
United States Department of Agriculture
Marketing and Regulatory Programs
Agriculture Marketing Service
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Mission Area Directive

MRP 4030.1

2/6/2020

CATEGORY RATING AND SELECTION

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1. PURPOSE

This Directive establishes the Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) policy on the use of category rating, a method of evaluating applicants under the Agency’s existing Delegated Examining authority and as prescribed in the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) Delegated Examining Operations Handbook.

2. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS AND REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

a. This Directive supersedes MRP 4030.1 Category Rating and Selection Policy, dated 10/29/2010.

(1) The principle changes to MRP 4030.1 are as follows:

(a) Section 5b: Added definition of Luevano Consent Decree.

- (b) Section 7d: Added policy statement to authorize use of category rating methodology to fill positions covered under the Luevano Consent Decree at the GS-5 and GS-7 grade levels.
 - (c) Section 8: Added “Roles and Responsibilities” section.
 - (d) Section 9d(1)(d): Added sole survivorship preference.
 - (e) Section 10: Added “Records Management” section.
- b. This Directive is in force until cancelled or superseded.

3. BACKGROUND

On June 15, 2004, OPM published final regulations that:

- a. Permit Federal agencies to develop and use a category rating method as an alternative method to assess applicants for positions filled through delegated examining; and
- b. Direct agencies to establish their own policies.

On May 11, 2010, The White House issued a Presidential Memorandum entitled *Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process*. The Presidential Memorandum directs Federal agencies to use the category rating approach rather than the “rule of three” approach effective November 1, 2010.

4. AUTHORITIES AND REFERENCES

- a. 5 U.S.C., Part III, Subpart B, Chapter 33, Subchapter I, Section 3317, [Competitive Service; Certification from Registers](#)
- b. 5 U.S.C., Part III Subpart B, Chapter 33, Subchapter I, Section 3319, [Alternative Ranking and Selection Procedures](#)
- c. Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process, [Presidential Memorandum](#), dated May 11, 2010
- d. 5 CFR, Chapter 1, Subchapter B, Part 337, Subpart C, [Alternative Rating and Selection Procedures](#)

- e. 29 CFR, Subtitle B, Chapter XIV, Part 1607, [Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures](#)
- f. 36 CFR, Chapter XII, Subchapter B, Part 1220, [Federal Records; General](#)
- g. USDA, Departmental Regulation 4030-337-2, [Category Rating](#)
- h. USDA, Departmental Regulation 4030-337-004, [Delegated Examining](#)
- i. [OPM's Delegated Examining Operation Handbook](#) (Chapter 5 - Assess Applicants, Chapter 6 - Certifying Eligibles, and Appendix C - Records Retention and Disposition Schedule)
- j. Human Resources Desk Guide Subchapter 4030, [Category Rating](#)

5. DEFINITIONS

- a. Category Rating. A ranking and selection procedure used to assess applicants for positions filled through the delegated examining process. Under category rating, applicants are evaluated based on job-related criteria and placed into predefined quality categories with individuals who possess similar levels of job related competencies or knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Category rating is synonymous with alternative ranking as described in 5 U.S.C. §3319.
- b. Luevano Consent Decree. A court decree issued on November 19, 1981 by the United States District Court for the District of Columbia to resolve a class action suit known as *Luevano v. OPM*. The purpose of the decree was to eliminate adverse impact, if any, in certain appointments to a variety of positions at GS-05 and GS-07 formerly covered by the Professional and Administrative Career Examination (PACE).
- c. Quality Categories. Grouping of candidates with similar levels of job-related competencies/KSAs.

6. SCOPE

- a. This Directive applies to MRP recruitment action processed under delegated examining procedures.
- b. This Directive does not apply to MRP recruitment action processed under merit promotion procedures or excepted service procedures.

7. POLICY

It is MRP policy to:

- a. Comply with all Federal and Departmental rules, regulations, and policies governing category rating.
- b. Provide managers and supervisors with effective hiring flexibilities to facilitate and streamline the selection of high quality candidates.
- c. Enhance the scope and timeliness of recruitment efforts by utilizing category rating as a ranking and selection procedure for positions filled through delegated examining.
- d. Allow use of category rating procedures to fill positions covered by the Luevano Consent Decree at the GS-05 and GS-07 grade levels as an alternative to the OPM Administrative Careers with America assessment procedure.

