., that provide alternate assessment methodologies that hiring managers can utilize depending upon the job being announced and its past recruitment history. The alternatives may include the use of interviews to help determine the best qualified, the use to questionnaires and/or the use of a paper-panel process used to assess resumes, etc. The models are designed based on hiring manager feedback, analysis of past recruitment efforts across the agency, and on the evaluation of “best practices” of other federal agencies and the private sector.

Benefits

- ◆ Increased opportunity for hiring managers to diversify their work force through the use of special appointing authorities for veterans, students, the disabled, etc.
- ◆ **Increased involvement by managers and supervisors in the hiring process.**
- ◆ Provides historical information to hiring managers on past recruitment efforts to improve decision-making process related to how, when, or if, a job should be announced or filled through alternative methods.

Changes for Applicants

Job applicants will no longer be required to respond to KSA statements or questions that require a narrative response. However, applicants will need to read carefully each vacancy announcement and ensure their resume fully addresses all the requests/requirements listed in the announcement and should make sure the resume fully illustrates how their background and experience meets the job requirements.

Category Rating

Definition and Background

A ranking and selection procedure used to assess applicants for positions filled through the delegated examining process. The new procedure replaces the “Rule of Three”.

Purpose

To increase the number of eligible candidates referred to a selecting official while preserving veterans’ preference rights.

- ◆ **Process**
Candidates are evaluated based on job-related criteria and placed into ‘quality’ categories with individuals who possess similar competencies. Selections are made from highest quality category. Any candidate from the highest category may be selected, as long as a veteran is not passed. (A veteran has preference in the selection process.)
- ◆ Candidates are referred alphabetically; but veterans are listed ahead of non-veterans. For scientific/professional positions at the GS-9 or higher, a qualified veteran with a disability of 10% or more will float to the top of his/her *respective* category. For all other positions, a qualified veteran with a disability of 10% or more will float to the top of the *highest* category

Benefits

- ◆ Provides a bigger pool of applicants from which to select (not limited to the top 3)
- ◆ Substantially equally-qualified candidates are treated as such, by placement in the same ‘quality’ category.

From the Policy Branch



New Hiring and Performance Accountability Measures for Supervisory Positions

Submitted by Gwen Montgomery

In May, 2010, a Presidential Memorandum on Hiring Reform was issued which stated that all Federal managers and supervisors with responsibility for hiring are to be held accountable for recruiting and hiring highly qualified employees and for supporting new employees' successful transition into the Federal service. As a result of the Presidential Memorandum, managers and supervisors within the Marketing & Regulatory Programs (MRP) will



have performance elements and measures added to their performance plans to address these responsibilities. The new performance elements and measures took effect October 1, 2010. The USDA, Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM) created standardized performance measures, which will apply to **all** supervisory

positions in USDA, including SES and SL/ST positions. Human Resources is incorporating standard language into supervisory/managerial performance elements. For more information on these new measures, contact Gwen Montgomery, at (301) 734-6341 or at Gwen.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov

USERRA and PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

Submitted by Gwen Montgomery

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) requires federal agencies to treat employees who deploy to perform military service as if they never left their civilian jobs. Numerous inquiries have been received throughout Government regarding how agencies should complete performance appraisals when an employee is deployed on active duty. As a result of the inquiries, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has issued guidance to assist agencies in the completion of performance appraisals for employees called to active duty. This guidance provides options for conducting performance appraisals for deployed employees. This guidance can be found on our website at http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/performance_management/performance_appraisals.shtml. If you have any questions, please contact Gwen Montgomery, at (301) 734-6341 or at Gwen.Montgomery@aphis.usda.gov



Staffing Corner

The USDA, Office of Human Resources Management has issued updated policy on Recruitment, Relocation and Retention Incentives (3Rs).

The new policy requires that:

- ◆ Retention incentives, including recertification of existing incentives, be approved by the Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA), USDA.



- ◆ Recruitment and relocation incentives be approved by the Agency Administrators.

Recruitment, Relocation and Retention Incentives

Submitted by Martha Gravagna



These changes are effective immediately. The MRP Human Resources Division is in the process of updating its policy and operational desk guide. For interim guidance, please contact your servicing Staffing Specialist in Human Resources Operations.

