

**Forest Service Handbook  
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Washington, DC**

**Forest Service Handbook 6109.16 – Demonstration Project Handbook  
Chapter 10 - Recruitment, Candidate Evaluation, and Selection**

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**Responsible Staff:**

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

**10:** Revises chapter in its entirety, and sets forth revised direction previously set out in FSH 6109.16, chapter 20.

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### **10.1 - Authority**

Federal Register (FR), 55 FR 9062, March 9, 1990 - The project is authorized by Title VI of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. Chapter 47) and approved for implementation by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on March 5, 1990 (Project Plan for U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Demonstration Project (Demo)).

Federal Register, 61 FR 9507, March 8, 1996 – The project was expanded from the experimental and the comparison sites to all Forest Service units.

Federal Register, 61 FR 49178, September 18, 1996 - The project was again expanded to include its use for the recruitment and selection for term appointments.

Public Law 105-277 dated October 1998 - USDA received legislative approval to continue the project on an indefinite basis for permanent and term appointments.

Federal Register, 67 FR 70776, November 26, 2002 - A notice of modification was published to include temporary appointments. This modification was for a period of five years and expired on November 26, 2007.

Section 7528, Public Law 110-246 dated June 18, 2008 - Forest Service received indefinite authority to use the Demo authority to make temporary appointments.

### **10.2 - Objectives**

The objectives of the project are to:

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

### **10.3 - Policy**

It is the Forest Service policy to comply with the Demo authority and requirements when using competitive procedures to employ new hires into the competitive service; and ensure the administration of the Demo Project fulfills both Merit System Principles and the requirements of the Uniformed Guidelines of Employee Selection Procedures. The Demo authority may not be used in combination with any other competitive examining authorities such as delegated examining.

### **10.4 - Responsibility**

#### **10.41 - Line Officers**

Line Officers are responsible for protecting the integrity of the USDA Demonstration Project, ensuring the administration meets mission requirements and compliance with applicable rules

and regulations. Delegated decision authority to Line Officers is found under Forest Service Manual (FSM) 6104.1, Exhibit 01, Delegations of Personnel Authorities.

#### **10.42 - Human Resources Management Director**

The Human Resources Management (HRM) Director has the responsibility to:

1. Ensure the overall implementation and execution of the Demo Project adheres to applicable laws, regulations, and other requirements.
2. Conduct compliance reviews for the oversight and accountability with regard to Demo Project.
3. Comply with merit system principles.
4. Ensure recruitment efforts reflect in a high-quality diverse applicant pool that meets mission needs.
5. Act on proposals to pass over preference eligibles in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 3318.

#### **10.43 - Managers and Supervisors**

Managers and Supervisors have the responsibility to:

1. Comply with the provisions of the Demo authority.
2. Identify anticipated staffing needs.
3. Develop outreach strategies and conduct outreach with a goal toward yielding a quality and diverse applicant pool.
4. Review, validate, and approve Job Analysis/Crediting Plan.
5. Make competitive selections based on fair and equitable treatment without regard to non-merit factors.
6. Promote fair and open competition.
7. Evaluate individuals based on job-related criteria.

#### **10.44 - Human Resources Practitioners**

Human Resources (HR) practitioners have the responsibility to:

1. Implement the day-to-day operations of the Demo Project with technical accuracy.
2. Work closely with Supervisors and Managers to analyze, recommend, and identify vacancy requirements and recruitment methodologies.

3. Work closely with Managers, Supervisors and/or subject matter experts to develop/review Job Analysis/Crediting Plan.
4. Advise Managers and Supervisors on personnel practices and merit factors when filling vacancies.
5. Prepare and issue vacancy announcements and referral certificates.
6. Evaluate a candidate's qualifications, place candidates in correct categories, and adjudicate veterans' preference.
7. Validate selections in accordance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations.
8. Safeguard personnel information and records (Reference section 10.27 – Case File Documentation and Disposition).

#### **10.45 - Civil Rights Office**

The Civil Rights Office has the responsibility to assist Supervisors and Managers with outreach activities.

#### **10.5 - Definitions**

Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP). Provides intra-agency selection priority for the Agency's eligible surplus and displaced employees (5 CFR 330.601).

Category Rating. A process of evaluating qualified eligibles by quality categories rather than by assigning individual numeric scores. The Agency assesses candidates against job-related criteria and then places them into two or more quality categories. Synonymous with alternative rating as described at 5 U.S.C. 3319.

Competitive Appointment. An appointment to a position in the competitive service following open competitive examination or under direct-hire authority.

Competitive Service. Includes all positions in which appointments are subject to the provisions of Chapter 33 of Title 5, United States Codes. Positions in the executive branch of the Federal Government are in the competitive service unless they are specifically excluded.

Competitive Status. An individual's basic eligibility for noncompetitive assignment to a competitive position. A person on a career or career-conditional appointment acquires competitive status upon satisfactory completion of a probationary period. It may also be granted by statute, executive order, or the civil service rules without competition. A person with competitive status may be promoted, transferred, reassigned, reinstated, or demoted without taking an open competitive examination, subject to the conditions prescribed by the Civil Service rules and regulations (5 CFR 212.301).

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

Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP). Provides eligible displaced Federal employees with interagency selection priority for vacancies in agencies that are filling positions from outside their respective permanent competitive service workforces. The ICTAP selection priority does not apply in the ICTAP eligible's current or former agency and it does not prohibit movement of permanent competitive service employees within an agency, as permitted by 5 CFR 330 Subpart F (5 CFR 330.701).

