

For: FSA Employees

Merit Promotion Process Changes

Approved by: Administrator



1 Overview

A

Background

The 1997 FSA Organizational Climate Survey identified employee concerns about the perception that many promotions were the result of preselection and use of a buddy system.

When the Administrator established the National EEO/Civil Rights Advisory Council in 1999, an initial task was to suggest recommendations that would help reduce negative perceptions about the administration of the merit promotion selection process. The Council met in July 1999 and established a subgroup to address the merit promotion process. The Council, in conjunction with CR&SBUS, HRD, and KCAO-PD, made recommendations to improve the merit promotion process. These recommendations have been approved by the Administrator.

B

Purpose and Effective Date

This notice reiterates policies and identifies changes about the merit promotion process within FSA.

These changes are effective immediately.

Note: Selecting officials still have the option of filling positions noncompetitively through programs, such as the Student Co-op Program and Workforce Recruitment Program.

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<p>Disposal Date</p> <p>October 1, 2001</p>	<p>Distribution</p> <p>All FSA employees; State Offices relay to County Offices</p>
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1 Overview (Continued)

C

FSA Policy

Supervisors and managers shall provide fair, equitable, and full consideration to all candidates without discrimination or favoritism.

D

**Labor
Management
Obligations**

Where exclusive representation exists, this notice does not apply until bargaining takes place. Where contract language addresses these policies and procedures for bargaining unit employees, contract language prevails.

E

**Additional
Information**

If additional information is needed, contact the following.

Office	Contact
National Office	Servicing Employment Specialist in HRD
Kansas City Offices APFO State Offices	Servicing Employment Specialist in KCAO-PD
County Offices	State Office

2 Changes in the Merit Promotion Process

A

Areas of Change

Changes have been made as follows:

- areas of consideration
 - KSA statements
 - identifying the rating panel
 - interview panels
 - selection process
 - training and outreach.
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2 Changes in the Merit Promotion Process (Continued)

**B
Areas of
Consideration**

A broad area of consideration:

- increases the applicant pool
- diversifies the applicant pool
- allows employee mobility.

The Secretary has directed that vacancy announcements for 2-grade vacancies have an “all sources” area of consideration, and have an open period of at least 30 calendar days. In addition, FSA has imposed the requirement that 2-grade vacancies be announced nationwide. The following vacancies are excepted from the “all sources nationwide” requirement:

- 1-grade interval positions
- vacancies in offices that do not have the ceiling for an outside hire
- Career Enhancement vacancies
- Farm Loan Manager vacancies
- Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) vacancies.

The minimum areas of consideration for 2-grade interval vacancies and for the above exceptions are as follows.

Type of Vacancy	Minimum Area of Consideration
2-grade vacancies	All sources nationwide
1-grade vacancies	FSA nationwide
vacancies in offices with no ceiling for outside hires	FSA nationwide
Farm Loan Manager	FSA nationwide
Career Enhancement	FSA local commuting area
CTAP	CTAP eligibles - local commuting area

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2 Changes in the Merit Promotion Process (Continued)

C

**Knowledge, Skill,
and Ability
(KSA)**

KSA statements will be:

- standardized for similar positions, except when positions require specific KSA's that are not typical of other positions of that series, or when positions are interdisciplinary in nature because of added functions assigned to the job
 - reflected in the official position descriptions
 - generic rather than specific, whenever possible.
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D

Rating Panels

Rating panels:

- are mandatory when there are more than 10 competitive candidates for a particular grade level
- may be used if there are 10 or less competitive candidates
- rate and rank qualified applicants to determine which applicants are best qualified and referred to the selecting official.

HRD and KCAO-PD shall:

- ensure rating panels include subject matter experts and are diverse
- ensure rating panel members are at a grade level not lower than the full performance level of the position being filled
- consult with managers and supervisors for suggested panel members
- make final panel member determinations.

Union representatives may suggest panel members.

An EEO observer shall be present during rating panel deliberations. EEO observers serve as observers only and do not rate and rank applicants.

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2 Changes in the Merit Promotion Process (Continued)

E

**Selection Process
for
Nonsupervisory
Positions**

For nonsupervisory positions, selecting officials may select an applicant either from the:

- competitive certificate, that is, from among applicants seeking promotion
- noncompetitive certificate, that is, from among applicants already at that grade or formerly at that grade.

Selecting officials shall interview **all** candidates on the competitive or noncompetitive certificate used for selection.

Selection certificates will be used for the original vacancy only, unless similar new vacancies occur in the same work unit within 30 calendar days of the date the selection certificate is issued.

If no selection is made, the selecting official shall provide justification to the next higher level official for approval of nonselection before returning the certificate to HRD or KCAO-PD.

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2 Changes in the Merit Promotion Process (Continued)

F
Interview Panels
for Supervisory
Positions

Interview panels are mandatory for:

- all supervisory grades GS-14 and above in the National Office
- all supervisory grades GS-13 and above in Field Offices.

Interview panels are **not** mandatory for nonsupervisory positions.

Interview panels shall:

- be determined by management
- consist of at least 3 persons at or above the grade level of the position being filled who have knowledge of the position
- include an EEO representative or a member of the CR/EEO Advisory Council as an observer for all interview panels

Note: The State Civil Rights Coordinator or Special Emphasis Program Manager may serve as the EEO representative in the field.

- be diverse
- interview **all** competitive and noncompetitive applicants on the selection certificates
- use standardized questions, based on the position description, and reflecting management and technical areas
- rate applicants High, Medium, or Low based on their response to the panel questions.

Selecting officials are encouraged to select from the highly ranked applicants, as rated by the interview panel. If a selection is not made from a highly ranked applicant, written justification shall be provided to the next higher official for approval before final decision.

Interview panel records and scores shall be provided to HRD or KCAO-PD for inclusion in the Merit Promotion case files.

If no selection is made, the selecting official shall provide justification to the next higher level official for approval of nonselection.

3 Roles and Responsibilities

A

HRD Responsibilities

To ensure employees are more knowledgeable about the Merit Promotion Plan and process, and to reduce perceptions of preselection, HRD and KCAO-PD shall:

- provide training on:
 - career counseling, including reinforcing that employees must manage their own careers
 - the Merit Promotion Plan and process
 - writing KSA statements
 - supervisory responsibilities
 - distribute the KSA sample booklet to all employees
 - evaluate the Merit Promotion Plan and process, and share the results.
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B

Supervisor/ Manager Responsibilities

Supervisors and Managers shall:

- work closely with HRD or KCAO-PD in the recruitment process
 - interview applicants
 - arrange interview panels, as required
 - review and use workforce profiles before making selections
 - support cultural diversity training for all employees
 - guide and assist employees in developing skills and abilities.
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C

Union Role

Union representatives may:

- assist HRD and KCAO-PD in developing training modules
 - encourage members to understand the Merit Promotion Plan and process
 - evaluate and provide input regarding the merit promotion process.
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