Call to Increase Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Staffing Corner



Submitted by Martha Gravagna

Secretary Vilsack, marking the 20th anniversary of the American with Disabilities Act, has called on managers and supervisors to make a renewed commitment to increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including veterans.

The Human Resources Division can help you meet the Secretary's goal of making the USDA a model for employing people with disabilities, particularly those with targeted disabilities, through the use of hiring flexibilities which allow managers to appoint qualified candidates without competition, and through the application of reasonable accommodation principles for employees in need.

What are your options?

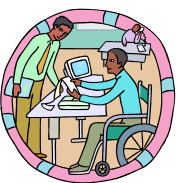
You may use these hiring authorities instead of the traditional merit promotion and case examining processes, which will streamline the recruitment and selection process and find exceptional candidates.

People with Disabilities- May be appointed to temporary, time-limited (made for more than one year), or permanent positions at any grade level for which qualified. Conversion to a career-conditional or career appointment can take place after successful completion of a minimum of 2 years of service under a permanent Schedule A appointment.

30 Percent or More Disabled Veterans- May be given a non-competitive temporary appointment of more than 60 days or a term appointment and later converted to a career or career conditional appointment. There is no grade level limitation for this authority, but the appointee must meet all qualification requirements, including any written test requirement.

Veterans Recruitment Appointment - Agencies can appoint an eligible veteran up through the GS-11 or equivalent grade level under this authority. The candidate must meet specific eligibility requirements along with the applicable qualification requirements. The appointment is converted to career or career-conditional after 2 years of successful service.

Disabled Veterans Enrolled in a VA Training Program- A person who successfully completes a qualifying program may be noncompetitively appointed under a status quo appointment that may be converted to career or career-conditional at any time.



How does reasonable accommodation fit into the process?

Reasonable accommodation applies to applicants as well as employees. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires employers to provide appropriate changes and adjustments to enable individuals to be considered for a job opening. Reasonable accommodation may also be required to enable a person to perform a job, gain access to the workplace, and enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment available to employees without disabilities.

Where can you get more information?

For assistance with planning your recruitment strategy, please contact your Human Resources Staffing Specialist:

[APHIS](#) Staffing Specialists

[AMS](#) Staffing Specialists

[GIPSA](#) Staffing Specialists

If you have questions about reasonable accommodation, please contact Sherri Sirotkin, Reasonable Accommodations Program Coordinator, at (301) 734-3162 or sherri.sirotkin@aphis.usda.gov





Are You Planning to Retire Within a Year?

If you are considering retiring within a year's time, there are several things you can do to make the retirement process easier for you.

While you may have previously requested an annuity estimate as part of your retirement planning, once you have finalized a retirement date, you should contact your Benefits Specialist. Plan to do this about a year in advance of your retirement. Contacting your Benefits Specialist early allows him or her time to review your federal service, verify your eligibility to continue your Federal Employees Health Benefits and Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance into retirement, compute your annuity estimate, assist you in the completion of deposits or redeposits that might increase your annuity, and correct possible errors in your federal service records that might delay your retirement. Your Benefits Specialist will also send you links to the retirement forms and other useful retirement information.

If you plan to retire this year, you should send your retirement forms about three to four months in advance of your retirement date.

Once you receive this information, please take the time to review the material and make note of any questions you may have. You will be required to make important decisions concerning your retirement benefits that will impact you, and possibly a survivor, for the rest of your lives. Your Benefits Specialist is available to answer questions you may have concerning your annuity estimate, retirement forms, and retirement elections. Please contact the Specialist for your program, http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/benefits.pdf

You should complete and mail your retirement forms to the Benefits Section, Human Resources Operations, in Minneapolis at least two months prior to your retirement date. If you plan to retire between November and January, you should send your retirement forms about three to four months in advance of your retirement date. The number of retirements received in the Benefits section at the end of the year requires additional processing time. Retirement forms should be mailed to: USDA APHIS MRPBS HR Benefits, Butler Square 5th floor, 100 N 6th Street, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

Once your forms are received, the Benefits Assistant will review your application for accuracy and completeness. A letter will be sent to you confirming the receipt of the forms and will request any missing or additional information that is needed. You should receive this letter about two weeks after we receive your retirement forms. Please return any requested information promptly so as not to delay the processing of your retirement action.