Minimum Qualifications. Qualifications that an applicant must possess, at a minimum, to be eligible for hire or promotion under competitive procedures. Minimum qualifications are typically expressed in terms of job-related years of experience or education, that is, course credit hours or a combination of the two. Applicants who do not meet the minimum qualification requirements for the position receive no further consideration.

Organizational Unit. The location where there is a Line Officer or equivalent at that geographic location. Individuals who are in virtual or detached offices (rather than at their unit's geographic location) would be included in the organizational unit to which they are officially assigned.

Preference Eligible. A veteran, spouse, widow, widower, or parent who meets the definition in 5 U.S.C. 2108.

Qualification Standards. Standards established in the Federal Government for white collar and blue collar occupations by the OPM.

Outreach. A pre-recruitment, systematic, on-going search to identify potential applicants for positions.

Outreach Plan. A document outlining management decisions and actions taken to identify a quality and diverse applicant pool for the position to be filled.

Reemployment Priority List (RPL). A list of employees within the local commuting area who are or will be separated from the Agency due to Reduction-In-Force (RIF) or other non-conduct/performance related involuntary separation; and former employees who have been separated from service for more than one-year due to a work-related injury (5 CFR 330).

## **11 - Recruitment, Candidate Evaluation, and Selection**

### **11.1 - Identify the Need to Fill a Position**

1. The Managers and Supervisors identify the need to fill a position. HR practitioners shall advise Managers and Supervisors regarding the staffing options associated with filling positions.

2. In deciding to announce a position using Demo, consideration should be given to previous recruitment efforts (if applicable), outreach, desired skills and experience needed for the position, and whether there is a need to address diversity gaps.
3. Refer to applicable provisions of any Departmental Regulation, Forest Service policy, and/or collective bargaining agreements that address management's requirements on recruitment and outreach.

## **11.2 - Job Analysis**

The job analysis identifies the competencies/knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) directly related to performance on the job and is based on the official position description and/or validated occupational competencies. When conducting a job analysis, the requirements outlined in 5 CFR 300.103(a) and 29 CFR part 1607, Uniform Guidelines for Employee Selection Procedures, must be satisfied. The job analysis, at a minimum, should identify the following:

1. Basic duties and requirements of the position and their relative degree of importance to an employee's success in the job.
2. Major job requirements and their linkage to the competencies/KSAs for use in the assessment; and
3. Factors used to evaluate candidates for basic qualifications, that is, specialized experience or selective factors for minimum qualification determinations.

### **11.21 - Selective Placement Factors**

A selective factor is a knowledge, skill or ability, basic to and essential for satisfactory performance of the job, for example, a special language proficiency. It represents minimum requirements, in addition to or more specific than the qualifications defined in the OPM Qualification Standards. A selective factor and/or multiple selective factors becomes part of the minimum qualification requirements for a position. Applicants who do not meet the selective factor(s) are ineligible for further consideration. A selective factor can be used for positions at any grade level where its use would be appropriate. The selective factors must be included in the vacancy announcement.

Selective factors cannot:

1. Be so narrow that they would exclude from consideration applicants who could perform the duties of the position.
2. Require competencies/KSAs that could be learned readily during the normal period (90 days) of orientation to the position.
3. Be so specific as to exclude from consideration applicants without prior Federal experience.



4. Be so restrictive that they run counter to the goal of placing applicants from priority placement lists Workforce Restructuring and Placement Systems (WRAPS) established to assist in the placement of employees affected by Reduction-In-Force.

## 11.22 - Modified Qualification Standards

The Demo Project authorizes modification of the OPM Qualification Standards for experience and/or substitutable education (other than positive education, professional certification, or licensure requirements) when it is determined that candidates can successfully perform the work of the position even if they are unable to meet all the requirements in the applicable OPM Qualification Standards. This provision should rarely be used.

Examples of reasons for modifying the qualification standards are similar to those for determining a shortage category and include:

1. Availability of a candidate(s) capable of performing the duties of the position but unable to meet the requirements in the OPM Qualification Standards;
2. Unique labor market conditions; or
3. Failure of past recruitment efforts to yield an adequate number of qualified candidates.

Any modification to the Qualification Standards must ensure that candidate's background includes experience that has provided the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for successful job performance. It is not permissible to require additional amounts of education or experience beyond those required by the OPM Qualification Standards. Selective factors may be used with a modified standard and are not considered to be a modification.

Experience. Modifications may be made to experience requirements but do not develop a new standard or substitute a standard from a lower grade for use at a higher grade. The intent is not to eliminate specialized experience requirements but to provide flexibility when conditions warrant. For example, experience in a similar or related field rather than directly-related experience or having less than the normal one year of specialized experience.

Education. Modifications may be made to substitutable education but not to positive education requirements. Do not modify the distribution of coursework requirements within a positive education standard or the Part B education requirements in standards containing a Part B. For example, a degree or coursework in a field that is not directly related to the work of the position but provides the candidate with the foundation to perform the work successfully.

The decision to modify a standard must be made before a vacancy announcement is issued. The vacancy announcement will contain the modified standard but will not identify it as a modified standard.

The modified standard applies only to the position(s) being filled as a result of the vacancy announcement for which a modified standard was approved and is not binding for future recruitment.

The Qualification Standards must be the same when recruiting internal and external candidates simultaneously. Since the rules for modifying standards under Demo differ than that for Merit; the standards would not be the same; and therefore you cannot recruit simultaneously.

When internal and external candidates for a position are recruited at different times, the same qualification standard need not be used in each case. For example, if a position had been previously advertised internally resulting in an insufficient number of qualified candidates and no selection was made, the same position may be advertised externally using a modified standard. This is because the vacancy announcements for the position were not advertised simultaneously and candidates from each source were not considered concurrently.

