

**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**Duration:** This amendment is effective until superseded or removed.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**Superseded Document(s):**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.

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

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The Forest Service is participating in a demonstration project designed to test alternative recruitment and hiring procedures for hiring new, permanent, competitive service employees into the Federal workforce. The project also tests the impacts of replacing a one-year probationary period with a three-year probationary period for newly hired research scientists. The Forest Service is participating in this project along with the Agricultural Research Service with support from the USDA Office of Personnel.

The project is authorized by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. 47) and was approved for implementation by the Office of Personnel Management on March 5, 1990. The project is being evaluated by a research team from the Pennsylvania State University. The project was approved for up to a 5-year period and may be extended.

This Handbook provides operating procedures and instructions to personnel specialists involved in staffing permanent, competitive service positions at Forest Service experimental units within the demonstration project authority, and it also serves as a reference for personnel specialists located at comparison units. The experimental and comparison sites are identified in the project plan, which is displayed in section 06.2, exhibit 01.

The standard operating procedures package in use at the time of implementation is in section 06.1, exhibit 01. These procedures have been supplemented by the direction in the zero code and chapters 10 and 20 of this Handbook. The Handbook direction is presented in the same order as the parent material in the standard operating procedures.

## **01 - Authority**

The Civil Service Reform Act (5 U.S.C. 47) authorizes the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to approve demonstration projects. The project plan for the USDA demonstration project was approved by OPM and was published in the Federal Register, volume 55, number 47, page 9062, March 9, 1990. (See sec. 06.2, ex. 01, for the full text of the project plan.)

## **02 - Objectives**

The objectives of this project are to:

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.

## **03 - Policy**

1. Line officers and personnel specialists at the experimental units listed in the project plan, appendix B (sec. 06.2, ex. 01), must comply with the demonstration project appointing authority and procedures when filling positions that would otherwise have been filled by using traditional procedures through the Office of Personnel Management, as set forth in the Federal Personnel Manual (FSH 6109.41 - FPM 212). Follow the

procedures for candidate evaluation, referral, and selection in the project plan and in this Handbook for all appointments under the demonstration project authority.

2. Experimental and comparison units must collect and submit the required data needed for project evaluation, according to the direction in FSM 6134.06 for information requirements and the Applicant Flow System. Take every reasonable precaution to ensure complete and accurate data collection and submission.

## **04 - Responsibility**

### **04.1 - Washington Office**

The Director of the Personnel Management Staff has overall responsibility for demonstration project implementation, leadership, and administration.

### **04.2 - Field Units**

Regional Foresters, Station Directors, and Forest Supervisors who manage the experimental sites listed in the project plan (sec. 06.2, ex. 01) are responsible for local administration of activities related to the project. They are delegated authorities as set forth in FSM 6104.1, exhibit 01 (Delegations of Personnel Authorities). The project plan (sec. 06.2, ex. 01) lists waivers to normal personnel authorities and requirements in Appendix A.

## **05 - Definitions**

Comparison Unit - An organizational unit serviced by an employing unit that has not implemented the provisions of the demonstration project and that continues to operate a personnel program completely within the existing laws in Title 5, United States Code, and Office of Personnel regulations (FSH 6109.41 - FPM).

Demonstration Project - Project authorized by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. 47) to allow testing of new approaches to personnel programs in the Federal Government requiring the waiver of existing law.

Employing Unit - An operating personnel office providing personnel services to an organizational unit.

Experimental Unit - An organizational unit serviced by an employing unit that has implemented the provisions of the demonstration project.

Organizational Unit - A Forest Service Research Station or Laboratory, State and Private Forestry Area or unit, Regional Office, National Forest, or National Headquarters.

X-118 and X-118C - Qualification standards established in the Federal Government for white collar and blue collar occupations, respectively, by the Office of Personnel Management Handbook X-118 and Handbook X-118C.

## **06 - Exhibits**

### **06.1 - USDA Demonstration Project Standard Operating Procedures**

The standard operating procedures approved by the Office of Personnel Management in June 1990 are displayed as exhibit 01 to this section.