It is important for you to notify your supervisor of your intent to retire at least 6 to 8 week in advance. While you may change your plans concerning retirement, providing your program notice allows transition planning and completion of a number of documents required to process your retirement and ensure accuracy of your final pay.

On your retirement date, or close to it, the Benefits Section will process your retirement and forward your retirement package to the National Finance Center. You will receive a final mailing from Benefits when we have completed our process.

The National Finance Center will finalize your payroll records and forward the payroll records and your retirement application to the Office of Personnel Management. Approximately six weeks after your retirement date, you should receive your first interim annuity payment from the Office of Personnel Management. During this six week period, you should receive your last paycheck, according to the normal pay schedule, and payment for any unused annual leave, compensatory time, and credit time. If you do not receive these payments, you may call your Benefits Specialist or Assistant to inquire.

To start your retirement process, or to request an annuity estimate for retirements through the end of 2011, please contact your servicing Benefits Specialist at: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/benefits.shtml

Keep up to date on [Benefits News](#).



TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR ASSETS

Submitted by Stephanie Orth

In June of 2010, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) obtained an asset freeze and other emergency relief against a Jacksonville, Fla., retirement benefits consulting firm that defrauded active and retired government employees and law enforcement agents nationwide through a Ponzi scheme that promised safe investments.

Here are a couple steps you should consider to protect your assets and avoid fraud. Gather information on the investment professional, look into the company that is handling your money, use common sense and ask questions.

Evaluating the background of the financial professional you plan to do business with is a good place to start. There are several sites that the SEC recommends investors to use to research their investment professionals.

Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) Broker Check -<http://www.finra.org/Investors/ToolsCalculators/BrokerCheck/index.htm>.

This is a site for investors to research the professional backgrounds of FINRA-registered current and former brokers and brokerage firms.

Investment Advisor Public

Disclosure Website – www.adviserinfo.sec.gov.

At this site you can search for investment advisers and check if they are registered with the SEC or with the state in which they work. You can also search for an individual investment adviser representative and view that individual's professional background and conduct including current registrations, employment history, and disclosures about certain disciplinary events involving the individual.

EDGAR - <http://www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml>. This site is a database that tracks if firms have registered their investments with SEC. Most companies have to register before they begin selling shares.

SEC website - <http://www.sec.gov/investor/pubs/companies.htm>. Provides information about companies from a variety of sources.

Remember that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Use your common sense. A good financial planner should be able to show you where your money is located and address any concerns you may have. Don't be afraid to challenge your advisor and ask questions. Here are a few simple questions to get you started.

What experience do you have, especially with people in my circumstances?

Where did you go to school? What is your recent employment history?

What licenses do you hold? Are you registered with the SEC, a state, or FINRA?

Are the firm, the clearing firm, and any other related companies that will do business with me members of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation (SIPC)?

Once you've taken these steps, you should feel more confident and comfortable with who is handling your money. If you are still feeling like you need more information there are a number of non-profit educational and consumer organizations that offer free tools to help investors check financial professionals.

For example, AARP offers a [Financial Advisor Questionnaire](http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org/articles/bulletin/money/financialquestionnaire.pdf) <http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org/articles/bulletin/money/financialquestionnaire.pdf>, and the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards has a [Checklist for Interviewing a Financial Planner](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/money/financial-planner/10questions.html). http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/money/financial-planner/10questions.html.



Tax Withholding Changes for Guam and Panama

Beginning with wages paid for Pay Period 20 (October 18, 2010), the National Finance Center (NFC) will make the following changes to Guam and Panama income tax withholdings:

- ◆ State taxes will not be withheld from any type of payment made to the employee since Guam and Panama require only Federal taxes to be withheld.
- ◆ NFC will no longer allow changes to Guam and Panama states tax withholdings through NFC's Employee Personnel Page/Employee Self Service (EPP/ESS).

