

**Forest Service Handbook
National Headquarters - Washington Office
Washington, DC**

**Forest Service Handbook 6109.16 – Demonstration Project Handbook
Zero Code**

Amendment: 6109.16-1992-1

Effective date: October 21, 1992

Duration: This amendment is effective until superseded or removed.

Approved by: F. Dale Robertson, Chief

Date approved:

Responsible Staff:

Last Change:

Superseded Document(s):

Digest: Following is an explanation of the changes throughout the directive by section.

6109.16: The New Demonstration Project Handbook, FSH 6109.16, provides direction on the implementation at Forest Service experimental sites of the USDA demonstration project, which is testing four major innovations in current personnel policy and practice. These four areas are (1) delegations of authority for recruitment and hiring; (2) streamlined candidate assessment and selection process; (3) recruitment incentives; and (4) extended probationary period for scientists. The zero code has exhibits containing the standard operating procedures and the project plan. Chapter 10 covers Recruitment, Candidate Evaluation, and Selection. Chapter 20 covers the Extended Probationary Period for scientists.

06.2 - Exhibit 01

Project Plan for USDA Demonstration Project,
as Published in the Federal Register (55 FR 9062, March 9, 1990)

Publication Date
6325-01

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Proposed Demonstration Project; Department of Agriculture

AGENCY: Office of Personnel Management

ACTION: Notice of approval of a final demonstration project

SUMMARY: Title VI of the Civil Service Reform Act authorizes the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to conduct demonstration projects which experiment with new and different personnel management concepts to determine whether such changes in personnel policy or procedure would result in improved Federal personnel management. The proposed Department of Agriculture Demonstration Project was published in the Federal Register on August 23, 1989. This is the final demonstration project plan approved by the Office of Personnel Management.

DATES: Approval date: The demonstration project was approved by the Office of Personnel Management on March 5, 1990.

Implementation date: The demonstration project will be implemented after the 90-day congressional review period.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: (1) Mary Ellen Recchia, U.S. Department of Agriculture, (202) 447-8580; (2) Paul R. Thompson, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, (202) 632-6164 (after April 30, 1990, (202) 606-2890).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Department of Agriculture has submitted a proposed demonstration project for consideration under chapter 47 of

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title 5, U.S. Code entitled "The U.S. Department of Agriculture Demonstration Project."

The purpose of the project is to demonstrate a flexible and responsive staffing system which will permit managers to attain a quality workforce reflective of society. To this end, the demonstration project tests four major innovations in current personnel policy and practice:

- (1) Delegation of authority for the day-to-day recruitment and hiring process to the agency for internal redelegation, as appropriate;
- (2) A streamlined candidate assessment and selection process, based on greater delegation of direct hire authority and replacement of numerical ratings with broad quality groupings;
- (3) Recruitment incentives, including bonuses and relocation expenses, to attract candidates to hard-to-fill positions; and,
- (4) Establishment of an extended probationary period for scientists, to provide greater opportunity to evaluate employee performance before granting career status.

The demonstration project will cover up to 5,000 newly hired employees, at any given time, at about 140 locations within the Forest Service (FS) and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). Covered employees will represent all occupational groups and grade levels (excluding SES) at the project sites, including both General Schedule (GS) and Federal Wage System (FWS) employees.

A proposed demonstration project plan was published on August 23, 1989, in the Federal Register (54 FR 35134). On the same date, copies of the proposed plan were transmitted to both Houses of Congress as required by 5 U.S.C. 4703 (b)(4). On October 17, 1989, an amendment to the proposed demonstration project was published in the Federal Register (54 FR 42608). The public comment period began on August 23, 1989.

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The plan for the proposed demonstration project reads as follows:

U.S. Department of Agriculture,
Demonstration Project
Project Plan

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I. Executive Summary

A. Purpose

The purpose of this demonstration project is to develop a recruitment and selection program for new hires that is flexible and responsive to local recruitment needs and which will facilitate the attainment of a quality workforce reflective of society.

In support of this goal, the following project objectives have been identified:

- (1) Increase the flexibility and responsiveness of the recruitment and hiring system.
- (2) Increase the reliability of the decision to grant career tenure for employees in scientific positions.

During the course of this project, the following interventions will be tested:

- (a) Decentralize the decision to authorize direct hire in shortage categories.
- (b) Implement an alternative candidate assessment method which uses categorical grouping instead of numeric score.
- (c) Provide the option of awarding monetary incentives for recruitment purposes.
- (d) Provide the option of reimbursing relocation travel and transportation expenses beyond those currently authorized for travel to first post of duty.
- (e) Extend the one-year probationary period to three years for employees in scientific positions.