**06.1 - Exhibit 01**

**USDA DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR  
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

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**USDA DEMONSTRATION PROJECT  
DELEGATIONS OF AUTHORITY**

The following authorities are delegated from the Office of Personnel Management to the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the Forest Service (FS) according to the guidelines and methods outlined both in the project plan and in the standard operating procedures established for demonstration project implementation:

1. Examining authority for all positions in any series, grades 1 through 15, at the experimental sites identified in the Federal Register;
2. Appointing authority to the competitive service for candidates selected through the demonstration project method at experimental sites;
3. Authority to adjudicate the nonselection of a preference eligible from a candidate referral list prepared according to the demonstration project method at an experimental site;
4. Authority to determine that a position vacancy at an experimental site is in a shortage category;
5. Authority to modify OPM Handbook X-118 qualification requirements for positions being filled under the demonstration method at experimental sites;
6. Authority to establish an extended probationary period for research scientists covered by the Research Grade Evaluation Guide and appointed to positions under the demonstration project method experimental sites; and,

**06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

7. Authority to provide a recruitment incentive, either cash payment and/or the payment of relocation travel and transportation expenses, to candidates appointed to positions under the demonstration project method at experimental sites.

**CHAPTER 1.  
RECRUITMENT, CANDIDATE EVALUATION, AND SELECTION**

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

The purpose of this material is to provide a standardized approach to the interpretation of the policies and procedures developed in support of the USDA Demonstration Project. It is intended to supplement the information contained in the final project plan published in the Federal Register on 03/09/90.

Under the demonstration project system, personnel specialists are responsible for providing technical advisory services to managers concerning the requirements of the project plan, as well as explaining and recommending the various options available through the experimental system, such as establishing a modified qualification standard, documenting a shortage category determination, etc.

In addition, the personnel specialist will retain final responsibility for approving shortage category determinations, modifying X-118, making qualifications determinations, placing candidates in either the quality or the eligible group, determining that selectees meet conditions of employment, sustaining objections to preference eligibles, making firm offers of employment, establishing entrance on duty dates, and making other substantive decisions in personnel staffing technical program areas.

Managers are responsible for identifying appropriate recruitment sources and for participating in recruitment activities, consistent with organizational needs and requirements, in order to identify candidates for position vacancies. Taking into account all available options as outlined by the personnel specialist, managers will select candidates for position vacancies and authorize recruitment incentives, as appropriate. Finally, managers are responsible for recommending that employees in scientific positions be converted to nonprobationary status.

**II . RECRUITMENT AND HIRING SYSTEM.**

**A. RECRUITMENT AND IDENTIFICATION OF CANDIDATES.**

**1. Preparation of Standard Form (SF) 52, Request for Personnel Action.**



## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

**DISCUSSION:** The same process currently used to request personnel actions will be used under the demonstration project authority. The SF-52 may or may not specify that the position is to be filled under the demo authority as the demo method is only one of many available to fill position vacancies.

**METHOD:** Follow current guidance.

### **2. Decision to fill a position vacancy under the demonstration project authority or through some other, existing authority.**

**DISCUSSION:** The demonstration project authority replaces the hiring of external, non-status, or other candidates via career-conditional and career appointment from Certificates of Eligibles issued either by OPM or through an examining authority delegated by OPM to an agency. Any position vacancy in any series at an experimental site, through GM-15, may be filled under the demonstration project authority.

Current employees of ARS, FS, other USDA, or other Federal agencies may be hired under the demonstration project authority. Keep in mind that the decision to hire under this authority does not in any way impact the decision to hire through internal methods, such as upward mobility, merit promotion, reassignment, or other means. Managers need to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each when various methods are available and make a decision accordingly.

Once the decision has been made to recruit externally, managers may still decide to fill position vacancies through other authorities such as transfer, Veterans Readjustment Appointment, previously established direct hire authorities, etc., depending upon individual candidate eligibility and agency hiring goals and objectives.

The decision to hire under the demonstration project authority may take into account the availability of recruitment incentives, the extended probationary period for research scientists, or other pertinent considerations. In some cases, however, it may be more appropriate to appoint candidates under other authorities. For example, a transfer or reinstatement which does not involve a promotion may be made without competition.

An appointment under the demonstration project authority requires that the procedures for candidate evaluation, referral, and selection outlined in the project plan be followed in all cases. These procedures are explained in greater detail in the sections that follow.

**METHOD:** Managers will continue to be responsible for initiating the request for personnel action, SF-52. The personnel specialist will be responsible for advising managers concerning the various options available, under both the demonstration project and other authorities, and the advantages and disadvantages of each. The manager will then determine the most effective means through which to fill the position vacancy.

## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

Normal procedures apply when filling position vacancies at experimental sites under authorities other than the demonstration project authority. This means that candidates previously eligible under any existing OPM direct hire authority are still eligible for appointment, regardless of demo. One example of this would be OPM's nationwide direct hire

authority for engineers at grades 5 through 11. Another example would be any direct hire authorities issued by OPM in connection with job fairs for specified periods of time. However, individuals with appointment eligibility by direct hire are not precluded from applying and being hired under the demo system.

Candidates hired under OPM-authorized direct hire authorities can be appointed either outside the scope of the demonstration project authority or under the demonstration project authority as follows:

If appointed outside the demonstration project authority, standard Nature of Action and Authority Codes found in FPM 296-33 are used. These candidates are not eligible for recruitment incentives, nor are they placed on extended probationary periods. They also do not count towards the project limitation of 5,000 covered under project provisions at any given time.

If appointed under the demonstration project authority for the purpose of providing a recruitment incentive or an extended probationary period, the OPM-authorized direct hire authority can be cited as the authority for the demo hire.

Position vacancies at experimental sites may NOT be filled from Certificates of Eligibles issued either by OPM or through an examining authority delegated by OPM to an agency. This means, for example, that certificates issued by the ARS SEU, or by OPM in Macon, Georgia, may not be used to fill permanent position vacancies at ARS and FS experimental sites. This is because the demo system replaces the OPM system of certificates of eligibles.

### **3. Identification of selective placement factors, if applicable.**

**DISCUSSION:** Selective placement factors are currently identified for external placement actions via SF-39A. Under the demonstration project authority, the DF-002 will be used to identify selective placement factors which restrict consideration for positions filled under the demo authority, and will become part of the recruitment case file documentation.

#### **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

**METHOD:** The manager will recommend that selective placement factors be established for a position vacancy. The personnel specialist will determine whether or not the request is valid and develop appropriate selective placement factors in cases where legitimate need has been identified. The selective placement factors will appear in the vacancy announcement and, as with the current system, are absolutely prerequisite for basic eligibility.

#### **4. Consideration of Reemployment Priority List (RPL) and Displaced Employee Program (DEP) candidates.**

**DISCUSSION:** Normal RPL procedures apply when filling positions under the demonstration project authority. That is, as long as a qualified RPL eligible is available, most outside hiring is prohibited. In addition, DEP candidates must be accorded consideration prior to authorizing any appointment under this authority. This means that consideration of demo candidates will be limited by both the RPL and the DEP to the same extent that consideration of candidates from OPM Certificates of Eligibles is thereby limited.

**METHOD:** The personnel specialist will follow current policy and procedures concerning RPL candidates when filling position vacancies. The personnel specialist will also request the names of DEP candidates from OPM and refer all interested and qualified candidates to the manager prior to making any firm offers of employment under the demonstration project authority. Referrals under each of these programs may be requested from OPM via telephone.

#### **5. Development of definition of quality experience.**

**DISCUSSION:** Examples of quality experience needed to meet the quality experience criterion for placement in the quality group must be established and documented on DF-003 prior to the commencement of recruitment activity. Like crediting or rating plans, this material is confidential and is neither published in the vacancy announcement nor released to applicants.

**METHOD:** See B.4, below, Evaluation of candidates in non-shortage categories, for definition of quality experience.

#### **6. Development of modified X-118 qualification standard.**

**DISCUSSION:** Under the demonstration project authority, the agencies are authorized to modify X-118 experience requirements or substitutable education (other than positive education, professional certification, or licensure requirements) when the agency is aware of an available candidate (or candidates) capable of performing the duties of the position, but unable to meet all of the requirements in the OPM qualification standard.

## 06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued

Agencies may not, however, require additional amounts of education or experience beyond those required by the standards, but may use selective placement factors.

The modified standard must ensure that candidates' backgrounds include experience which has provided the skills and abilities necessary for successful job performance. The decision to modify X-118 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 who might otherwise be excluded by X-118. Agencies may also consider this option when recruitment efforts fail to yield an adequate number of candidates. The decision to modify a standard will be made before a recruiting announcement is issued, and the announcement will contain the modified standard.

**METHOD:** Managers, in consultation with personnel specialists, will determine when a modified standard is appropriate and will establish a modified standard which specifies the amount of experience required or substitutable education needed in order to qualify for the position. The modified standard will appear in the vacancy announcement, although it need only be identified as the qualification requirement for the position, not necessarily "modified." Documentation that a modified standard was used will be maintained in the recruitment case file on DF-004.