The case file must be documented to show such modification of qualifications was intentional and not a result of misinterpretation of the OPM standard. Use Demo Form (DF) 003 – Modification of Qualification Standards to document the modification of a qualifications standard and a copy filed on the right-hand side of the employee's Official Personnel Folder. The use of a modified qualification standard must also be documented on the Standard Form (SF) 50.

### **11.3 - Crediting Plan**

A crediting plan is a document used solely to evaluate the quality of experience, as defined by the Supervisor/Hiring Manager, using weighted benchmarks or quantitative measurements. The plan measures the applicant's level of possession of job-related experience necessary for successful performance in the job (see section 14.44, Evaluation of Quality Experience, for the definition of quality experience). Examples of quality experience must be established and documented on the Crediting Plan prior to the commencement of recruitment activity. If announcing a position at multiple grade levels, a separate definition for quality experience must be established for each grade. Crediting Plans and quality experience definitions are confidential and are neither published in the vacancy announcement nor released to applicants or the public in response to a Freedom of Information Act request.

### **11.4 - Demonstration Project Direct-Hire Authority**

Local determination of a shortage category for direct-hire purposes is authorized under the Demo Project. Such determinations will be made by applying the criteria in 5 CFR 337.204 or other factors that the Agency has determined to be significant. The authority for approving a determination that a shortage category exists is delegated to the HRM Director.

Units may continue to make use of direct-hire authorities issued by the OPM. These hires are outside the scope of provisions contained within the Demo project authority; therefore, incentives or extended probationary period under this authority may not be applied.

#### **11.41 - Determination of Shortage Category**

In consultation with the Supervisor and/or Hiring Manager, the HR practitioner will make the initial determination that a shortage category exists by taking into account the following conditions:

- a. Local labor market and availability of candidates specializations;
- b. Prior recruitment efforts resulted in an insufficient number of quality candidates, including the number and quality of internal candidates;
- c. High declination rates;
- d. Applicant pool is limited based on position requiring skills on the cutting edge of a rapidly changing field;
- e. Use of other appointing authorities, recruitment initiatives, incentives, or training efforts have not been sufficient; and
- f. Desirability of geographic location, duties, and/or work environment associated with the position.

Do not use underrepresentation of women and/or minorities in an occupation or series as a factor in making a shortage determination.

The Human Resources Officer is responsible for making the final determination that a shortage category exists. Shortage category determinations should be documented sufficiently by using Demo Form 004, Shortage Category Determination and included as part of the case file and filed on the right-hand side of the Official Personnel Folder of the selectee.

#### **11.42 - Area and Scope for Shortage Category**

Shortage categories may be established for an area equal to the area where recruitment activities would be typical for the occupation; for example, commuting area may be appropriate if the relevant labor pool is found within the local commuting area; this would be more typical of clerk, technician, and wage grade positions, but would not be appropriate for professional and administrative positions.

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

#### **11.43 - Duration of Shortage Category Determination**

Shortage determinations can remain in effect for up to three-years. HR practitioners, in conjunction with selecting officials, are responsible for confirming that the circumstances under which the original determination was approved are still in effect when applying a previous

determination to a current situation; that is, they must reexamine the labor market and any other factors that led to the original determination in terms of relevancy to the current situation. Documentation for shortage category determinations must be kept in the case file. Shortage determinations may be extended after three-years if the conditions as stated above remain in effect. Written recertification/documentation is required for each extension beyond the three-years.

#### **11.44 - Public Notice Requirements**

A vacancy announcement must be prepared for vacancies to be filled through direct-hire and must be entered into the OPM USAJOBS website. Follow guidance in the Standard Operating Procedures for creating and posting announcements. Make modifications as needed to reflect direct-hire requirements.

### **12 - Recruitment and Relocation Incentives**

The use of cash incentives, reimbursement for relocation travel and transportation expenses, or any combination, is authorized under the Demo authority to encourage individuals to enter and remain with the Federal service. Incentives may be authorized to augment the employment and compensation package as an effort to enhance the Agency's ability to compete with other employers for individuals with desired skills. The payment of incentives is discretionary in all cases.

#### **12.1 - Decision to Authorize Recruitment Incentives**

The determination to authorize an incentive must be made prior to the employee's entrance on duty and be based upon such market factors as a shortage category designation; salary comparability and salary offer issues; relocation considerations; programmatic urgency; emerging technologies; or a candidate's unique qualifications.

Incentives are not authorized for current permanent competitive-service Federal employees selected from a Demo authority vacancy announcement. 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 Demo authority. There is no requirement to include a statement regarding incentives in the vacancy announcement; however, if a position is likely difficult to fill and offering an incentive could affect the applicant pool, Managers and Supervisors should consider adding a statement to the vacancy announcement.

#### **12.2 - Cash Payments**

The exact amount of a cash-incentive payment must be approved prior to the employee's entrance on duty. A cash-incentive payment is not considered to be a part of an individual's basic pay.

A cash-incentive payment may be paid in a lump sum upon entrance on duty; made incrementally over a period not-to-exceed 36 months; or deferred until the completion of a

specified service period, not-to-exceed 36 months. Complete DF 011, Recruitment Incentive Authorization Cash Payment.