B. Benefits to be Derived from the Project

The combined changes are expected to simplify the hiring system, and to improve the ability of the agency to compete for quality candidates, reflective of society.

C. Project Administration

The project is a joint effort on the part of the U.S Department of Agriculture Office of Personnel (OP), the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), and the Forest

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Service (FS). The project is guided by an Executive Steering Committee and will be conducted through a project task group. Representatives from OP, ARS, and FS serve on both the steering committee and the task group, reflecting the joint nature of the project.

D. Participating Organizations

The demonstration project will be conducted entirely within ARS and FS of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, at selected experimental and comparison sites, which have been listed in Appendix B. Agency reorganization may necessitate changes to this list during the life of the project.

E. Types and Numbers of Participating Employees

Demonstration project coverage at any one time is limited to 5,000 employees hired under project provisions and who are serving a probationary period or receiving a recruitment incentive. Since the project covers only prospective new hires, the occupational mix of participating employees cannot be identified precisely. Based on historical staffing patterns at the participating sites, it is anticipated that the annual breakdown of new hires will include the following approximate percentages for each of the participating agencies:

ARS: 17% scientific, 9% professional, 11% administrative, 36% technical, and 27% clerical and wage grade.

FS: 2% scientific, 18% professional, 8% administrative, 43% technical, and 29% clerical and wage grade.

The most populous occupational series within ARS include biological technician, entomologist, plant physiologist, and chemist. The most populous occupational series within FS include forester, forestry technician, engineering technician, and civil engineer.

F. Labor Participation

ARS employees are represented at various experimental locations by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE); FS employees are also represented by both AFGE and NFFE and by the National Association of Government Employees (NAGE).

Briefings were conducted by both agencies during the developmental stage of the project. In accordance with 5 U.S.C. 4703 (f) and (g), the agencies did consult and are in the process of negotiating with certified labor organizations.

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G. Methodology

This proposal provides a detailed description of the following interventions, or personnel system changes, to be tested and evaluated during the life of the project: (1) delegated direct hire authority; (2) an alternative candidate assessment method; (3) recruitment incentives; (4) payment of relocation travel and transportation expenses; and (5) an extended probationary period.

H. Training

A comprehensive training effort will be conducted prior to project implementation in order to ensure that project interventions are implemented as originally conceived.

I. Evaluation Plan

An evaluation plan has been designed for the purpose of measuring the outcomes expected to result from project implementation. The scope of the evaluation plan is intended to provide sufficient data to evaluate the Federal sector-wide applicability of each of the interventions.

The evaluation model is part of a quasi-experimental design using experimental and comparison groups matched for characteristics but not necessarily for population numbers. The model will provide statistical and historical data regarding the effects attributable to the experimental treatments. Baseline data collection will occur pre-treatment, and data will be collected during the post-treatment period for comparison and analysis.

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II. Introduction

A. Purpose

The project was conceived in response to managerial concern with the adequacy of the present recruiting and hiring system in light of the predicted recruitment challenges of the future, which have been described in recent publications including Workforce 2000, and Civil Service 2000, which were prepared by the Hudson Institute for the Department of Labor and The Office of Personnel Management, respectively. The purpose of this project is to develop and test an alternative system which will enable Federal managers to meet these challenges.

Workforce 2000 outlines an employment future characterized by a slowly growing population, which will result in slower labor force growth. This, in turn, is expected to result in tighter labor markets, with fewer well-educated workers available, and increased competition among employers for available candidates.

Civil Service 2000 provides the following analysis of the impact of these trends within the Federal sector: "Because these tight labor markets are likely to develop in different ways in different states and to shift quickly in response to economic and population changes, it is essential to decentralize responsibility and to provide more flexibility in hiring and personnel management than is characteristic of the current system. Federal employers in locally tight or expensive labor markets must be able to compete for workers on a par with private employers if they are to continue to fulfill their responsibilities" (page 27).

This publication goes on to describe a slowly emerging crisis of competence, as labor markets become tighter and it becomes increasingly more difficult to hire qualified workers. The competition for qualified workers will only intensify, for coupled with slower labor force growth is the fact that substantial numbers of new entrants to the labor market will have lower levels of competence in language, math, and other basic skills. The inability of Federal agencies to adapt as easily as private employers to fluctuating labor market conditions means that, ". . . some of them will be unable to compete successfully with the private sector, and may find it much harder to recruit and keep good employees" (page 30).