## 7. Vacancy announcement requirements

**DISCUSSION:** Information regarding ALL vacancies to be filled under the demonstration project authority must be provided to the servicing State Employment Office (SEO) and Federal Job Information Center (FJIC). This information may be provided in a number of ways, for example, open continuous announcement, announcement with specific opening and closing dates, etc. Announcements may also take the form of specific job orders with the SEO requesting that candidates meeting the criteria outlined in the job order be located and referred to the agency for consideration.

**METHOD:** Personnel specialists are responsible for the accurate preparation of vacancy announcements. Announcements must contain, as a minimum, the position title, series, grade level(s) to be filled, location, minimum qualification requirements, and procedures for application. Providing position vacancy

information to the SEO and local FJIC does not obligate the agency to fill the announced position(s), as vacancy information may be based simply on workforce planning projections.

Vacancy announcements should remain open long enough to attract an adequate number of candidates. However, in no case will this period be less than three working days.

## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

Announcements may contain a statement to the effect that applicants must specify position title, series, grade level(s), and location for which they wish to be considered, and that applications not containing all of the required information will not be considered. Announcements may specify that applications must be accompanied by transcripts or equivalent documentation of GPA and coursework completed, or they may allow candidates to self-report these items for later verification. Announcements will in all cases invite candidates to highlight any experience they might have which is directly related to the duties of the position so that they can be evaluated against the quality experience criterion.

Applications in the form of resume, curriculum vitae, etc., may be accepted, to the extent that they contain adequate information upon which to base an eligibility determination. Candidates may provide additional information in cover letters or other correspondence. However, an SF-171 must be completed and reviewed by the personnel specialist prior to making any firm offer of employment.

Managers and personnel lists may also solicit candidates through the use of paid advertising following current guidelines. Personnel specialists are responsible for the content of such advertising.

### **8. Identification of recruitment sources beyond SEO and FJIC.**

**DISCUSSION:** Within the context of the demonstration project authority, OPM no longer performs a centralized recruiting function for the experimental sites through the maintenance of open registers and the issuance of Certificates of Eligibles. Under the demo authority, managers, in consultation with personnel specialists, assume primary responsibility for the adequacy and sufficiency of recruitment sources identified in addition to the SEO and FJIC.

**METHOD:** Managers and personnel specialists will be responsible for identifying appropriate recruitment sources which are likely to yield qualified candidates consistent with mission requirements and other organizational considerations. Personnel specialists and managers will develop an effective overall recruitment strategy.

### **9. Disposition of unsolicited applications**

**DISCUSSION:** Applications may be received for positions for which there is no ongoing recruitment activity, or for which vacancies may not be expected in the near future.

## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

**METHOD:** The agency will establish a policy for the disposition of unsolicited applications. This policy should establish the minimum information required for acceptance of the application, as well as procedures for the review, return, retention, or referral of applications received and the subsequent notification of candidates. The agency policy should also stipulate the length of time during which these applications will actively be considered.

### **10. Merger of candidates from various recruitment sources.**

**DISCUSSION:** Candidates identified through various recruitment methods must be merged into a single applicant pool for final evaluation and consideration.

**METHOD:** The personnel specialist is responsible for merging candidates from various sources so that all receive proper consideration. This includes all qualified and available candidates from the SEO or FJIC along with candidates from any other appropriate recruitment source(s). Other appropriate recruitment sources may include, but are not limited to, job fair participation, on-campus recruiting, vacancy announcements, etc. Candidates identified to whom tentative offers are made by managers during job fairs or campus visits must be referred to the personnel specialist for qualifications analysis and quality grouping, if applicable, prior to actually being considered for selection and appointment.

The personnel specialist has overall responsibility for tracking the various recruitment activities conducted in connection with a particular position vacancy, and for ensuring that all applicants from any source(s) contacted are considered as outlined below. Procedures for the referral, selection, appointment, and notification of candidates will be discussed in the sections that follow.

## **B. CONSIDERATION OF CANDIDATES.**

### **1. Determination of basic eligibility.**

**DISCUSSION:** A determination of basic eligibility will be made concerning each applicant's qualifications utilizing the appropriate OPM X-118 Handbook, single agency, or modified qualification standard, plus any previously established selective placement factors. Current regulation and FPM guidance concerning the time-in-grade and time after competitive appointment restrictions remain in effect and are not impacted by the project.

Test requirements as outlined in X-118 or elsewhere, including minimum typing or stenography scores, are eliminated under the demo authority.