Performance Ratings are due to HRO by November 15

Attention supervisors!!! When you have completed your employee performance reviews, there is one final step you must take. **A copy of the summary performance rating for each employee must be submitted to the Processing Section in Human Resources Operations – Minneapolis for entry into the personnel database.** The reason for entry into the personnel database is twofold: 1) proof that the appraisal was conducted for

accountability reporting; and 2) use in construction of a retention register in the event a Reduction in Force is ever required.



Please do not send copies of the performance standards; only the Form AD-435 showing the summary rating is required. Copies of ratings are not retained permanently by HR; original copies of the ratings should be filed in the Employee Performance File (EPF) which is maintained by the supervisor.

Submit approved Performance awards (AD 287-2 and justification, including AD-435 if award is performance-based) to HRO Processing by November 29, 2010.

Trivia

T	O	C	T	O	B	E	R	K	H
Y	B	I	N	C	R	E	A	S	E
J	E	J	Q	H	S	Z	Q	I	U
S	E	V	I	T	N	E	C	N	I
I	G	U	A	S	F	A	V	Q	D
Q	N	C	Q	L	O	C	I	B	W
Q	I	W	E	B	U	H	S	Z	L
H	T	T	M	O	R	A	I	C	M
V	A	X	L	W	O	P	T	O	N
D	R	E	P	T	P	K	O	E	G

Find your answers in the word find (word key below)

There is a new policy for recruitment, relocation, and retention ____.

USDA has renewed its commitment to _____ employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including veterans.

If you are retiring between November and January, send your retirement forms three to ____ months in advance of your retirement date.

To protect your assets, you should _____ the background of financial professionals prior to doing business with them.

The 24 hour _____ family support policy now extends to same-sex domestic partners of federal employees.

Completing the medical release form as part of your background investigation does _____ mean you are required to schedule an appointment for a physician's _____.

New performance elements and measures for supervisors and managers will take effect _____ 1, 2010.

A copy of the summary performance _____ for each employee must be submitted to HRO / Processing.

Submitted by Kim Kilde

INCENTIVES INCREASE FOUR EVALUATE LWOP NOT VISIT OCTOBER RATING

Leave and Compensation



Extension of 24-Hour LWOP Family

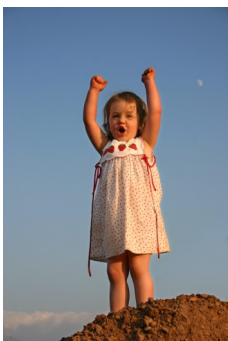
Support Policy to Same-Sex Domestic Partners of Federal Employees

Submitted by Cindy Hadlich

In his June 2, 2010 memorandum, President Obama directed Federal agencies to extend certain benefits to same-sex domestic partners of Federal employees and, where applicable, to the children of same-sex domestic partners of Federal employees, to the maximum extent permitted by law. See www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-memorandum-extension-benefits-same-sex-domestic-partners-federal-emplo.

The purpose of this memorandum is to allow 24 hours of leave without pay (LWOP) for school and early childhood educational activities; routine family medical purposes; and elderly relatives' health or care needs may be used to meet the needs of an employee's same-sex domestic partner or the partner's children.

Federal employees with same-sex domestic partners may now use 24 hours of LWOP in a leave year for the following reasons:



(1) School and Early Childhood Educational Activities.

Federal agencies should allow employees to participate in school activities directly related to the educational advancement of a child, including children of an employee's same-sex domestic partner. This includes parent-teacher conferences or meetings with child-care providers, interviewing for a new school or child-care facility, or participating in volunteer activities supporting the child's educational advancement. "School" refers to

an elementary school, secondary school, Head Start program, or a child-care facility.

(2) Routine Family Medical Purposes.

Federal employees should be permitted to accompany the children, including the children of their same-sex domestic partners to routine medical or dental appointments, such as annual checkups or vaccinations.

(3) Elderly Relatives' Health or Care Needs.