It is imperative that Federal managers and others in positions of responsibility prepare to meet the recruitment challenges of the future. This project was developed as part of a continuing effort to anticipate and successfully confront these challenges. The strategies and recommendations provided by Workforce 2000, Civil Service 2000, and other publications provided guidance and direction as we developed this project. It is our intention to evaluate the demonstration project in order to determine the extent to which each intervention impacts the recruitment and hiring program.

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It is anticipated that an alternative recruitment and hiring system, offering expanded incentives for recruitment purposes, will enable Federal managers to more readily adapt to fluctuating labor market conditions. In addition, the level of performance demonstrated by those hired under the new system is expected to be equal to the level of performance demonstrated by employees hired through traditional methods.

B. Problems with the Present System

The current method of employee intake, generally through centralized testing, assumes a surplus of applicants for available positions within the Federal sector, with a concomitant emphasis on the stratification process required to provide manageable rosters of best qualified candidates from among the numerous applicants for a given position vacancy.

In reality, however, the manner in which changing demographics have fundamentally altered the American labor force has been well documented in the publications cited above. As the population ages and technological innovation accelerates, shortages of qualified candidates either already exist or are predicted to develop in a wide variety of occupations. Trend lines indicate an exacerbation of this problem. Simply stated, the supply/demand curve for labor resources no longer reflects an excess of supply but, rather, a strong demand for well-trained, quality candidates.

For example, FS has been recruiting candidates with backgrounds in engineering research combined with a knowledge of wood technology. These candidates are in exceedingly short supply; the few meeting these criteria are found either in academia, or conducting research in private wood technology firms. Experience has shown that potential candidates have been lost to competing employers who can more quickly make position offers and establish reporting dates.

As another example, ARS has advertised a GS-13 Plant Geneticist position at a remote location on two separate occasions during the past year and received only two applications. Neither applicant possessed the highly specialized skills necessary to perform the duties of the position. The availability of recruitment incentives might have enhanced the ability of the agency to attract qualified candidates to this location.

C. Benefits to be Derived from the Project

The demonstration system is expected to simplify the selection and appointment of candidates to the Federal service. Additionally, the system is expected to improve the ability of agencies to compete with other public employers and private industry for available quality candidates.

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D. Participating Organizations

ARS and FS experimental and comparison sites are identified in Appendix B. Agency reorganization may necessitate changes to this list during the life of the project.

E. Types and Numbers of Participating Employees

Demonstration project coverage is limited to permanent hires receiving appointment to the competitive service at the experimental sites identified in Appendix B following selection under the demonstration project candidate assessment method.

Candidates with reinstatement eligibility as currently defined by regulation may continue to be noncompetitively appointed to positions at experimental sites under the reinstatement authority. At the discretion of the selecting official, however, reinstatement eligibles may be considered for competitive appointment under the demonstration project authority and all provisions pertaining thereto.

Demonstration project coverage is extended to General Schedule (GS) and Federal Wage System (FWS), regardless of occupational series, from grade 1 through grade 15 or equivalent. Candidates for appointment to the Senior Executive Service, to supergrade positions, or to the Executive Assignment System are excluded from coverage.

The rate at which the number of accessions approaches the regulatory limitation of 5,000 employees to be covered under this authority will be centrally monitored throughout the test sites.

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III. Methodology

A. Objective #1: Increase the flexibility and responsiveness of the recruitment and hiring system.

1. Interventions

- (a) Decentralize the decision to authorize direct hire in shortage categories.
- (b) Implement an alternative candidate assessment method which uses categorical grouping instead of numeric score.
- (c) Provide the option of awarding monetary incentives for recruitment purposes.
- (d) Provide the option of reimbursing relocation travel and transportation expenses beyond those currently authorized for travel to first post of duty.

Interventions (a) and (b), and (c) and (d), will be discussed separately in the sections that follow.

2. Description of Interventions (a) and (b)

a. Introduction

Civil Service 2000 recommends a number of strategies for attracting, hiring, training, motivating, and keeping talented people. Chief among these is the following: "Decentralize authority and responsibility for operations and hiring . . . Standardized recruiting, testing, competition, classification, and pay should give way to decentralized personnel management, giving agency managers full responsibility not only for their missions, but for the human resources they need to accomplish them. . ." (page 32).

The concept of decentralized authority and full responsibility for human resources is fundamental to this project. The alternative system is founded upon the assumption that centralized registers no longer meet local hiring needs and that a level of qualifications can be established at which all candidates meeting this level are well qualified. Selection will be made from this group following the normal candidate evaluation process, which may include such additional measures as personal interview, reference checks, etc.