### **12.21 - Service Requirement**

Prior to paying an incentive, the employee must sign a written service agreement to complete a specified period of employment with the Agency (DF-011A Lump Sum Payment or DF-011B Deferred Payments). The service period must be 12 months with the Forest Service. Service agreements must specify the total amount of the incentive, the method of paying the incentive, the timing and amounts of each incentive, and the conditions under which the service agreement must be terminated. For incremental or deferred cash-incentive payments, the employee must be on the Forest Service rolls on the scheduled date in order to receive payment. No outstanding deferred or incremental amounts may be paid in cases where the employee, for any reason, is no longer employed by the Forest Service.

### **12.22 - Repayment of Incentives**

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 by the appropriate official delegated authority.

### **12.3 - Relocation Travel and Transportation Expenses**

The authority to reimburse new appointees under Demo for relocation travel and transportation expenses includes all of the expenses authorized for transferring employees, such 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. Such reimbursements for relocation travel and transportation expenses to new employees are limited and must comply with the Departmental Manual (4050-575-001 dated June 21, 2010). Use DF-012 to document authorization and options approved under this incentive option.

Managers wishing to establish dollar limits, in lieu of paying full amounts associated with some options, should consider the use of the Cash Payments (sec. 10.12) instead of the option for reimbursement of relocation and transportation expenses.

#### **12.31 - Service Requirement**

The service requirement for payment of relocation travel and transportation expenses is 12 months of service with the Federal Government.

#### **12.32 - Repayment of Incentives**

If an employee is separated prior to fulfilling the 12-month service agreement, they must repay the full amount of travel and transportation expenses they received, 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.

## **13 - Recruitment Provisions**

### **13.1 - Public Notice Requirement**

Public notice is required when announcing positions under the Demo authority (5 CFR 330.103). HR practitioners are required to post all vacancy announcements on the OPM USAJOBS website.

### **13.2 - Vacancy Announcement Requirements**

The vacancy announcement must be posted to USAJOBS prior to the opening date not the same day. A copy of the USAJOBS vacancy announcement must be maintained for file management and audit purposes. Vacancy announcements must follow the OPM regulations outlined in 5 CFR 330.104 and any Agency specific or collective bargaining requirements. Keep vacancy announcements open long enough to attract an adequate number of candidates. This period must be no less than three working days. Reference applicable Standard Operating Procedures for creating, posting and extending announcements.

### **13.3 - Required Documents**

Vacancy announcements must specify the required documents to be submitted at the time of application and prior to appointment. HR practitioners should reference the Standard Operating Procedures for further guidance. Applicants who do not submit the documents and/or information that is specified as required in the vacancy announcement by the closing date (or date a certificate is issued for open continuous announcements) will be considered and evaluated only on the basis of the documentation submitted.

For some occupations (such as landscape architect), Managers may want to request work samples or projects as part of the application package. Work samples or projects are not required under Demo as part of the evaluation process; however, it may be appropriate to ask for work samples in the vacancy announcement to be used only for selection purposes and not in the initial rating or evaluation process.

### **13.4 - Receipt of Applications**

Applicants must submit their application and supporting documents through the automated procedures by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on the closing date of the announcement. However, if applying online poses a hardship, the applicant must contact the point of contact listed on the vacancy announcement before the closing date of the vacancy announcement for an alternative method. All hardship application packages must be complete and submitted not later than noon ET on the closing date of the announcement in order to be entered into the automated system prior to its closing. The vacancy announcement must clearly state the submission requirements for online or hardship application packages.

Ten-Point Preference Eligible Late Filers. Under the Demo Project, there is no requirement to accept applications or maintain a list of 10-Point late filers. This is based on the exemption to application of 5 CFR 332 in Federal Register Vol. 55, No 47, Page 9075, dated March 9, 1990.

## **14 - Candidate Evaluation And Referral**

### **14.1 - Determination of Basic Eligibility**

The HR practitioner retains final responsibility for determining the basic eligibility of individual applicants in accordance with applicable OPM rules and regulations, such as, citizenship requirements, suitability, and veterans' preference adjudication.

### **14.2 - Determination of Basic Qualifications**

Candidates will be evaluated against the experience and education requirements in the OPM Qualification Standards, selective factors, and/or modified qualification standards. Test requirements specified in the standards, including minimum typing or stenography scores, are eliminated. Self-certification of proficiency skills, such as those identified for typing or stenography, is acceptable documentation to assess these skill requirements. Demo does not depart from the OPM standard criteria when recency of experience is used in determining qualifications. In addition, OPM policy on positive education, licensure, and professional certification requirements will be followed. Determining basic qualifications in highly specialized or technical fields may require input from subject matter experts.

### **14.3 - Veterans' Preference Adjudication**

When applicants do not submit documentation for the veterans' preference claimed on their application as stated in the vacancy announcement, refer them without preference or the highest level of preference that can be confirmed based on any documentation provided. If the applicant is selected for the position, the applicant shall provide proof documents for the veteran's preference claimed prior to receiving a job offer.

### **14.4 - Evaluation of Candidates**

#### **14.41 - Evaluation of Candidates in a Shortage Category (Direct Hire)**

Candidates considered under a Demo shortage category determination for direct hire need only meet eligibility and basic qualifications requirements. No further assessment of these candidates is performed.

#### **14.42- Evaluation of Candidates in Non-Shortage Categories**

Candidates meeting eligibility and basic qualifications requirements, including any selective factors, for the position are evaluated against the criteria outlined below for the purpose of establishing the quality group and eligible group.

1. Above average academic education (knowledge);

2. Quality experience (skill); and
3. High ability (ability).

It is necessary for an applicant to meet only one of the three criteria for placement into the quality group. Once it has been determined that an applicant meets one of the criteria, there is no further need to evaluate the applicant against any of the other criteria. An applicant who has been evaluated against all three criteria and found not to meet any of the three is placed in the eligible group.