## 06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued

**METHOD:** The personnel specialist retains final responsibility and authority for determining the basic eligibility of individual applicants. Applicants will be evaluated for all grade levels covered by an announcement, down to and including the lowest grade they will accept. Applicants who do not indicate a minimum acceptable grade will be evaluated for the highest grade for which they qualify. Determining basic eligibility in highly specialized or technical fields may require input from subject matter specialists.

Documentation that qualification requirements were modified in connection with a position vacancy will be noted in the recruitment case file summary as well as on the SF-52 in the selectee's Official Personnel Folder (OPF). When an employee has been placed in a position based on modification of a qualification standard under this provision, the "add-on" rule may be applied in any subsequent inservice placement action.

### 2. Determination of shortage category.

**DISCUSSION:** Candidates meeting basic eligibility requirements who are in locally determined shortage categories may be directly appointed. This means the agency will have full authority to approve the direct hire of individuals in shortage categories where no OPM-approved direct hire has already been established and without requesting approval from OPM in cases where the agency has determined that candidates are in short supply within the appropriate area of consideration.

**METHOD:** Shortage determinations will be based upon the same criteria as those used by OPM to make these determinations; however, full authority in this area will be delegated to the agency. Shortage categories will be determined by using the criteria in 5 C.F.R. 572.301 and FPM Chapter 572, Subchapter 2; supporting documentation must address reasonable recruitment efforts, both internal and external, as outlined in the regulation and FPM guidance.

Some factors to consider when making shortage determinations:

**Recruiting efforts.** Has external recruitment been conducted through normal sources, including SEO and FJIC, for the position? Depending on the vacancy, additional sources may include academic institutions, professional organizations and societies, search firms, and paid advertising. What consideration has been given to employees available for reassignment, promotion, transfer, or reinstatement? When deciding whether recruitment efforts have been adequate, consider such factors as past experience with internal and external sources, the availability of qualified candidates in the local workforce, the cost-effectiveness of using paid advertising or search firms, and the possibility of relieving the shortage through job engineering or training of current employees.

## 06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued

**Competition generated.** Consider both quality and quantity. A shortage may be found when numerous minimally qualified candidates are available, but few candidates are well qualified for the position. Generally, when well qualified candidates are available from one or more sources, a shortage does not exist. However, if the declination rate for the particular position has consistently been high, a shortage determination may be appropriate.

**Extent of the problem.** Are other agency activities experiencing difficulty in filling the same kinds of positions? Are other agencies or employers having trouble? Generally a shortage determination should cover the specific position(s) for which a current problem has been identified. This is particularly true if the hard-to-fill jobs have unusual qualification requirements or working conditions. However, if comparable shortages are shown for numerous positions, a determination may cover all positions in the specified series and grade(s) in a commuting area, state, geographic region, or the agency.

A standard form has been developed through which supporting documentation will be provided by both agencies. Documentation will include, at a minimum, the following:

- an indication of candidate availability;

- a description of relevant recruitment efforts conducted by the employing unit or other employers in the same labor market; a description of alternative staffing approaches which could be used to fill the position; and,

- the specific criterion used in making the final determination.

You will note that 5 C.F.R. 572.301(a)(3) cites OPM-approved direct hire authority as a criterion; this may be used in two ways under the demonstration project authority: **(1)** A candidate may be appointed under the OPM-approved direct hire authority, and, thus, outside the scope of the demonstration project; or, **(2)** A candidate may be appointed under the demonstration project authority, for the purpose of authorizing a recruitment incentive or extending the probationary period, citing the OPM-approved direct hire authority as the basis for the shortage category determination and requiring no further documentation.

Under the demo authority, a position may be identified as "shortage" both **(a)** prior to, or **(b)** subsequent to, the active recruitment of candidates. A discussion of each of these situations follows:



**06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

**(a)** Previous reasonable recruitment efforts may have already resulted in the establishment of a blanket shortage category determination under the demonstration project authority for a particular position title, series, and grade level(s) in specified locations. In this case, eligible candidates may be directly appointed, citing the blanket determination.

Blanket shortage determinations may remain in effect for a period not to exceed three years, and may be renewed only upon showing that the criteria are still met. Position coverage and duration of a shortage determination will depend on the geographic extent of the problem, as discussed above; the length of time the recruiting has been conducted; and the number of current and projected vacancies and turnover rate in recent years. If available evidence does not clearly show whether a shortage is continuing (for example, if the current vacancy rate is higher than in previous years because of the need to staff a new activity), a three-year authorization may not be appropriate. In that case, the determination may be established for a shorter period, perhaps one year, and reviewed at the end of that time, or may be limited to the specific vacancies already identified.

