

BPA Human Resources Desk Reference

Merit Promotion Plan for Annual Positions

HR Desk Reference: 410-3-2

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1. Purpose/Objectives

This HR Desk Reference implements BPA HR Directive 410-03: Hiring, Selecting, and Assigning Employees.

The purpose of the HR Desk Reference is to provide a systematic means of identifying, evaluating, and referring applicants who meet minimum qualification requirements, as defined by Office of Personnel Management (OPM), both competitively and non-competitively, on the basis of merit, as well as, alternative qualification procedures such as Upward Mobility, Accelerated Merit Promotion (AMP) process, and use of modified qualifications.

2. Background

- A. **Governance Model:** This HR Desk Reference is part of a tiered approach to BPA’s Human Resources governance model. The first tier is the BPA HR Directive, which provides broad BPA-wide guidelines and standards for making specific human resources-related decisions, and specifies who in BPA is delegated the authority to make them.
- The second tier consists of HR Desk References covering more detailed instructions concerning program administration and processes. These second tier documents will be authorized in the related HR Desk References section of the BPA HR Directive, when they are published as an extension of a specific BPA HR Directive.
- The third tier consists of Standard Operating Procedures applicable to a specific business process. Standard Operating Procedures may stand alone, or be encompassed in an HR Desk Reference.
- B. **Design of the HR Desk Reference:** In order to support the overarching guidance contained in the relevant BPA HR Directive, this HR Desk Reference provides a standardized and consistent approach to BPA HRSC’s and BPA Management’s administration of the programs and processes, contained in this HR Desk Reference.
- C. **Using the HR Desk Reference:** Recorded information is an integral part of all business functions at BPA and, as such, is an asset of the agency that is handled and managed based upon content and the circumstances surrounding the function. Users of this HR Desk Reference are likely to reference a specific function or procedure rather than reading it in its entirety, and it is therefore structured to reflect this type of use.

3. Applicability

This plan covers all actions involving annual positions in the competitive service at BPA, for which competition is required. This plan also allows for the use of competitive procedures to facilitate non-competitive placement actions, e.g., reassignment, change to lower grade. In addition, the plan allows for concurrent consideration of employees appointed under the Veteran’s Readjustment Act (VRA) and/or 30 percent compensable disabled veterans.

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4. Terms & Definitions

- a. **Accelerated Merit Promotion (AMP):** A process that offers a streamlined competitive process for Hiring Managers to expedite internal merit promotion selections, including temporary promotions lasting more than 120 days and permanent promotions, for positions not covered by a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).
- b. **Best Qualified:** Candidate(s) who meet minimum qualification requirements through the rating process, and who meet or exceed the case-specific score of the merit-based ranking process, which best illustrates a meaningful distinction between candidates who are qualified and those who meet this definition.
- c. **Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP):** Provides placement consideration for displaced or surplus employees within BPA.
- d. **Change to Lower Grade:** Voluntary or involuntary change of an employee to a lower grade, when both the old and new positions are either under the same pay schedule/system, or when there is a lesser representative rate, in a different pay schedule/system.
- e. **Commuting Area:** The geographic (usually local) area that constitutes one area for employment purposes, and includes any population center and the surrounding localities, in which people live and can reasonably be expected to travel back and forth daily to their usual employment, as defined by the BPA Travel Manual.
- f. **Competency:** An observable and measurable attribute (whose source may lie in knowledge, skills, and abilities), that contributes to success in performing a task or job.
- g. **Competitive Service:** All civilian positions in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the Federal government and the District of Columbia, not specifically excepted from civil service laws, and not in the Senior Executive Service.
- h. **Crediting Plan:** An assessment instrument used for annual positions, to objectively evaluate candidates against job-related criteria. In Merit Promotion Plan (MPP) actions, it will be used to identify best qualified candidate(s).
- i. **Job Analysis:** The identification of the qualification requirements, Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA's), and critical-activity components of the job, and the degree to which each component is essential to the job. A comprehensive job analysis provides information that is used in the development of the crediting plan.
- j. **KSAC:** The acronym used to identify the Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Competencies (when appropriate), contained in vacancy announcements.
- k. **Learning From Experience (LFE)© Interview:** A tool used in conjunction with an applicant's credentials, technical/functional knowledge, and specific accomplishments

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to help selecting officials determine an applicant’s ability to transfer learning from one experience to another and apply them successfully. © 1996 Les Woller, Woller and Associates, Ltd., Inc. All rights reserved.