#### **14.43 - Evaluation of Above Average Academic Education Achievement**

Candidates demonstrating above average academic education achievement under any of the options outlined below are eligible for the quality category.

1. Candidate has completed all requirements 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 they meet one of the requirements listed below (b and c apply to post-high school only). The high school grade point average (GPA) may not be used to place a candidate in the quality group for a position for which a positive or minimum education requirement has been established.
  - a. The candidate's GPA 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. The candidate's GPA 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 post high school curriculum; in each case, verification that the required average was maintained is prerequisite to appointment.
  - c. The 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 placed in the quality group on the basis of overall GPA 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 their GPA in order to establish eligibility for placement in the quality group based on above average education achievement. In the event that their GPA 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. Reference OPM's Qualification Standards, and General Schedule Qualification Policies, for evaluating the acceptability of foreign education for Federal employment.

Eligibility under this provision is awarded to candidates who have completed, or who are about to complete, a formal education program 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 GPA was maintained, they are eligible for the quality category. Additional coursework has no impact on eligibility, once established.

For example, a candidate qualifying for placement in the quality group based on high school GPA retains that eligibility even though they may go on to complete several more courses as part of a continuing education program. The additional coursework does not become part of the overall GPA computation. Coursework beyond the high school level that 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. The 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, for example, M.A., Ph.D., and so forth. Candidate must provide certification of completion of all degree requirements, for example, thesis, dissertation, and so forth.

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

Grade Point Average:

1. General Education Diploma. When evaluating candidates with a general education diploma (GED) in place of a high school diploma and GPA, consider a GED score of 52 as equivalent to an overall GPA of 2.7 on a 4-point scale. A GED score of 52 or above qualifies an applicant for entry into the quality group based on above-average educational achievement. To be credited, the GED must be issued by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as equivalent to U.S. education standards.
2. Graduate Level Programs. GPA requirements do not apply to graduate level programs, that's why it's possible for an applicant to have an overall GPA below 2.7 but still be evaluated as a quality candidate based on the applicant's completion of a master's degree program if the master's degree is appropriate and related to the position being filled.
3. Rounding a GPA. Round GPA's to the next highest tenth of a point when possible. For example, round a 2.65 GPA to 2.7, as a result the applicant can be placed into the quality group for above-average educational achievement.

4. Documentation to support GPA. Documentation of GPA by supporting transcripts is required when the GPA is used to evaluate an applicant for the quality group. The vacancy announcement should clearly state what must be included in a complete application and the consequences of submitting an incomplete application. The official transcripts must be obtained and verified prior to a job offer being extended, and once hired, filed in the case file and the employee's Official Personnel File.

#### **14.44 - Evaluation of Quality Experience**

Candidates who have quality experience are eligible for the quality category. Quality experience is directly related experience and is differentiated from the specialized experience requirements outlined in the OPM Qualification Standards 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 under this provision.

Quality experience is distinct from, and must be determined separately from selective factors. An applicant must first meet a selective factor in order to basically qualify for the position, whereas quality experience is used as a means to evaluate candidates for entry into the quality group.

Quality experience may include outstanding contributions to the state of the art or to the advancement of knowledge in a directly related field. 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.

The intent of the "quality experience" provision is to go beyond experience that 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 qualification requirements. This is accomplished by the use of assessment questions that will evaluate quality experience as defined by the manager. These questions may or may not be the same that are used to evaluate candidates under merit promotion as the merit promotion assessment questions are based on the KSA's identified in the Job Analysis and not on a quality experience definition. 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 case file.

#### **14.45 - Evaluation of High Ability**

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. Utilize either of the following measures in assessment of the candidate's high ability:

1. The 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 (used only when 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. The candidate has a GPA of at least 2.7 on a 4-point scale for at least 24 semester hours (or equivalent) of coursework above the high school level that is directly related to the position to be filled.

#### **14.5 - Requests for Reconsideration of Qualifications or Ranking**

An applicant may request reconsideration of their ranking, if believed to be improper. Original examining decisions are subject to reconsideration upon reasonable demonstration by the applicant that review is warranted.

The applicant's request for review must be made in writing (email is acceptable), should indicate why they believe the original decision was not proper, and should include any other pertinent information. The request is submitted to the office that made the decision (first level review); however, the review should be conducted by a HR practitioner other than the person who made the original decision. Responses to a review request should provide a full explanation of the reason(s) for the decision. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the decision of the first level review, the request should be submitted to the next higher level of the organization (second level review). This decision is final and there is no further review.

##### **14.51 - Reconsideration Decision - Favorable to Applicant**

When a determination is made that a candidate did not receive proper consideration for a position and the candidate would have been among the qualified eligibles referred for the position had they not missed proper consideration, refer the candidate prior to issuance of a certificate of qualified candidates for the next available vacancy to be filled at the same grade level, series, and location under this authority. If the certificate has already been issued, refer for the next position in the same series, grade level, location, and specialized duties. Selection of such candidates is not mandatory; however, the priority consideration candidates who are non-preference eligibles may be selected over preference eligibles who apply under normal procedures. Eligibility for priority consideration ceases when the candidate has been given one priority consideration for a missed consideration.

Absent a procedural violation, nonselected candidates may follow any appeal process available under current law or regulation, for example, MSPB, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and so forth.

## **14.6 - Referral**

### **14.61 - Referral of Candidates under Direct Hire**

All candidates meeting basic eligibility and qualification requirements will be referred to the selecting official. There is no requirement to apply veteran's preference.