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The implementation of the policy and procedures as established by this Directive requires the responsibilities of the following individuals and/or groups:

- a. The MRP Human Resources Division will:
 - (1) Establish category rating policy that identifies MRP requirements for implementing category rating;
 - (2) Interpret the statutes of policies and regulations pertaining to category rating;
 - (3) Serve as liaison with USDA, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM)
 - (4) Submit the Agency report (prepared by HRO) to OHRM on the use of MRP category rating and selection procedures when required.
 - (5) Provide technical advice, guidance, and training to hiring managers who use category rating;

- (6) Collaborate with the hiring manager to define each quality category through job analysis conducted in accordance with the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures*; and
 - (7) Consult with the hiring manager to decide if and when to merge quality categories.
- b. Managers and Supervisors will:
- (1) Work with MRP HRD to complete a job analysis; and
 - (2) Consult with MRP HRD to decide if and when to merge categories.

9. PROCEDURES

Category rating is required to fill permanent, term, and temporary positions in the competitive civil service under delegated examining procedures. Category rating is not required when filling positions through direct-hire authority. This Directive establishes the following procedures:

a. Quality Categories

MRP will use three quality categories to assess applicants under the category rating method: *Best Qualified*, *Well Qualified*, and *Qualified*. Each category will be defined through a job analysis process that uses the level of job competencies/KSAs required for the job as a basis for each definition. The job analysis must be consistent with the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures*.

When using OPM's Standing Registers, MRP must follow OPM's established quality categories for each register.

b. Rating Methods

MRP may use either of the following category rating methods:

- (1) Score-Based Method. Under this method, applicants will be placed into quality categories based on their scores obtained through an applicant assessment (e.g., Hiring Management). The following score ranges define quality categories:

- (a) **Best Qualified* – Applicants who have a score between 95 and 100.
- (b) ***Well Qualified* – Applicants who have a score between 85 and 94.9.
- (c) *Qualified* – Applicants who have a score between 70 and 84.99.

**The cut-off for the Best Qualified category may be increased or lowered, as appropriate. However, all cut-off scores must be identified prior to issuing the job announcement.*

***The cut-off score for the Well Qualified category (85 points) is consistent with the 'Well Qualified' cut-off score under the USDA Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP).*

- (2) Manual Method. Under this method the MRP servicing Human Resources Operations office will work with the hiring manager and/or subject matter expert to:
 - (a) Create and distinguish three quality categories: *Best Qualified*, *Well Qualified*, and *Qualified*; and
 - (b) Define each quality category through a job analysis that used level of job competencies/KSAs required for the job as a basis for each definition. (Note: All quality categories must be identified before opening the job announcement.)

c. Job Announcement Requirements

MRP must include the following information in all job announcements for positions filled under category rating procedures.

- (1) A statement describing that category rating procedures will be used to rank and select eligible candidates. This statement must be included in the “How You Will Be Evaluated” section.
- (2) A statement describing the quality categories. This statement may be as simple as identifying the categories as *Best Qualified*, *Well Qualified*, and *Qualified*.
- (3) A description of how veteran’s preference is applied under category rating procedures.

d. Veteran’s Preference

MRP will apply veterans' preference as prescribed in 5 U.S.C. § 3319(b) and (c) 2, and as referenced below:

- (1) Within each quality category, veterans' preference eligibles will be listed ahead of non-preference eligible in alphabetical order by preference type:
 - (a) Compensable disability of 30 percent or more (CPS);
 - (b) Compensable disability of 10 percent or more, but less than 30 percent (CP);
 - (c) Compensable disability of less than 10 percent, derived preference; and other "10 point" preference eligibles (XP);
 - (d) Other preference eligibles not listed above (TP-preference eligibles with no disability rating) and SSP-sole survivorship preference); and then
 - (e) Non-preference eligibles in alphabetical order.
- (2) Preference eligibles do not receive additional points under category rating procedures.
- (3) For positions other than professional and scientific at the GS-09 level or higher, qualified preference eligibles with a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more (i.e., 30 percent Compensable Disability Preference (CP)) are placed at the top of the highest quality category.
- (4) For professional and scientific positions at the GS-09 level or higher, qualified preference eligibles with a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more (i.e., CPS and CP) are placed at the top of the appropriate quality category for which they qualify.