Federal agencies should allow employees to accompany an elderly relative, including the elderly relative of their same sex domestic partner to routine medical or dental appointments or other professional services related to the care of the elderly relative, such as making arrangements for housing, meals, phones, banking services, and other similar activities.

The Human Resources Desk Guide is being updated to reflect these changes. The changes will be posted at the following link:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4630/4630sesa.shtml#situations

Please contact your servicing HR Specialist on the Leave and Compensation Team with any questions.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/lct.pdf

Leave and Compensation



Extension of Benefits to Domestic Partners of Federal Employees

On August 31, 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued Agency guidance on compliance with President Obama's June 2, 2010, Presidential memorandum, and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance on the extension of benefits to same-sex domestic partners of Federal employees. Following is a list of the benefits and programs that are currently available to agency employees, their family members and same-sex domestic partners. These include:

- If spouses and/or children of employees are invited to informational meetings, counseling services, or morale/wellness/recreation events, including office or work unit ceremonies, parties or other events, the invitation extends to employees' same-sex domestic partners and their children.
- The 24-hour Leave Without Pay (LWOP) policy encourages Federal agencies to take 24 hours of unpaid leave available to Federal employees for their family support purposes. The 24 hours of LWOP may be used for: (1) school and early childhood educational activities; (2) routine family medical purposes; and (3) elderly relatives' health or care needs to meet the needs of an employee's same-sex domestic partner or the partner's children. For more guidance on this leave usage, please see the accompanying article.
- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a professional counseling and referral service to help employees and their families with personal and professional problems. It is free, confidential, and voluntary. EAP can assist with all types of issues including, problems in the workplace, family, relationship issues, or struggles with alcohol or drug use/abuse. EAP is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For immediate assistance call 1-800-222-0364.
- The WorkLife4You Program, for APHIS and AMS only, is a comprehensive resource and referral service. A WorkLife4You specialist will talk with employees and family members about their specific needs, perform a customized search, and locate the resources they need. WorkLife4 You resources materials include topics such as adoption, parenting and child care; safety, nutrition, fitness/exercise, and health resources; educational programs for all-levels, preschool/nursery school, and financial aid; credit & debit assistance, insurance, social security, Medicare/Medicaid, real estate and loans, and retirement planning; and travel, pet care, moving/relocation, home improvement, automotive services, and consumer information.
- Human Resources continues to examine any new benefits made available to family members of employees and, where authorized by law, will continue to work to make them available to same-sex domestic partners.



Submitted by Dru Dukart



INFORMATION: e-QIP Medical Release Form

Personnel Security occasionally receives inquiries regarding the *Medical Release Form*, which is one of three signature/verification forms required when completing the e-QIP application for a background investigation through OPM's secure on-line system. This is a form required of those completing the SF-85P (Public Trust) or SF-86 (National Security) questionnaire.

PLEASE NOTE: *this form does not mean an employee is required to schedule an appointment for a physician's visit.* It is only intended to be used in the event there is a question regarding mental health consultations. Your signature on this form will allow the practitioner(s) to answer only the questions on the form. The authorization is only valid for one (1) year from the date signed or upon termination of applicant's affiliation with the Federal Government, whichever is sooner.



Changes to OPM Background Investigations – effective October 1, 2010

OPM has eliminated the Moderate Risk/Public Trust, *Limited Background Investigation (LBI)*. The cost for an LBI in FY2010 was \$2988 and will be replaced by the *Minimum Background Investigation (MBI)* at a FY2011 cost of \$809. This will be a considerable cost savings to the Agencies. *(Personnel Security is waiting for further guidance from the Department on the effect the elimination of the LBI will have on mission area facilities which currently requires the LBI for laboratory access.)*

Noncritical-Sensitive (National Security) positions determinations will **no longer** require the more expensive *Background Investigation (BI)* with Secret Access (FY2010 cost \$3670) but will be replaced by the *Access National Agency Check and Inquiries (ANACI)* w/Secret Clearance at a cost of \$260.



Updated Reimbursable Billing Rates for FY2011 – effective October 1, 2010

The new Investigations Reimbursable Billing Rates for FY2011 can be found on the HRD Personnel Security Web Site -- http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/personnel_security.shtml