The experimental sites will have examining authority for all of their positions. The elimination of centralized registers which establish fine distinctions among

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candidates will be balanced by an increased emphasis on the responsibility and accountability of managers for ensuring that selection and advancement are determined on the basis of the ability, knowledge, and skills necessary to perform the duties of the position.

This system is expected to produce a workforce equal to that which has been obtained through traditional testing and examining, without compromising the merit system principles, outlined in 5 U.S.C. 2301, which stipulate that, "Recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an effort to achieve a workforce from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity."

Fair and open competition will be provided by the proposed system as follows:

- (1) All basically qualified candidates (other than those eligible for appointment under the direct hire option) will be considered against the same job-related evaluation criteria for the purpose of placing candidates in the quality group.
- (2) All candidates meeting these criteria will be available for selection, with preference given to veterans. Candidates who do not meet these criteria are available for selection when there is an inadequate number of candidates in the quality group.
- (3) Candidates will no longer be eliminated from consideration by the rule of three or point score ranking.
- (4) Information regarding all vacancies to be filled under the demonstration project authority shall be made available to the appropriate State Employment Service offices and local Federal Job Information Centers.

Finally, recognizing the mandate contained in Title 5, U.S. Code, that the work force be from all segments of society, and to the extent that the current system may be a barrier to achieving this objective, the alternative system will allow managers and supervisors more direct access to a candidate pool that is reflective of society.

b. Overview of Method

As with the current system, the individual manager will decide whether to fill a position from among internal candidates or to recruit from the outside. If the decision is made to recruit from the outside using the demonstration project authority, candidates will be evaluated using the following method:

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(1) Candidate's basic eligibility is determined using OPM Handbook X-118 or modified standard, as outlined below. Questions regarding a candidate's suitability or general fitness to perform the duties of the position may be resolved at this or at any stage prior to appointment.

(2) Candidates meeting basic eligibility requirements are then evaluated for eligibility under the direct hire option, which allows candidates in shortage categories to be directly appointed.

(3) All remaining candidates meeting basic eligibility requirements are evaluated against job-related evaluation criteria, outlined below, which measure above average educational achievement, quality experience, and high ability. Candidates meeting any one of these criteria are placed in the quality group.

Selection will be made from the quality group, taking into account such factors as personal interview or reference check, etc. Candidates not meeting any of these criteria are in the eligible group, and may only be selected when there is an inadequate number of quality candidates available. Veterans preference will apply when selecting candidates from either group.

c. Recruitment Methods and Sources

The demonstration project authority is one option for outside recruitment. However, the participating agencies may make use of any direct hire authority issued by OPM, for example, in connection with a job fair, for the purpose of directly appointing individuals to positions at experimental sites. Demonstration project implementation at experimental sites does not preclude the use of other available noncompetitive appointing authorities intended to facilitate access to particular candidates, e.g., disabled individuals, students eligible for cooperative education programs, etc. The continued use of these programs is encouraged in support of agency employment goals and objectives.

Certificates of eligibles issued either by OPM or agencies with delegated examining authority will not be utilized at the experimental sites. However, the participating agencies may make use of any direct hire authority issued by OPM for the purpose of directly appointing individuals to positions at experimental sites. As these individuals will not be appointed under the demonstration project authority, none of the other provisions of the project such as incentives or extended probationary period will apply to them.

Appropriate recruitment methods and sources include those that are likely to yield candidates with knowledges, skills, or abilities sufficient to perform the duties of the position. Agencies will continue to utilize recruitment methods and sources which identify disabled individuals or members of protected groups.

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As no specific waivers of law or regulation are required prior to the development of an effective recruitment strategy, agencies will explore the use of innovative or creative recruitment methods and sources in order to facilitate the attainment of a quality workforce, reflective of society. Towards this end, agencies will take advantage, to the extent necessary, of the full range of telecommunications, printed, and other media in order to reach a sufficient number of qualified candidates.

Recruitment and consideration of candidates under the demonstration project authority will be subject to the following requirements:

(1) Current law and regulation concerning the Reemployment Priority List (RPL), and Displaced Employee (DE) or other outplacement programs, will be observed. The agency is responsible for maintaining and following the regulations concerning the RPL as outlined in pertinent FPM and Departmental guidance. No part of these regulations is waived for the purpose of this project.

Additionally, agencies are responsible for contacting the appropriate OPM office concerning the referral of displaced employees prior to making competitive appointments under the demonstration project authority, and according bona fide consideration, as appropriate, to DE or other outplacement program eligibles.

(2) Information regarding all vacancies to be filled under the demonstration project authority regardless of source will be made available to the appropriate State Employment Service offices and local Federal Job Information Centers. Procedures for providing such notification will be established at the local level.