### **14.62 - Referral of Candidates in Non-Shortage Categories**

#### **Single Grade**

Determine referral of qualified candidates as follows:

1. Place candidates meeting any of the criteria outlined in section 14.42, Evaluation of Candidates, in the quality group.
2. Place candidates who do not meet any of these criteria in the eligible group.
3. Within each group, list preference eligibles ahead of non-preference eligibles. For positions other than scientific and professional at GS-9 and above, list at the top of the quality group, preference eligibles who meet basic eligibility requirements and have a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more (CP or CPS).
4. When referring candidates to the selecting official, refer the quality group first unless there is an inadequate number of candidates, at which point the quality group may be combined (merged) with the eligible group.
  - a. An inadequate number is generally considered to be one or two candidates in the quality group. In this situation, HR practitioners should have a discussion with the Manager to determine if referral of only one or two candidates is sufficient. Discussion should not include names, number of additional eligible candidates that would be referred, or if preference eligible candidates would be included as this information is not merit based.
  - b. If categories are merged, no distinction is made between the quality and eligible candidates.
  - c. List all qualified preference eligibles ahead of non-preference eligibles.
5. Name requests are not permitted, since there are no ratings and rankings, and selection can be made from the entire group after taking veterans' preference into account.

#### **Multi-Grade**

When multi-grade positions are advertised, ensure that candidates are referred appropriately for each grade level preference indicated in the application.

1. Group candidates by grade level for referral to the selecting official as follows:

- a. Place candidates meeting any one of the criteria outlined in section 14.42, Evaluation of Candidates, in the quality group.
  - b. Place candidates who do not meet any of these criteria in the eligible group.
  - c. Within each group, list preference eligibles ahead of non-preference eligibles. For positions other than scientific and professional at GS-9 and above, list at the top of the quality group preference eligibles who meet basic eligibility requirements and have a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more (CP or CPS).
2. When referring candidates to the selecting official, refer the quality group for each grade level first unless there is an inadequate number of candidates, at which point the quality group may be combined with the eligible group.
- a. An inadequate number is generally considered to be one or two candidates in the quality groups collectively. In this situation, HR should discuss with the manager to determine if referral of only one or two candidates is sufficient. Discussion should not include names, number of additional eligible candidates that would be referred, or if preference eligible candidates would be included as this information is not merit based.
  - b. If categories are merged, no distinction is made between the quality and eligible candidates.
  - c. List all qualified preference eligibles ahead of non-preference eligibles.
3. Name requests are not permitted, since there are no ratings and rankings, and selection can be made from the entire group after taking veterans' preference into account.

#### **14.63 - Time Limits on Certificates**

The time limit for Demo certificates is the same as that for Merit certificates. Currently a certificate is valid for up to a total of 60 days. The certificate is initially issued with an expiration date 15 calendar days from the date of issuance. The HR practitioner who issued the certificate may grant the first extension of 15 days upon the request of the Hiring Manager. A second extension of 15 days may be requested by the Hiring Manager and approved by the Line Officer of the hiring unit (in the case of HRM, Budget & Finance, Chief Information Office, and the Washington Office, the approving official is the Senior Executive Staff Director). A third extension of 15 days may be granted only for emergencies of national scope such as hiring freezes, natural disasters, lapse in appropriations, and other unexpected circumstances, and must be approved by the next higher Line Officer. All requests/approvals for extensions must be in writing, made prior to the expiration date of the certificate, and provided to the HR practitioner to document the extension for the case file. Time limits on certificates are subject to change, as such, always reference current policy and Standard Operating Procedures.

## 15 - Selection and Appointment

### 15.1 - Selection of Candidates

1. Demo Shortage Category/Direct-Hire Authority: Managers shall make selections from the qualified candidates referred. Veteran's preference does not apply.
2. Non-Shortage Category: Managers shall make selections from the quality (or merged) group established for each grade level under consideration. Candidates with veterans' preference must be selected unless the Manager seeks and obtains approval to pass over the veteran. Non-preference candidates may be selected only when all veterans' preference candidates are selected or approved for a pass over.

Preference eligibles have equal standing; therefore, selection may be made from any preference eligible in the quality group, that is, CPS, CP, XP, TP or SSP.

### 15.2 - Veterans' Preference

Veterans' preference eligibles receive preference in the non-shortage category selection process. A preference eligible must be selected before non-preference eligibles in all cases within a category (Quality or Eligible). Preference eligibles have equal standing; therefore, a 5-point preference eligible can be selected over a 10-point preference eligible. A non-preference eligible cannot be selected when preference eligibles are available unless a formal request to pass over the preference eligible is submitted and approved.

#### Passing Over a Preference Eligible

The HRM Director has the authority to act on proposals to pass over a preference eligible, including compensable disabled veterans, for suitability, qualifications and other reasons considered to be disqualifying under 5 U.S.C. 3318. An eligible that is objected to by an appointing official may be removed from consideration on a certificate only after the pass over has been approved.

In the case of a pass over of a preference eligible who has a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more, the HR practitioner shall notify the preference eligible of the proposed pass over, of the reasons therefore, and their right to respond to such reasons within 15 calendar days of the date of such notification. Documentation is required to demonstrate that the pass over notification was sent timely to the preference eligible's last known address.

A Hiring Manager requesting a pass over or objection to a preference eligible must complete the Request to Pass Over or Object to a Veteran, form DF-009 and DF-010, and submit the request and all supporting documentation to the human resources practitioner.