When appointments in previously determined shortage categories are made, a copy of the previous determination will be a part of the recruitment case file documentation.

**(b)** An initial determination of shortage category may be made after reasonable recruitment efforts have resulted in a situation meeting any of the criteria in 5 C.F.R. 572.301.

Shortage determinations may not be automatically established by the presence (or absence) of a specified number of candidates, in recognition of the flexibility provided by the demonstration project authority which does not require that any minimum amount of recruitment activity be conducted beyond notifying the SEO and the FJIC. That is, full documentation is required of reasonable recruitment efforts as outlined in the regulation.

The "other factors" cited in the project plan include future employment trends, situations, or other labor market factors meeting the spirit and intent of, but not currently covered by, the regulation.

Personnel specialists will advise managers of the availability of this option, and will assist in the determination of shortage category by collecting and/or analyzing the data needed to support such a determination. Data collection and analysis will provide the basis for the determination that a shortage of candidates exists for a particular position vacancy according to the criteria discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

## 06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued

Shortage determinations may be limited to one position vacancy, or may include occupational groups defined by geographic or other parameters, provided all determinations are substantiated by data collection and analysis. The determination of shortage category in individual cases will be delegated to the lowest practicable level within the organization. Higher level review will be required for blanket authorizations.

The personnel specialist will be responsible for maintaining the inventory, as well as for initiating a prescheduled or periodic review, of any blanket or other continuing shortage determinations. Additional data collection and analysis may be necessary for the continuation of these determinations as outlined in 5 C.F.R. 572.301(b)(3).

3. Referral of candidates in shortage categories for selection.

**DISCUSSION:** Qualified candidates for positions which have been identified as shortage categories as outlined in the preceding section will be referred to the selecting official for consideration. Veterans preference will apply when using direct hire procedures in shortage categories.

**METHOD:** Personnel specialists are responsible for ensuring the definition of shortage category has been properly applied, that all candidates have been considered, and that qualifications requirements have been met prior to referring candidates for positions in shortage categories to selecting officials. Candidates will be referred on DF-008, Candidate Referral List.

Referral of candidates may include the merger of candidates identified by managers through campus visits, job fairs, etc., and presented to the personnel specialist to be combined with other sources. Managers participating in a career or job fair might also collect, in advance, any appropriate applications from the SEO or FJIC, for the purpose of considering them along with candidates identified at the job fair. For positions in predetermined shortage categories, managers may make immediate tentative offers of employment, subject to verification of eligibility, application of veterans preference, etc., by the personnel specialist.

Veterans preference applies when appointing individuals to positions in shortage categories as follows:

If a preference eligible applies in a direct hire situation, all candidates under consideration must be evaluated against the quality group criteria outlined in Section II.B.4. If any preference eligible meets the quality group criteria, the preference eligible must be selected unless a formal objection is sustained under the procedures outlined in Section II.C.1. If no preference eligible meets the quality group criteria, a nonpreference eligible meeting the quality group criteria may be direct hired. Preference eligibles who are only basically eligible receive preference over other basically eligible candidates.



#### **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

If no preference eligibles apply in a shortage situation, a direct hire may be authorized under the guidelines outlined in Section II.B.2.

#### **4. Evaluation of candidates in non-shortage categories.**

**DISCUSSION:** Candidates for positions in non-shortage categories will be evaluated against the job-related evaluation criteria outlined below for the purpose of establishing the quality group and the eligible group.

**METHOD:** The personnel specialist is responsible for evaluating candidates against the job-related evaluation criteria. 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.

**(a)** Candidates demonstrating above average educational achievement at any educational level 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. High school grade point average may not be used to place a candidate in the quality group for a position for which a positive or minimum educational requirement has been established. Items 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 each 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 each 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.

**06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

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 culminating in the granting of a diploma or a degree. Once a candidate has completed a qualifying period of education as outlined above, leading to the completion of a diploma or a degree, 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 could 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.

## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

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.

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

Examples of quality experience must be established and documented on DF-003 prior to the commencement of recruitment activity. Like crediting or rating plans, this material is confidential and is neither published in the vacancy announcement nor released to applicants. Quality experience standards will be established according to the following definition:

**Quality experience** 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.

**06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

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.