Recruitment sources may include, but are not limited to, such activities as attendance at a job fair, career day, or professional association meeting; preparation and distribution of a vacancy announcement; on-campus recruiting; or other focused recruitment effort, etc. Procedures for the acceptance of unsolicited or walk-in applications will be established at the local level.

d. Determination of Basic Eligibility

A determination regarding each candidate's basic eligibility for a particular position will be made utilizing the standard criteria.

No part of law or regulation concerning citizenship requirements, security investigations, or other suitability issues is waived under this authority.

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Additionally, the requirement to pass any pre-employment physical, drug screening, or other fitness for duty examination remains in effect.

The determination that a candidate meets experience or education requirements will be made using OPM Handbook X-118 or approved single-agency standard. OPM policy on positive education, licensure, and professional certification requirements will be followed.

Selective placement factors may be established when judged to be critical to successful job performance and will be communicated to all candidates for particular position vacancies. These must be met for basic eligibility.

Test requirements as outlined in X-118 or elsewhere, including minimum typing or stenography scores, are eliminated. Instead, the manager's assessment of the candidate's ability to do the work of the position will be based on an evaluation of the candidate's training and experience. Managers may, however, continue to accept candidates' self-certification of typing or stenography proficiency when such documentation is necessary to perform an adequate assessment of basic eligibility.

Agencies are authorized to modify X-118 experience requirements (other than positive education, professional certification, or licensure requirements) when the agency determines that an individual can successfully perform the work of a position even though that person may not meet all the requirements in the OPM qualification standard. The modified standard must assure that candidates' backgrounds include experience which has provided the skills and abilities necessary for successful job performance. Agencies may not, however, require additional amounts of education or experience beyond those required by the standards, other than selective placement factors as indicated above.

The decision to modify X-118 experience requirements is discretionary on the part of the manager and is intended to provide management with a recruitment tool which will allow the consideration of candidates for whom X-118 might otherwise serve as a prima facie basis for exclusion. The decision to modify a standard will be made before a recruiting announcement is issued, and the announcement will include the modified standard.

Agencies may delegate the decision to use a modified standard to the lowest practicable level within the organization. The decision to modify X-118 requirements will be documented in the recruitment case file and will also be noted in the employee's Official Personnel Folder.

e. Candidate Evaluation

(1) Direct Hire of Individuals in Shortage Categories

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Candidates meeting basic eligibility requirements as outlined above, and who are in shortage categories as locally determined by the agency, may be directly appointed. Agency determination of shortage category will be made by applying the criteria in 5 C.F.R. 572.301 or other factors which the agency has determined to be significant, and may be delegated to the lowest practicable level within the organization.

Agency determination of shortage category may include, but is not limited to, consideration of such factors as external or local labor market demands, extent or impact of prior recruitment efforts, critical or recurring need for particular knowledges or skills based on chronic shortages, turbulent state of the art, etc.

A determination by one agency that a shortage of eligibles exists for a particular title, series, grade, and geographical location does not require a like determination by any other agency. A determination made in connection with one specific vacancy does not establish a precedent in connection with future vacancies.

Agency determination of shortage category will be documented. The documentation supporting the decision to appoint an individual under this authority will be placed on the right-hand or permanent side of the Official Personnel Folder.

(2) Evaluation of Candidates in Non-Shortage Categories

Candidates meeting basic eligibility requirements as outlined above, but who are not eligible for direct hire as outlined in the section immediately preceding, may be considered for appointment against the job-related evaluation criteria outlined below under above average educational achievement, quality experience, and high ability.

All candidates, to the extent necessary, will be evaluated against each of these criteria; that is, no candidate will be eliminated from the quality group without being considered under the three criteria outlined under (a), (b), and (c), below.

It is hypothesized that all employees hired through this system are equally likely to demonstrate successful job performance, regardless of the criterion under which the candidate qualifies.

Minimum grade point averages established under above average educational achievement or high ability, below, may be adjusted by mutual agreement between the participating agencies and OPM.

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(a) Candidates demonstrating above average educational achievement under any of the options outlined below are eligible for the quality category:

1. Candidate has completed all the requirements for, or is a candidate, within nine months, for a high school diploma, or a degree from an accredited junior college, college, university, or other baccalaureate institution, provided he or she meets one of the requirements listed below (b. & c. apply to post-high school only):

a. Candidate's grade point average is at least 2.70 on a 4.0 scale or equivalent. This is either the average of all completed courses at the time of application, or the average of all courses completed during the last two years of a high school, college, or other four year program, in which case verification that the required average was maintained is prerequisite to appointment.

b. Candidate's grade point average in the major field of study is at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale or equivalent. This is either the average of all completed courses at the time of application, or the average of all courses completed during the last two years of a four year curriculum, in which case verification that the required average was maintained is prerequisite to appointment.

c. Candidate is a member of one of the national honorary scholastic societies meeting the minimum requirements of the Association of College Honor Societies, other than freshman honor societies.

