

FOREIGN SERVICE EXAMINATION AND SELECTION

1. PURPOSE

This Directive states the policies and procedures for the examination and selection of applicants for career candidate appointments in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), International Services (IS), Foreign Service (FS).

2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This Directive replaces APHIS Directive 417.7, Foreign Service Examining and Selection, dated 7/9/84.

3. SCOPE

All APHIS-IS career-candidate appointments are covered by this Directive.

4. POLICY

It is APHIS-IS policy to attract the best qualified applicants for FS positions. APHIS-IS encourages eligible personnel of proven ability and experience from within APHIS, other USDA agencies, other agencies of the Federal Government, and the public and private sector who meet the statutory and eligibility requirements of the position to apply.

5. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- a. Applicants will be considered without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age (see 5.d.), disability, sexual orientation, marital or family status, political beliefs, parental status, or protected genetic information.
- b. Applicants must be U.S. citizens.
- c. Qualifications. Applicants must meet the basic qualification requirements of the occupational series as prescribed in the Office of Personnel Management's Qualification Standards Operating Manual.
- d. Age. Applicants must be no more than 59 years of age on the date of their career candidate appointment. The maximum age for appointment under this program is based on the requirement that all career-candidates will be able to:

- (1) Complete the requisite eligibility period of 3 to 4 years for tenure consideration, and
 - (2) Complete the requisite eligibility period of 5 years to receive retirement benefits, before reaching the mandatory retirement age of 65 as prescribed by the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended.
- e. Status. Applicants must have competitive status in the Civil Service personnel system.

6. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must submit the following in response to APHIS-IS recruitment announcements:

- a. SF-171, Personal Qualifications Statement, or
- b. OF-612, Optional Application for Federal Employment, or a
- c. Resume.
- d. Supplemental narrative describing the degree to which specific selection criteria are met and highlighting skills that would contribute to a successful career in the FS.
- e. Signed and dated IS Form 10, Assignment and Policy Commitment statement (see Attachment 1).

7. QUALIFYING GUIDELINES

- a. A standardized rating scale will be used for evaluating an applicant's technical knowledge, skills, and abilities; suitability for the work; communication skills, both oral and written; and managerial competence (if required by the position).
- b. Numerical Rating. A 100-point scale (maximum) will be used for rating applicants and placing them on the APHIS-IS FS rosters. The numerical rating consists of three components.
 - (1) Evaluation of the application,
 - (2) Interview results, and
 - (3) Assessment center evaluation.

Each component has a minimum level required to proceed to the next stage.

- (4) Individuals receiving an average score below 70 percent in the overall numerical rating will not be placed on the roster and will be removed from any further consideration.
- (5) Applicants receiving an average score of 70 points or above will be placed on an APHIS-IS FS roster (rank-ordered list) of eligible candidates. Individuals selected from the roster will be subject to their successfully passing a Class 1 Medical Clearance (Unlimited Clearance for Worldwide Assignment) and Top Secret Security Clearance prior to APHIS-IS FS appointment.

8. RECRUITMENT, EXAMINATION, AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

a. Recruitment.

APHIS-IS Administrative Services (AS) will:

- (1) Prepare APHIS-IS recruitment announcements.
- (2) Arrange for external recruitment publicity.
- (3) Conduct an initial review of an individual's application. This review determines if the applicant meets basic eligibility requirements (Handbook of Occupational Groups and Series, status, etc.). Ineligible applicants are notified in writing and eliminated from further consideration.
- (4) Refer names of applicants who are basically qualified to the appropriate review panel.

b. Examination. APHIS-IS uses FS specialty review panels to evaluate applicants for staffing needs abroad. The review panels evaluate and identify candidates for management's consideration for assignment in the APHIS-IS FS.

- (1) Review Panel membership will consist of a minimum of three members including at least:
 - (a) One job specialty expert,
 - (b) One FS employee (APHIS-IS), and
 - (c) A representative with collateral Equal Employment Opportunity duties.