#### Appeals of a Pass Over

Preference eligibles who have been passed over have no appeal rights to Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). An individual may not appeal to the MSPB a decision by OPM or an

agency with delegated authority to sustain an objection pursuant to this part, including a decision to grant a pass over request, irrespective of the reason for the decision (5 CFR 332.406(g)).

### **15.3 - Interviews and Reference Checks**

There is no requirement to conduct interviews; however, reference checks are required for all supervisory positions and strongly recommended for all other positions. It is advisable to reserve reference checking to those candidates either to be interviewed or recommended for selection. The Forest Service Reference Check Guide and Form should be utilized for all reference checking. The questions on the form and be modified or supplemented by hiring managers as needed to match the needs of the position.

## **16 - Candidate Notification**

### **16.1 - Tentative Selection Notification**

All offers and selections are tentative until the HR practitioner has verified all applicable pre-employment requirements, including but not limited to verification of education with official transcript(s) or other equivalent documentation, physical/medical examination, drug screening, U.S. citizenship, suitability, veterans' preference, and/or other factors as appropriate.

To minimize the risk of complaint or appeal, exercise caution when making tentative offers after appropriate consideration of WRAPS, CTAP, RPL, and ICTAP candidates. Ensure the candidate understands the offer is tentative and may be withdrawn. Never ask candidates to sign service or other incentive agreements prior to a firm offer, approval of an incentive, and the establishment of an effective date.

### **16.2 - Firm Offer of Employment and Establishment of Effective Date**

Once all pre-employment requirements have been successfully met, the HR practitioner, in collaboration with the selecting official, establishes the reporting date and the official offer of employment is extended. The HR practitioner discusses with the selecting official any recruitment incentives, payment of travel expenses, above the minimum rate appointment, and so forth, to be offered and included in the letter of offer along with the service agreement, if applicable.

### **16.3 - Documenting Failure to Respond to a Job Offer**

An applicant may be contacted by letter, electronic email, or telephone to determine their availability for a job offer. Instruct the applicant to respond by a specific date if they wish to continue to be considered for the position. If the applicant does not respond by that date, document failure to respond and no further consideration must be given to that applicant for the position. No additional written documentation or notification is required. If you are contacting the applicant via telephone, make a good faith effort to speak to the applicant before annotating their record. Document the case file by showing who made the contact, when, with whom you spoke, and a summary of any conversation that you had.

**17 - Initial Demonstration Project Appointments**

There are specific documentation requirements for individuals hired under the Demo Project authority.

The USDA Demonstration Project Official Personnel Folder Coversheet (DF-013) (revised March 11, 1999), is to be filed on the right side of the electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF) on top of the Standard Form 50, Notification of Personnel Action, that documents the employee's Demo Project appointment.

**17.1 - Restriction on Movement After Competitive Appointment (90-Day Rule)**

All candidates selected for permanent positions under Demo are subject to the restriction found in 5 CFR 330.502. An appointee cannot be reassigned, promoted, demoted, detailed, transferred or reinstated into a different position or to a different geographical area until after completion of 90 days in the position to which they were appointed.

The restriction does not apply to employees who were appointed under an external recruitment authority in the last 90 days. The 90-day restriction starts over on the most recent appointment.

**17.2 - USDA Demonstration Project Forms**

Forms authorized for use are identified by a DF (Demo Form) numbering system. Unless identified as reserved, HR practitioners must use the form identified for a particular process. These forms are available electronically through the Forest Service Directives website.

Form Number	Form Description
DF-002	Selective Factors/Quality Experience Worksheet
DF-003	Modification of Qualification Standards
DF-004	Shortage Category Determination
DF-009	Request To Pass Over or Object to A Preference Eligible
DF-010	Medical Reasons for Passing Over A Preference Eligible or Rejecting A CPS Eligible
DF-011	Recruitment Incentive Authorization - Cash Payment (and Service Agreement)
DF-011A	Service Agreement for Receipt of Lump Sum Cash Payment
DF-011B	Agreement for Receipt of Deferred Cash Payment
DF-012	Reimbursement of Relocation Travel and Transportation Expenses - Recruitment Incentive Authorization Form (and Service Agreement)
DF-012A	Service Agreement for Receipt of Payment for Relocation Travel and Transportation Expenses
DF-013	Official Personnel Folder Cover Sheet (Reference Appendix A)



## **18 - Probationary Period**

### **18.1 - Extended Probationary Period for Research Scientists**

All Research Scientists (and only Research Scientists) appointed under the Demo Project in career conditional appointments, shall be placed on a three-year probationary period. Conversion from probationary status to career status occurs after three years of service in the same manner as with all other employees who are appointed with a one-year probationary period. Aside from extending the time period, all other features and requirements 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.

The purpose of the extended probationary period is to allow Managers an adequate period of time to assess the job performance of employees in scientific positions and to provide the employee with a longer period of time to demonstrate their competence.

Scientific positions are those covered under the Research Grade Evaluation Guide. These employees are assigned to tenure group 2. To ensure that Managers have enough time to make tenure decisions, the probationary period will be extended by the amount of time the employee spends in non-pay status, except when prohibited by law, for example, credit is given for non-pay time due to compensable injury or military service.

The extended probationary period is portable both within and between Agricultural Research Service and Forest Service, but not to non-participating agencies. Employees under an extended probationary period are eligible for transfer to other Federal agencies. Upon position change 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 is no longer in effect, except for movements within and between Agricultural Research Service and the Forest Service.

An employee under an extended probationary period who is separated prior to completion of the three-year period and then reappointed under the Demo Project authority begins a new probationary period.

Employees under an extended probationary period are not eligible for the reemployment rights in 5 CFR Part 352 based on other service, such as with an international organization, as these rights are generally discretionary with the Agency head or are reserved for non-probationers.