e. Referral and Selection of Candidates

- (1) Within each quality category, veterans' preference eligibles will be listed ahead of non-preference eligible in alphabetical order by preference type:
 - (a) Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP) eligibles;

- (b) Eligible candidates who lost consideration due to erroneous certification; and
- (c) Eligible candidates in the highest quality category, using either option described below. (In accordance with Departmental Regulation 4030-337, this determination may be made on a case-by-case basis.)
 - 1. All eligible candidates in the highest quality category, with preference eligible listed ahead of non-preference eligible; or
 - 2. Only the preference eligible in the highest quality category when the number of preference eligible equals or exceeds the number of positions to be filled.
- (d) If there are fewer than three candidates in the highest quality category, candidates from the next lower category may be combined with those in the highest category (see paragraph 9f).
- (2) Qualified candidates are referred in the appropriate quality category according to veterans' preference within each category.
- (3) Selections must be made from the highest quality category.
- (4) Any veterans' preference eligible in the highest quality category may be selected regardless of the type of preference to which he/she is entitled.
- (5) The hiring manager cannot pass over a preference eligible to select a non-preference eligible unless a written objection is submitted and sustained in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 3318. Objections to preference eligible shall be processed in accordance with the procedures outlined within Chapter 6 of OPM's Delegated Examining Operations Handbook.

f. Merging Quality Categories

- (1) If there are fewer than three candidates in the highest quality category, the two highest categories may be merged into one category. The newly merged category becomes the new highest quality category from which selection can be made. All preference eligible in the merged category must be placed ahead of non-preference eligible.
- (2) Merging is optional and can only be done when there are fewer than three candidates in the highest quality category. There is no limit to the number of times categories can be merged. The human resources specialist, in

conjunction with the hiring official, may decide to merge categories at two places in the hiring process:

- (a) Before certifying/issuing the Certificate of Eligibles; or
- (b) Before making a selection.

g. Reporting Requirements

MRP will collect and submit the following information to the Office of Human Resources Management, USDA when requested:

- (1) Number of employees hired under category rating;
- (2) How the category rating method has impacted the hiring of veterans and minorities, including those who are American Indian or Alaskan Natives, Asian, Black or African American, and native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders; and
- (3) Training provided to managers in the administration of category rating.

10. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Federal records created by this Directive must be maintained in accordance with the established [General Records Schedule \(GRS\)](#), [APHIS](#) and [AMS](#) Records Management Handbooks (when applicable), and the [OPM Delegated Examining Handbook \(Appendix C\)](#). If employees are named in an active litigation hold, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, and/or other action, those records, regardless of media, must be preserved and maintained in their native format until otherwise notified by your Agency Records Officer and/or the Office of General Counsel.

- a. MRP-IT, Information Management Branch (MRP-IT, IMB) is the official recordkeeper of this Directive which is to be preserved permanently, per [Paperwork and Data Management \(PDM\) 4-1](#).
- b. The Human Resources Division, Human Resources Operations office will establish and maintain records (i.e. recruitment case files) for each position filled using the category rating methodology. The records will be maintained in accordance with the retention and disposition schedule established by GRS 2.1, Employee Acquisition Records, items 050, 051, 150 and 160, and the OPM Delegated Examining Handbook, Appendix C.

- c. Retention may be in either electronic or hardcopy format, or a combination of both. Unless otherwise instructed, all records are to be kept for two full fiscal years or longer if a grievance, appeal, or complaint is pending.

11. INQUIRIES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- a. Request for policy interpretations on this Directive may be directed to the Human Resources Policy Branch at 301-851-2929.
- b. General inquires on procedural matters should be directed to [Human Resources Operations Service Providers](#).
- c. Records management inquiries should be directed to the Program Records Management Liaison for [APHIS](#) or [AMS](#).
- d. Additional information for operating guidelines on category rating are contained in the Human Resources Desk Guide (HRDG), [Subchapter 4030](#), Category Rating.
- e. This Directive can be accessed online via the [APHIS](#) and [AMS](#) Issuance Web page.

/s/

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