- l. **Minimum Qualifications:** The education, experience, or other position-related criteria established by OPM and agencies, which reflect an acceptable level of competence for successful performance in a position.
- m. **Merit Promotion Plan:** The system under which agencies consider an employee for vacant positions, on the basis of personal merit.
- n. **Modified Area of Consideration:** A modified AOC limits the candidate pool to a specific area (i.e., organization), when filling positions under the AMP process. Under the modified AOC in the AMP process, the maximum AOC cannot extend beyond the Departmental Element, including its field sites, and the minimum AOC is a branch, division, or equivalent within a Departmental Element/field site, in the local commuting area. For DOE, the local commuting area is generally considered within the geographical area surrounding the site that encompasses the localities where employees live and reasonably can be expected to travel back and forth daily to work (e.g., within a 50-mile radius).
- o. **Modified Qualifications:** The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has authorized agencies to modify qualification standards for certain in-service placement actions. The use of modified qualifications is appropriate for filling positions with individuals who possess closely related experience, which provided the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA), necessary for successful job performance. Modified qualifications may be used to fill annual positions non-competitively or competitively by reassignment, transfer, reinstatement, or voluntary change to lower grade. The authority to modify qualification standards may not be used for promotions.
- p. **Non-Competitive Action:** Promotion, change to lower grade, reassignment, transfer, or reinstatement for which competitive procedures do not apply or are discretionary.
- q. **Position Description:** A position description is a statement of the major duties, responsibilities, and supervisory relationships of a position.
- r. **Promotion:** The change of an employee to a position at a higher-grade level within the same pay system, or to a position with a higher rate of basic pay, in a different pay system.
- s. **Ranking:** The placement of candidates in score order to identify the best qualified based upon application of a crediting plan.
- t. **Rating:** The evaluation of candidate applications to determine if applicants meet minimum qualifications.
- u. **Reasonable Accommodation:** Making a change in the workplace that enables an employee with a qualifying disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities. These

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changes may include modifications or adjustments to the work environment (e.g., modification of work schedules, modification of existing facilities or removal of workplace barriers, job restructuring to enable an employee to perform the essential functions of a position, or acquisition of special equipment), unless doing so would cause BPA undue hardship.

- v. **Reassignment:** Moving an employee, while serving in the same department (Department of Energy (DOE), from one position to another, without promotion or change to lower grade, in the same or different commuting area.
- w. **Reinstatement:** The non-competitive reemployment in the competitive service, as a career or career-conditional employee, of a person formerly employed in the competitive service who had competitive status, or was serving a probationary period when separated.
- x. **Re-promotion:** Promotion, with or without competition, to a grade previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service, from which an employee was separated or changed to lower grade, for other than performance or conduct reasons.
- y. **Reemployment Priority List:** The mechanism that BPA will use to grant consideration to any former competitive service employees separated by reduction-in-force, or fully recovered from a compensable injury, after more than one year.
- z. **Selective Placement Factor:** The knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required to establish basic eligibility for a position. Selective placement factors are identified in the job analysis and the vacancy announcement.
- aa. **Subject-Matter Experts (SME's):** Employees who possess a thorough knowledge of the position requirements, which may be evidenced by having held or supervised the same or similar position.
- bb. **Transfer:** A change of an employee, without a break in service of one full workday, from a position in one agency to a position in another agency that can be filled under the same appointing authority.
- cc. **Well-Qualified:** Under the CTAP, applicants must be determined as well-qualified to receive special selection priority. Well qualified candidates demonstrate experience, knowledge, skills, and abilities that clearly exceed OPM minimum qualification requirements; these applicants are not required to meet best qualified criteria.

5. Acronyms

- A. **BPA:** Bonneville Power Administration
- B. **OWCP:** Office of Workers Compensation and Pension
- C. **PD:** Position Description
- D. **RIF:** Reduction in Force

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- E. **RPL:** Reemployment Priority List
- F. **SOP:** Standard Operating Procedure
- G. **AMP:** Accelerated Merit Promotion
- H. **BPA HRSC:** Bonneville Power Administration, Human Resources Service Center

6. Responsibilities

A. BPA Human Resources Director or delegate:

1. Has overall oversight of competitive process;
2. Ensures systems and processes are in place to keep the office in line with goals, metrics, and mandates;
3. Ensures legal adherence in the competitive hiring process;
4. Meets with stakeholders; and
5. Reviews policy for adherence.