Completion of an extended probationary period as a Supervisor or Manager fulfills the requirement to complete a supervisory probationary period. Completion of at least one year of an extended probationary period as a Supervisor or Manager fulfills this requirement for employees who move to non-participating agencies prior to the completion of the extended probationary period.

If the Agency decides to separate an employee on an extended probationary period for reasons not related to RIF, the Agency shall follow the current procedures for separating probationary employees, (5 CFR 315.804, 315.805, and 315.806); 5 CFR Part 432 and 752 do not apply to

separation of an employee under an extended probationary period, regardless of the employee's length of service.

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 completion of probation as outlined in 5 CFR 315.802 (b). These employees will also be assigned to tenure group 2 to reflect their probationary status.

### **18.2 - Decision to Convert Employee to Non-probationary Status**

The final managerial decision to convert a Scientist from probationary status is based on the same factors that are considered prior to converting all other probationary employees, including performance, suitability, conduct, aptitude, and so forth, as set forth in 5 CFR 315, Subparts H and I. The decision to retain these employees shall also take into account the documentation of the employees' research findings. Employees shall be rated at least fully successful in order to be converted to non-probationary status.

Four months prior to the conclusion of the extended probationary period, the Supervisor should make a decision to either retain and convert the employee to career tenure or to separate the employee. This action 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.

### **18.3 - Probationary Period for Non-Research Positions**

An applicant appointed from a Demo certificate and given a career or career-conditional appointment must serve a one-year probationary period when it is the individual's first appointment to the competitive service. This period is to assess the employee's fitness for continued employment. During the probationary period, the Supervisor is observing the employee's performance and conduct. If during the probationary period an employee's performance is not adequate and fails to demonstrate fitness or qualifications for the position, they can possibly be separated from the federal service (Subpart H, 5 CFR Part 315).

Under Subpart I, 5 CFR 315.901, employees promoted, transferred, or otherwise assigned for the first time to supervisory or managerial positions, are required to serve a one-year supervisory or managerial probationary period.

## **19 - Case File Disposition, Documentation, Audits and Reporting**

Ensure all records created as a result of the processes prescribed in this directive are maintained and disposed in accordance with FSH 6209.11, Records Management Handbook, which is the Forest Service records disposition schedule (RDS). The RDS can be located at <http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives>.

### **19.1 - Records and Information**

A record of each recruitment action must be documented in a case file sufficient to allow reconstruction of the action, including documentation on how candidates were evaluated. These records should be documented according to the Case File Checklist.

### **19.2 - Self Audits**

The HR Staffing Teams (HRST) shall conduct bi-annual and annual self-audits of their Demo Project authority actions.

### **19.3 - Quarterly Workload Reporting**

The HRSTs must complete the quarterly workload report and submit it to the appropriate office. These reports are due by the 15th of the month (that is, January 15, April 15, July 15, and October 15). Negative responses are required.

**APPENDIX A**

THIS FORM IS APPROVED BY THE U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AS A LONG-TERM OFFICIAL PERSONNEL FOLDER/MERGED RECORDS PERSONNEL FOLDER (OPF/MRPF) RECORD.

IT MUST BE FILED ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE OPF/MRPF ON TOP OF THE SF-50, NOTIFICATION OF PERSONNEL ACTION THAT DOCUMENTS THE EMPLOYEE'S MOVE INTO THE PROJECT.

**USDA DEMONSTRATION PROJECT  
OFFICIAL PERSONNEL FOLDER COVER SHEET**

This employee was appointed to a Forest Service site under the USDA Demonstration Project Authority; reference 5 USC Chapter 47, Public Law 105-277, Federal Register, 67 FR 70776, and Public Law 110-246. The full text of the Demonstration Project plan was published in the March 9, 1990, Federal Register.

Appointment under this authority conveys the same status and benefits as a competitive appointment from an OPM certificate of eligibles with the following exception:

The probationary period under this authority for research scientists, as defined by the Research Evaluation Guide, is three years.

The following information is provided regarding the extended probationary period for research scientists:

Aside from the longer time period, all other features of the current probationary period are retained.

These employees are assigned to tenure group 2 while serving the three year probationary period. Prior service is credited towards completion of the extended probationary period in accordance with current regulations.

Any movement within and between the Forest Service and Agricultural Research Service is subject to satisfactory completion of the extended probationary period.

Employees under an extended probationary period are eligible for transfer to other Federal agencies at which time the extended probationary period will no longer be in effect. Upon position change to another USDA agency or transfer to a non-USDA agency, any remaining balance of a one year probationary period must be served.

Employees under an extended probationary period are not eligible for the reemployment rights in 5 CFR Part 352 based on other service such as with an international organization. Completion of an extended probationary period as a Supervisor or Manager fulfills the requirement to complete a supervisory or managerial probationary period. Completion of at least one year of an extended probationary period or Manager fulfills this requirement for an

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

**Chapter 10 - Recruitment, Candidate Evaluation, and Selection**

**Amendment:** 6109.16-2019-1

**Effective date:** September 10, 2019

employee who moves out of the project prior to the completion of the extended probationary period.

For further information regarding this appointment, please contact:

USDA Forest Service  
Human Resources Management  
4000 Masthead St. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87109  
1-877-372-7248: press 2 for HRM  
<http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/hrm/>

\*\*\*\*\*THIS DOCUMENT MUST BE RETAINED WITH THE APPOINTMENT SF 50 FOR  
THE LIFE OF THE OPF/MRPF\*\*\*\*\*