Applicants may not be appointed on the basis of overall grade point average if more than 10 percent of their grades were based on pass/fail or similar systems rather than on traditional grading systems. Such applicants may claim credit under this provision only on the basis of national honorary society membership. Candidates are required to submit an official transcript or similar correspondence documenting grade point average in order to establish eligibility for appointment based on above average educational achievement. In the event that grade point average has not been computed by the educational institution, an official transcript may provide the basis for manual computation. Transfer credits, foreign credits, and credits from more than one educational institution must be evaluated and included to the extent that they provided the basis for awarding the degree or the certificate.

Eligibility under this provision is awarded to candidates who have completed or who are about to complete a formal educational program

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culminating in the granting of a degree. Once a candidate has completed a qualifying period of education as outlined above, leading to the completion of a degree or a diploma, and during which a qualifying grade point average was maintained, he or she is eligible for the quality category. Additional course work has no impact on eligibility, once established.

For example, a candidate qualifying on the basis of high school grade point average retains that eligibility even though he or she may go on to complete several more courses as part of a continuing education program. The additional course work does not become part of the overall grade point average computation. However, course work beyond the high school level which does not culminate in the awarding of a degree should be factored into the decision to appoint candidates to administrative, management, specialist, or other positions for which such education would normally be qualifying in lieu of experience .

2. Candidate has completed all requirements for an advanced degree from an accredited institution, appropriate to the position being filled. An advanced degree is defined as beyond the baccalaureate, e.g., D.V.M., M.A., Ph.D., etc. Candidate must provide certification of completion of all degree requirements, e.g., thesis, dissertation, etc.

Evaluation of candidates under this provision will take into account the relevancy of both the type and the level of education completed to the knowledges, skills, and abilities required to perform the duties of the position.

Candidates are required to submit an official transcript or similar correspondence documenting actual course work, and grade point average, if necessary, in order to establish eligibility for appointment based on above average educational achievement. In the event that grade point average has not been computed by the educational institution, an official transcript may provide the basis for manual computation. Transfer credits, foreign credits, and credits from more than one educational institution must be evaluated and included to the extent that they provided the basis for awarding the degree.

Inasmuch as eligibility under this provision requires completion of a degree or a diploma, candidates who have completed either without meeting any of the criteria outlined above, or who have not completed any type of degree or diploma, will be evaluated under the criteria addressing experience and ability outlined in (b) and (c), below.

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(b) Candidates who have quality experience in the field are eligible for the quality category.

Quality experience in the field is defined as directly related experience, and is differentiated from the specialized experience requirements outlined in X-118 to the extent that it is directly related to the position to be filled, was gained in the same functional specialization, and has clearly equipped the candidate with superior ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position. The directly related experience must have been at an acceptable level of competence in order to qualify for appointment under this provision.

OPM's generic standard for two-grade interval professional positions defines specialized experience as that, ". . . which is in or related to the line of work of the position to be filled and which has equipped the applicant with the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully perform the duties of the position." Similar language also appears in the other generic standards. The intent of the "quality experience" provision is to go beyond experience which is simply related to the line of work and focus upon directly related experience in the same field.

Assessment of individual candidates under this provision will take into account the extent of the candidate's experience beyond that which is necessary to meet basic eligibility requirements.

Candidates currently employed in the same or a directly related occupation, either within the agency under temporary or excepted service appointments, or outside the agency in State or local government, private industry or academia, are likely to be placed in the quality group under this criterion. For example, candidates employed in one of the private forestry operations located in the Pacific Northwest may possess experience that is directly related to one of the specializations covered by the forester or forestry technician standard.

Candidates who have made an outstanding contribution to the state of the art or to the advancement of knowledge in a directly related field may also qualify under this provision. Evaluation of these candidates will be performed by an agency subject matter expert and will focus upon extraordinary professional achievement, beyond normal professional competency, which may include, but is not limited to, such accomplishments as the publication of groundbreaking experimental results, authorship of seminal works in the field, or other noteworthy achievements or credentials.

Documentation regarding the extent to which the candidate's experience exceeds that which is required for basic eligibility, or documentation of extraordinary professional achievement, will be maintained in the recruitment case file.