B. HR Specialist:

1. Verifies accuracy of information;
2. Determines competitive status;
3. Determines areas of consideration;
4. Gathers case file documentation as required by OPM;
5. Advertises vacancies, rate, rank, issue certificates; and
6. Makes job offers.

C. Hiring Manager/Selecting Official:

1. Helps determine areas of consideration;
2. Acts as Subject Matter Expert for positions;
3. Reviews and interviews applicants; and
4. Makes selections.

7. Program Administration Requirements & Guidance

A. Merit promotion plan:

Competition is required for the following actions:

1. All promotions without time limitations;
2. All temporary promotions over 120 days in duration, or any action which would cause an employee to be temporarily promoted for more than 120 days, in a 52- week

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period. Service during the preceding 52 weeks under:

- a) Details to higher-graded classified positions, or those with known promotion potential, or
 - b) Temporary promotions count toward the 120-day limit. A temporary promotion may not be effected, unless the employee meets the mandatory eligibility and qualification requirements, and assumes the full range of the duties and responsibilities of the position to which temporarily promoted.
3. All details to higher-graded classified positions over 120 days in duration, or positions with higher-graded classified promotion potential. (Note: The use of details to an unclassified set of duties, when those duties are actually classified, will not be used as a way to circumvent this requirement; and
 4. Training intended to prepare an employee for placement or required for eligibility for higher-level positions.
- B. Area of consideration:** Must be sufficiently broad to ensure the availability of the best-qualified candidates.
- C. BPA policy for announcing positions:**
1. Minimum areas of consideration: BPA-wide.
 - i. For positions posted under the Accelerated Merit Promotion (AMP) process, vacancy announcements are posted using a modified Area of Consideration (AOC), that limits the candidate pool to a specific area (i.e. organization or field site). All employees within the modified AOC will receive an email notification providing a link to apply. The AMP does not apply to positions covered by Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).
 2. Minimum Vacancy Announcement open periods: BPA-wide for 10 calendar days.
 - ii. Vacancy Announcement open periods for positions under the AMP process should not go beyond 3 calendar days, with a minimum posting of 1 business day. A maximum of 4 calendar days may be used, if the position falls over a weekend (i.e. opens on Friday and closed on Monday).
 3. Vacancy announcements open periods will not close on federal holidays.
- D. Selection certificate:** Issued with the names of best qualified applicants from all sources, listed in alphabetical order for each grade level.
- E. Selection by Selecting Official:**
1. Chooses any applicant from the selection certificate;
 2. Decides to interview all, some, or none of the applicants, as part of the selection process;
 3. Is consistent when applying any interview process to a particular position, in order to ensure equitable interviewing opportunities for all referred applicants;

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4. Checks references, as appropriate; and
5. Adheres to Prohibited Personnel Practices.

8. Processes & Procedures

A. Gather documentation:

The HR Specialist working with the Hiring Manager/Selecting Official will gather, create (as needed), and review for accuracy the following:

1. SF-52, Request for Personnel Action;
2. Current Position Description (ensure it is current within five years);
3. Job Analysis (a simplified competency-based Job Analysis may be used for positions advertised using the Accelerated Merit Promotion process);
4. Questionnaire/Crediting Plan; and
5. Competency Assessment (if one will be used to rate all applicants).

B. Determine if the position is exempt:

A position is determined exempt from competition, for one of the following reasons:

1. Promotion to and through intervening grades, up to the established full performance level of the position. The employee must have initially competed for the full performance level of the position. The employee must meet all eligibility and qualification requirements for promotion.
2. Promotion resulting from any one of the following:
 - a) The accretion of higher-graded duties and responsibilities;
 - b) The application of a new classification standard resulting in a higher grade; or
 - c) A correction to an initial classification error.
3. Promotion of employees in the Pathways Program.
4. Temporary promotions or details to higher-graded classified positions (or higher-potential positions), for 120 days or less, in a consecutive 52-week period.
5. Reassignment to an equivalent position, or to a position with equivalent known promotion potential.

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6. Selection of an applicant in compliance with OPM and BPA programs, which are covered under the RPL, the CTAP, and any other programs for surplus or displaced employees.
7. Re-promotion to a grade, or intervening grade, from which an employee was changed to a lower grade, without personal cause, or that was not based on conduct reasons.
8. Promotion of an employee entitled to priority consideration because a previous promotion plan action was not properly processed.
9. Position Change permitted by Reduction-In-Force (RIF) regulations.
10. Placement in compliance with Office of Workers' Compensation Program (OWCP) requirements of an employee who has incurred an on-the-job injury.
11. Placement under reasonable accommodation procedures in an equivalent or lower-graded position, with a higher full performance level (promotion potential), than the employee's current position.