- (2) Review panel members will:
- (a) Be designated by the IS Assistant Deputy Administrator, ISAS, in coordination with management officials,
 - (b) Be grade FP-2 (GS-14) or higher, and
 - (c) Identify candidates for consideration for the APHIS-IS FS rosters in classes FP-6 through FP-3 by occupational series.
- (3) The Review Panel will:
- (a) Convene to assess qualified applicants' managerial experience, technical skills, and suitability relative to the needs of the APHIS-IS FS. An ISAS personnel specialist will serve as a resource person to the panel and provide instruction, where appropriate. The instructions, at a minimum, will include:
 - 1 Their responsibility to keep panel discussions confidential;
 - 2 Their responsibility to consider only the information on the application by comparing it to the information in the announcement, position description, and rating plan; and
 - 3 How to use the rating plans to rate candidates.
 - (b) Independently evaluate each applicant against each knowledge, skill, and ability (KSA) definition and assign the appropriate point score.
 - (c) Resolve any discrepancies of four points or more (20 vs. 16, 15 vs. 11) among scores assigned by raters to an applicant for each KSA. The personnel specialist will be present and will participate in resolving and recording the scores.
 - (d) At the end of the evaluation, tally the totals for each evaluation criterion. The personnel specialist will record the totals. The final rankings of applicants will be determined by the total overall scores.
 - (e) Provide the list of the applicants rated 50 or over for further evaluation.

- (4) APHIS-ISAS will:
 - (a) Conduct structured, standardized, and documented reference checks and interviews.
 - (b) Coordinate online self-assessment and assessment center evaluation of applicants.
 - (c) Establish the APHIS-IS FS roster of highly-qualified candidates according to their numerical rating.
 - (d) Inform applicants in writing whether or not they made the APHIS-IS FS roster.
 - (e) Maintain the APHIS-IS FS roster for 18 months, as indicated on the announcement.
 - (f) Notify applicants not selected from the roster during the valid 18-month period of the need to reapply for the new APHIS-IS FS recruitment announcements.

c. **Final Selection**

- (1) Based on the needs of the Agency and the lack of a candidate from the APHIS-IS FS cadre to fill a position, a selection may be made from a valid roster of eligibles within the highest point range.
- (2) If a selection is not made from the applicants in the highest point range, a justification based on valid job-related or other reasons must be documented and approved by the ISAS Director of Personnel and Travel.
- (3) Selectees for FS career-candidate status at grades GS-9 through GS-13 are converted as lateral entry appointments at their current rank to class FP-6 through FP-3. A selectee at the GS-14 or higher level is converted to career-candidate appointment in the FS at the FP-3 level (GS-13).

9. APPOINTMENT AS A CAREER-CANDIDATE

- a. A career-candidate will be given an FS 4-year appointment that can be extended for up to an additional year if tenure is not granted. The purpose of the career-candidate appointment is to permit on-the-job evaluation of a candidate's performance, capability, and adjustment to the FS.

- b. After serving 3 years in the APHIS-IS FS, career-candidates are considered for career status by the Intermediate Selection Board.
- c. An employee serving as a career-candidate may be terminated by the APHIS-IS Deputy Administrator at any time during the 4-year period for unsatisfactory service or for causes that negatively impact the APHIS-IS FS.
- d. Candidates not recommended for career status in the FS during the 4-year period, or otherwise separated, that were working for APHIS at the time of their FS appointment, will be assigned to an APHIS position in the U.S. at their current grade.

10. INQUIRIES

- a. Direct inquiries through administrative channels to the ISAS Director of Personnel and Travel.
Director of Personnel and Travel
USDA/APHIS/IS, Unit 65
4700 River Road
Riverdale, MD 20737
USA
- b. This Directive is available on the [APHIS](#) Administrative Issuances homepage.

/s/

William J. Hudnall
Deputy Administrator
MRP Business Services

Attachment