**(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.

**06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

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.

**5. Referral of candidates for selection.**

**DISCUSSION:** Candidates who meet basic eligibility requirements and who have been evaluated against the criteria outlined above are grouped by the personnel specialist for referral and selection. Regardless of recruitment source, the personnel specialist will place all available candidates for a particular position vacancy in either the quality group or the eligible group based on an evaluation of each candidate against the job-related evaluation criteria outlined in the preceding section.

Separate quality and eligible groups will be established for each grade level for which candidates are being considered when multiple grade levels are indicated, similar to the manner in which OPM issues separate Certificates of Eligibles for different grade levels within the same series.

Candidates will be referred for all grade levels for which they have applied and for which they are qualified. If no grade level is indicated, candidates will only be referred for the highest grade for which they are qualified.

**METHOD:** Candidates will be summarized using DF-006. By grade level, candidates will then be grouped for referral to the selecting official on DF-007 by the personnel specialist 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.

When the group of candidates to be referred to the selecting official is so large that the selecting official requests that it be reduced to a more manageable size, a random number procedure will be employed to reduce the group to the number of candidates requested.

## 06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued

The personnel specialist is responsible for referring candidates to the manager, and for providing advice and guidance concerning the proper order in which preference eligibles and other candidates are to be considered, as outlined below.

### C. SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT

#### 1. Selection of candidates.

**DISCUSSION:** All qualified candidates in the quality group will be referred to the manager, unless there is an inadequate number of quality candidates, in which case the eligible candidates will be referred as well. Separate groups will be established for each grade level at which candidates are being considered. Interviews are optional and at the discretion of management.

**METHOD:** Selection by the manager will be from the quality group established for each grade level under consideration. If the manager determines that there is an inadequate number of candidates in the quality group for a particular grade level, the personnel specialist will list all qualified candidates from all sources as a single group, with preference eligibles listed ahead of nonpreference eligibles.

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, U.S. Code, using the DF-008. This authority will rest with the agency personnel officer, and may be redelegated, as appropriate.

This authority may not be redelegated, however, to either the recommending or selecting official for the position.

When objections are sustained on the basis of overall suitability, the preference eligible need not be considered for future position vacancies at the experimental sites of either agency. A copy of the documentation may be forwarded to OPM to preclude referral to comparison sites or other locations. Objections sustained on the basis of qualifications do not prevent a preference eligible from being considered for other grades and/or occupational series.



## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. 3317(b), when an appointing authority has three times considered and passed over a preference eligible, consideration of the preference eligible may be discontinued. This means that, when three or more vacancies are being filled at the same time, and all preference eligibles are considered and three preference eligibles are selected for the first three position vacancies, nonpreference eligibles may be selected beginning with the fourth vacancy without any need to sustain an objection.

Current guidance on conducting preemployment interviews remains in effect under the demonstration project authority. As test requirements have been eliminated, 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 applicable.

Managers may make tentative offers of employment to candidates at job fairs or during campus visits, with or without the assistance of the personnel specialist. These along with all other tentative offers are subject to review prior to becoming firm offers.

### **2. Decision to authorize recruitment incentive.**

**DISCUSSION:** 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. 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.

**METHOD:** 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. DF-009 is required in all cases to document the authorization of a recruitment incentive.

Former Federal employees with reinstatement eligibility are not eligible to receive incentives unless there is a break in Federal service of at least 180 days immediately preceding appointment under the demonstration project authority. In addition, incentives may not be authorized for current permanent competitive service Federal employees appointed to a new position under the demonstration project authority.

#### **(1) Cash Payments**

## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

Cash payments are authorized for recruitment 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.

A cash payment may be made in a lump sum upon entrance on duty. Additionally, cash payments may be made incrementally over a period not to exceed 36 months, or deferred until the completion of a specified period, not to exceed 36 months, in order to encourage retention of employees.

Cash payments are processed through the NFC Personnel Action Processing System (PACT) as a cash award.

### **(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. As under the current system, reimbursements for relocation travel and transportation expenses are limited by the Federal Travel Regulations.

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.

You will note that a menu approach has been established on the DF-009 which will be used to authorize the payment of relocation travel and transportation allowances. This means that managers may establish a relocation package which contains some, but not all, of the options available. The form lists those options which may be selected as part of such a package. Options may not, however, be further subdivided, as current Department travel regulations will be followed concerning any of the options selected. For example, a manager may decide to authorize the payment of expenses incurred in the sale of a residence. All such expenses will be paid, therefore, in accordance with Departmental regulation; no set dollar limit may be established beyond which the manager does not wish to pay. Managers wishing to establish dollar limits should consider the use of the cash payments as outlined above.