If the position is exempt from competition, then proceed with non-competitive action, as appropriate.

C. Draft the Vacancy Announcement and send it to the manager for review.

D. Finalize the Vacancy Announcement and post: All announcements should be posted on USA Jobs, and in addition to the USA Jobs announcement, information may be shared in targeted recruiting efforts to increase the applicant pool and promote diversity initiatives. Positions posted under the Accelerated Merit Promotion (AMP) process will not be visible on USA Jobs without the specific link to the posting.

E. Collect applications:

Note: BPA employees who are not present in the workforce due to extended absence, leave, military duty, injury compensation, or service with an international organization, will receive consideration for any positions, for which they apply and are determined to be qualified.

These employees are responsible for notifying their managers in writing of their interest in current and future vacancies, and for notifying management on how they may be contacted while away from their work site, so that they can submit their applications.

F. Rate and rank all applicants according to the BPA HRSC Standard Operating Procedure RS19.2, Merit Promotion Procedures.

G. Issue a Selection Certificate with the names of the best qualified applicants from all sources, listed in alphabetical order for each grade level.

H. Make a selection:

6. The selecting official may choose any applicant from the selection certificate. He/she may decide to interview all, some, or none of the applicants, as part of the selection process.

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However, when applying any interview process to a particular position, managers must be consistent in their use of the process, e.g. using the same listing of questions, for each applicant interviewed.

7. The selecting official and HRS should collaborate to determine when reference checking is appropriate. Reference checking is a critical part of the due diligence in the hiring process, and it is highly encouraged for potential selectees with whom the selecting official has not had prior professional work experiences.
8. The selecting official then advises the HRS of his/her decision by completing and returning the following:
 - a) The selection certificate along with all of the applications referred (accomplished electronically through the Hiring Management System);
 - b) The U.S. Department of Energy’s Certification of Federal Hiring Principles form.

I. Coordinate with the manager on timely notification to all applicants:

1. The Human Resources Specialist will conduct a final audit of the selectee’s application and then extend the Tentative Job Offer. Note: the selecting official may advise the applicant that he/she has been referred, but all formal job offers come from BPA HRSC.
2. Within BPA, the releasing manager must make a selectee who was selected through competitive procedures available within one month. The HRD may authorize exceptions, as applicable.
3. Additional selections for positions with identical ranking factors/credit level definitions and duty station may be made from a selection certificate, within 120 days after its initial issuance to a selecting official. The HRD may extend this period, not to exceed a total of 180 days, when such extension is in the best interest of BPA. Documentation to this effect must be made part of the written record for the merit promotion file.

9. Authorities & References

- A. BPA HR Directive 410-03: Hiring, Selecting, and Assigning Employees
- B. 5 CFR 335 – Promotion and Internal Placement
- C. 5 CFR 720 – Affirmative Employment Programs
- D. 5 U.S.C. 2102 – Competitive Service
- E. 5 U.S.C. 2301 - Merit System Principles
- F. 5 U.S.C. 2302 – Prohibited Personnel Practices
- G. Policy Memo #89, Accelerated Merit Promotion Process, 4/28/2021
- H. BPA HRSC Standard Operating Procedure RS19.2, Merit Promotion Procedures

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10. Contacts

- A. For information on Merit Promotion Announcement for Filling Jobs contact the Recruitment and Placement (HA) branch, BPA HRSC.
- B. For information on submitting an HR request, contact HR Help, BPA HRSC.

11. Revision History

Version Number	Issue Date	Description of Change or Review
1.0	1/19/2016	Initial publication.
2.0	4/18/2016	Style, formatting, and grammar changes. Added OPM definitions for Merit Promotion Plan and Position Description in Definitions section. Added DOE Nepotism form to Appendix A.
3.0	12/20/2018	Change minimum vacancy announcement open periods to 10 calendar days, and include requirement that vacancy announcements open periods not end on federal holidays.
4.0	8/2/2023	Accelerated Merit Promotion process – updated open period to reflect Policy Memo #89, Accelerated Merit Promotion Process, 4/28/2021
5.0	1/1/2024	Minor formatting and grammar changes.

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Appendix A: Links to Forms

No.	Title of Attachment
1.	Standard Form (SF) 52e, Request for Personnel Action
2.	U.S. Department of Energy Certification of Federal Hiring Principles

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