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(c) Candidates who demonstrate high ability to do the work of the position are eligible for the quality category.

The intent of this provision is to allow candidates, who do not meet criteria established for above average educational achievement or quality experience, to be considered on the basis of having demonstrated high ability through some other means.

Assessment of the candidate's high ability will utilize the following measures:

1. Candidate has received a certificate or other indicator of successful completion of a trade or vocational program that is directly related to the work of the position to be filled, for positions for which this type of education has been determined to be appropriate. Candidates must also meet applicable experience requirements; that is, program completion is not a substitute for, but clearly exceeds, basic eligibility requirements.
2. Candidate has a grade point average of at least 2.7 on a 4 point scale, or equivalent, for at least 24 semester hours, or equivalent, of course work above the high school level that is directly related to the position to be filled.

f. Grouping of Eligibles

Candidates who meet basic eligibility requirements and who have been evaluated against the criteria outlined above are grouped as follows:

- (1) Candidates meeting any one of the criteria outlined above are placed in the quality group.
- (2) Candidates who do not meet any of these criteria are placed in the eligible group.
- (3) Within each group, preference eligibles will be listed ahead of nonpreference eligibles. In addition, for positions other than scientific and professional at GS-9 and above, preference eligibles with a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more who meet basic eligibility requirements will be listed at the top of the quality group.

The quality group and/or the eligible group for a particular position vacancy may include candidates from one or more sources, provided that candidates from the State Employment Service or Federal Job Information Center are included, as appropriate.

g. Selection and Appointment

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Selection will be made from among candidates in the quality group. When an inadequate number of candidates is in the quality group, all qualified candidates from all sources will be listed as a single group.

In making selections, the provisions granting extra points for veterans and the rule of three (i.e., selection from the top three) will not be followed because candidates will not be assigned points or ranked numerically within a group. However, all preference eligibles in a group will be listed ahead of nonpreference eligibles. To pass over any preference eligible(s) to select a nonpreference eligible requires approval under formal objection procedures. The agency will have authority to act on proposals to pass over preference eligibles, including compensably disabled veterans, for suitability, qualifications, and other reasons considered to be disqualifying under 5 U.S.C. 3318. To do so, the agency will follow the procedures in Title 5, United States Code. This authority will rest with the agency personnel officer, and may be redelegated, as appropriate, to someone other than the selecting official.

Candidates selected under the demonstration project authority may be eligible for recruitment incentives, subject to the requirements outlined below.

3. Description of Interventions (c) and (d)

a. Introduction

Incentives will be authorized to augment the employment and compensation package as part of an effort to enhance the ability of the agency to compete with other employers for individuals with desired skills. Subject to OPM approval, the agency may decide to identify additional incentives under this authority at a future date. Any such additions will be published in the Federal Register.

b. Method

Recruitment incentives may be authorized to encourage individuals to enter as well as to remain with the Federal service. These may include cash payments and reimbursement for relocation travel and transportation expenses, any combination of which may be authorized for an individual candidate.

The decision to authorize an incentive will be based upon such market factors as shortage category designation; salary comparability and salary offer issues; relocation considerations; programmatic urgency; emerging technologies; or a candidate's unique qualifications. The payment of incentives is discretionary in all cases.

Incentives may only be authorized after a break in service of at least 180 days for former Federal employees with reinstatement eligibility who are reappointed

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under the demonstration project authority following separation from the Federal service. In addition, incentives may not be authorized for current permanent competitive service Federal employees.

(1) Cash Payments

Cash payments are authorized for recruitment and retention purposes. The amount of a cash payment will be firmly established prior to entrance on duty, and is not considered to be a part of an individual's basic pay.

Cash payments may be made either in a lump sum upon entrance on duty, incrementally over a period not to exceed 36 months, or deferred until the completion of a specified period, not to exceed 36 months.

(2) Relocation Travel and Transportation Expenses

The authority to reimburse new appointees for relocation travel and transportation expenses is expanded to include all of the expenses authorized for transferred employees as outlined in 5 U.S.C. 5724 and 5724a, 5724b, and 5724c. This may include payment to new appointees for such expenses as house hunting trips, expenses related to the sale and/or purchase of residence, access to relocation services, and other services normally available only to transferred employees.

The provisions of this section apply only to employees hired under the demonstration project authority. Current law and regulation covering the reimbursement of relocation travel and transportation expenses for employees not hired under the demonstration project authority remain the same and are not affected by this provision.