### **(3) Statement of Conditions of Employment**

### **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

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)
- (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.

### **3. Verification that selectee meets conditions of employment.**

**DISCUSSION:** All managerial selections are tentative until the personnel specialist has verified that all eligibility and other requirements have been met.

**METHOD:** The manager (or personnel specialist) may make tentative offers of employment with the understanding that, should the candidate be ineligible, the tentative offer will be withdrawn, regardless of the circumstances under which it was made.

## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

Eligibility determinations prior to selection will take into account the normal preemployment requirements, including basic eligibility, proper grouping and referral, citizenship, physical, drug screening, suitability, or other factors, as appropriate.

### **D. CANDIDATE NOTIFICATION.**

#### **1. Firm offer of employment and establishment of EOD date.**

**DISCUSSION:** Once all preemployment requirements have been met, the personnel specialist makes a firm offer of employment and, in collaboration with the manager, establishes a reporting date.

**METHOD:** Normal processing policies and procedures will be followed in order to effect the appointment, including required signatures and documentation. Recruitment incentives, if authorized, will also be finalized at this point. The Recruitment Case File Summary, DF-013, will be completed for all position vacancies filled under the demonstration project authority. (This form will also be used to document competitive hires at comparison sites.)

#### **2. Notification of candidates.**

**DISCUSSION:** All candidates will be notified regarding the disposition of their application for employment.

**METHOD:** Follow current agency guidelines.

### **E. REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF EXAMINING DECISIONS.**

**DISCUSSION:** Original examining decisions by examining offices are subject to reconsideration upon reasonable demonstration by the applicant that review is warranted.

**METHOD:** Requests should be made in writing. The request should indicate why it is believed that the original decision was not proper, what factors were considered, and any other pertinent information. Requests for reconsideration of original examining decisions are submitted to the office which made the decision. The participating agencies will identify two reviewing levels for reconsideration requests; the request will go to the second reviewing level if the applicant is dissatisfied with the decision of the first level review. The request will be reviewed by a staff member not involved in the original decision and the results of this reconsideration will be provided in writing over the signature of the head of the office which accomplishes the review. In responding to a request, a full explanation of the reason for the decision should be provided.

## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

In cases where the agency determines that a procedural violation has occurred, the candidate will receive priority consideration for the next available vacancy to be filled under this authority which is at the same series, grade level, and location. Absent a procedural violation, nonselected candidates may follow any appeal route available under current law or regulation, e.g., MSPB, EEOC, etc.

## **CHAPTER 2. EXTENDED PROBATIONARY PERIOD**

### **I. Establishment and tracking of extended probationary period.**

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

**METHOD:** Candidates hired for scientific positions under the demonstration project authority will receive career-conditional appointments to the competitive service with a probationary period of three years. 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.

Candidates who have already attained career status will receive career appointments but will be subject to completion of the extended probationary period when appointed to a different line of work as outlined by current regulation and FPM guidance. These employees will also be assigned to tenure group II to reflect their probationary status.

Conversion to career tenure prior to the completion of the extended probationary period for candidates with prior service will follow 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 non-pay time due to compensable injury or military service.

## **06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

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 to a comparison site or to another USDA agency, or transfer to a non-USDA agency, 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 separated and then reappointed to an 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 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 for experimental site positions. Completion of at least one year of an extended probationary period as a supervisor or manager fulfills this requirement for employees who move to comparison sites and non-participating agencies prior to the completion of the extended 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.

## **II. Decision to Convert Employee to Nonprobationary Status.**

**06.1 - Exhibit 01 (Standard Operating Procedures)--Continued**

**DISCUSSION:** 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.

**METHOD:** Four months prior to the conclusion of the extended probationary period, the supervisor will be asked for a decision to either retain the employee, or to separate the employee. The decision will be documented on the AD-507, Probationary or Trial Period Report. 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.

## APPENDIX A. USDA DEMONSTRATION PROJECT FORMS

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## **06.2 - USDA Demonstration Project Plan**

The project plan approved by the Office of Personnel Management on March 5, 1990, and published in the Federal Register on March 9, 1990 (55 FR 9062) is displayed in exhibit 01 to this section.

### **06.2 - EXHIBIT 01 IS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT.**