HRDG 4030 - Category Rating - Introduction

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Subchapter 4030
Category Rating
Introduction

- Purpose of this Subchapter
- Glossary
- Background
- Related Regulations/Guidelines
- Scope
- Quality Categories
- Summary of Category Rating
- Responsibilities
- Training

Return to 4030 Table of Contents

Purpose of this Subchapter

This Human Resources Desk Guide (HRDG) Subchapter:

- Provides Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) operating guidelines and instructions for supervisors, managers, and HR practitioners to follow in implementing the MRP policy on category rating,
- Provides examples of the primary category rating methods, and
- Establishes the responsibilities of the MRP Human Resources Policy Branch and the MRP Servicing Personnel Office (SPO).

Ability - Competence to perform an observable behavior or a behavior that results in an observable product.

Applicant - A person who applies for a vacant position.

Assessment Tool - A device or method used to measure the degree to which an applicant possesses the competencies or knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) necessary for successful job performance. Examples of assessment tools include rating schedules, written tests, work samples, and structured interviews.

Candidate - An applicant who meets the minimum qualification requirements for a position.

Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP) - A program designed to assist surplus and displaced employees by providing selection priority for competitive service vacancies.

Category Rating - A ranking and selection procedure used to assess applicants for positions filled through the competitive 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 (KSAs). Category rating is synonymous with alternative rating as described in 5 U.S.C. §3319.

Competency - A measurable pattern of KSAs, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully.

Competitive Examining - A process used to fill civil service positions with candidates who apply from outside the Federal workforce. It is also used to enable current Federal employees without civil service status to compete for a permanent appointment and to enable employees with civil service status to compete for other Federal positions.

Crediting Plan - A method by which a candidate's job-related competencies/KSAs are evaluated by reviewing the factual background of a candidate, to include positions held, levels of responsibility, accomplishments, and job-related education

Background

On June 15, 2004, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) published final regulations implementing certain human resources flexibilities contained in the Homeland Security Act of 2002. One of the flexibilities allows Federal agencies to use a category rating method as an optional alternative ranking and selection procedure. Section 1312 of the Homeland Security Act states that “OPM in exercising its authority under Section 3304, or an agency with delegated examining authority under Section 1104(a) (2), may establish a category rating system for evaluating candidates for positions in the competitive service based on merit and consistent with regulations prescribed by OPM, rather than assigning individual numerical ratings.”

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 no later than November 1, 2010.

Related Regulations/ Guidelines

This Subchapter supplements the following regulations and guidelines:

- Public Law 107-296 (Homeland Security Act of 2002);
- Title 5, United States Code, Part 3317;
- Title 5, United States Code, Part 3319;
- Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 337, Subpart C;
- Federal Register (FR), Vol. 69, No. 114, pages 33271 to 33277, dated June 15, 2004;
- FR, Vol. 68, No. 114, pages 35265 to 35270, dated June 13, 2003;
- Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 5;
- Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 6;
- Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures;
- **USDA Departmental Regulation 4030-337-2**, Category Rating;
- **MRP Directive 4030.1** (243.75 KB)**,** Category Rating and Selection Policy; and
- Presidential Memorandum, *Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process*, dated May 11, 2010.

Scope

What is the scope of this Subchapter?

- This Subchapter applies to MRP recruitment actions processed under delegated examining procedures.
- This Subchapter does not apply to MRP recruitment actions processed under merit promotion procedures or excepted service procedures.

Quality Categories

What quality categories will be used in MRP?

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.*

Quality categories will be predetermined and defined by the hiring manager, in consultation with the HR practitioner, before preparing the job announcement.

Note: You may not establish a "not qualified" category in category rating. Only qualified candidates will be placed in a category.

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

What's the difference between category rating and the "rule of three?"*

- Unlike traditional "rule of three" ranking and selection procedures, candidates assessed through category rating procedures are **not** ranked by individual numeric score. Rather, candidates are evaluated based on job-related criteria and placed into predefined quality categories with individuals who possess similar levels of job related competencies/KSAs.
- Under category rating procedures, hiring managers are no longer required to select from the top three available candidates. Instead, hiring managers may select any of the candidates in the highest quality category as long as a veterans' preference eligible in that category is not passed over for a non-preference eligible.

* For additional comparisons between category rating and the "rule of three," see **Appendix A** (25.38 KB) - Summary Chart: Category Rating Compared to Traditional "Rule of Three" Method.

What are the benefits of category rating to the hiring manager?

- Provides additional hiring flexibility and efficiency.
- Gives hiring managers the potential to select from a wider pool of candidates than previously allowed under the "rule of three."
- Does not limit hiring managers to considering candidates in any particular order (i.e., they are not bound by the "rule of three").
- Substantially equal candidates are treated as such. This means that candidates with similar competencies/KSAs are more likely to get referred to the hiring manager for employment consideration, regardless of minor differences in examination ratings or numeric scores.

Example: Traditional "Rule of Three" Method vs. Category Rating

The following example illustrates the increased flexibility of the

Responsibilities

The Human Resources Policy Branch will:

- Establish category rating policy that identifies MRP requirements for implementing category rating,
- Provide interpretation of policies and regulations pertaining to category rating,
- Advise and guide the SPO on statutory and regulatory requirements,
- Serve as liaison with USDA, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), and
- Submit the Agency report (prepared by the SPO) to OHRM on the use of MRP category rating and selection procedures when required.

The Servicing Personnel Office (SPO) will:

- Provide technical advice, guidance and training to hiring managers who use category rating,
- Collaborate with the hiring manager to define each quality category through job analysis conducted in accordance with the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures,*
- Consult with the hiring manager to decide if and when to merge quality categories, and
- Submit an Agency report to the Human Resources Policy Branch on the use of MRP category rating and selection procedures when required.

Managers and Supervisors will:

- Work with the SPO to complete a job analysis, and
- Consult with the SPO to decide if and when to merge quality categories.

Training	Training options include, but are not limited to: • HR practitioners will provide specific procedural information and training to managers/supervisors, • The Fundamentals of APHIS Human Resources Management (FAHRM) blended learning course will include information on category rating for hiring managers.

Return to 4030 Table of Contents

Print