(3) Statement of Conditions of Employment

A statement summarizing conditions of employment under which a recruitment incentive may be authorized will be prepared in each case, and will address the following:

(a) Type of incentive(s)

1. cash payment
2. relocation travel and transportation expenses

(b) Total authorized amount or entitlement(s)

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(c) Method and schedule for cash payment

1. lump sum upon EOD
2. increments over a period NTE 36 months
3. deferred until the end of a specified period, NTE 36 months

(d) Service requirement for lump sum upon EOD is 12 months with the hiring agency. For incremental or deferred cash payments, the employee must be on the rolls of the hiring agency on the scheduled date in order to receive payment. No outstanding deferred or incremental amounts will be paid in cases where the employee for any reason is no longer employed by the hiring agency.

(e) Service requirement for relocation travel and transportation expenses in all cases is 12 months of service with the Federal Government.

(4) Failure To Meet Service Requirement

Repayment of incentives is required if the employee is separated prior to fulfilling the service requirement, unless the reasons for the separation are beyond the control of the employee and are acceptable to the agency. Repayment is required in all cases where the employee is separated for misconduct. Actions to collect repayment may be terminated under appropriate circumstances and in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 5584.

B. Objective #2: Increase the reliability of the decision to grant career tenure for employees in scientific positions.

1. Intervention

Under the career-conditional appointment system, extend the probationary period to three years for all employees in scientific positions covered by the Research Grade Evaluation Guide.

2. Introduction

The purpose of the extended probationary period is to allow managers an adequate period of time within which to assess the job performance of employees in scientific positions, and to provide the employee with a longer period of time to demonstrate his or her competence.

Under the experimental system, the probationary period will be three years in length for employees in scientific positions. Aside from extending the time period, all other features of the current probationary period are retained, including the

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potential to remove an employee without providing the full substantive and procedural rights afforded a nonprobationary employee.

3. Method

Candidates hired for scientific positions under the demonstration project authority, as described under section II. E., above, Types and Numbers of Participating Employees, will receive career-conditional appointments to the competitive service with a probationary period of three years prior to conversion to career tenure. Scientific positions are those which are covered under the Research Grade Evaluation Guide. These employees are assigned to tenure group II; conversion to nonprobationary or career status will take place according to current regulation and FPM guidance, except for the longer period of probation.

Candidates who have already attained career status will receive career appointments but will be subject to completion of the extended probationary period. Prior service will be credited toward probation as outlined by current regulation and FPM guidance.

To ensure that managers have sufficient time to make tenure decisions, the probationary period will be extended by the amount of time spent in non-pay status, except when protected by law, e.g., credit is given for nonpay time due to compensable injury or military service.

The extended probationary period is portable both within and between ARS and FS experimental sites, but is not portable to non-experimental sites or to non-participating agencies.

Employees under an extended probationary period are eligible for transfer to other Federal agencies. Upon position change or transfer to a comparison site or to a non-participating agency, within or outside of USDA, employees must serve any remaining balance of the one-year probationary period. However, the extended probationary period will no longer be in effect.

An employee under an extended probationary period who is reappointed to a demonstration project experimental site under the demonstration project authority begins a new probationary period. An employee under an extended probationary period who is reinstated to either a comparison site, or to a non-participating agency, must serve a one-year probationary period if the employee has not completed one year of satisfactory service under the previous appointment.

Employees under an extended probationary period will not be eligible for the reemployment rights in 5 C.F.R. Part 352 based on other service such as with an international organization, as these rights are generally discretionary with the

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agency head or reserved for non-probationers. Therefore, exclusion of employees under an extended probationary period is consistent with existing policies.

Completion of an extended probationary period as a supervisor or manager fulfills the requirement to complete a supervisory probationary period.

Any employee appointed prior to the implementation date of the project will not be affected. Present performance management systems will not be affected, as performance standards must still be established against which employees will continue to be rated annually.

If the agency decides to separate an employee on an extended probationary period for non-RIF reasons, the agency shall follow the current procedures for separating probationary employees, as outlined in 5 C.F.R. 315.804, 315.805, and 315.806. 5 C.F.R. 432 and 752 do not apply to an employee under an extended probationary period, regardless of the employee's length of service.

The decision to retain or separate an employee under an extended probationary period may take into account such factors as performance, suitability, conduct, aptitude, etc., as outlined in FPM Chapter 315, Subchapter 8. The decision to retain these employees will also take into account the documentation of his or her research findings. Employees must be rated at least fully successful in order to be converted to nonprobationary status.

Four months prior to the conclusion of the extended probationary period, the supervisor will be asked for a decision to either convert the employee to career tenure, or to separate the employee. This does not preclude the agency from separating an employee on an extended probationary period any time prior to the conclusion of the three year probationary period.