

**NORTHERN PLAINS AREA
Policy Memorandum**

DATE:	August 11, 2009
SUBJECT:	Recruitment Procedures for Cat 1, Cat 4 Scientists, Research Leaders and Center Directors - Northern Plains Area
NUMBER:	PM-04-002
EFFECTIVE DATE:	Immediately Until Replaced or Superseded (Replaces PM-04-002 dated March 14, 2008)

Purpose

The recruitment of a scientist is one of the most crucial and expensive decisions we make in pursuing our research programs. The process of identifying and selecting a scientist deserves as much thought and care as that given to selecting research objectives. Over a 30-year career, investment costs for a scientist can amount to more than \$10 million. In recognition of the critical role scientists play in the ARS/NPA mission and the tremendous costs associated with recruitment and retention of scientists, the Northern Plains Area has developed this policy for recruiting Category 1 and 4 Scientists, Research Leaders and Category 6 Center Directors. This policy encompasses similar recruitment procedures found in industry and higher education.

It is vital that each and every search be conducted thoroughly and fairly. This policy provides selecting officials with the tools to ensure thoughtful, consistent, and comprehensive recruitment planning and procedures in order to achieve our diversity goals while at the same time ensuring quality hires.

Although this policy is designed for the recruitment of scientists, this policy can also be adapted for recruiting any position.

Selecting Official

For Category 1 and 4 SY positions, the immediate supervisor is the selecting official. For Research Leaders and Center Directors, the Area Director is the selecting official. In locations where Center Directors are present, the Area Director may delegate the selecting official role but the Area Director must concur with the selection based on information gained in the recruitment process. All RL and CD selections must be approved by the Associate Administrator.

Request to Recruit

The selecting official prepares a position description (PD) and sends it to the Area Director and National Program Staff. After approval of the PD, the selecting official

prepares an SF-52 and submits it through the Area Office to headquarters to secure formal approval to conduct a search.

Recruitment Process

Formal announcement: Once approval to recruit is obtained, the selecting official, in consultation with the human resources specialist will prepare the formal announcement. KSAs must accurately reflect the needs of the unit and position, and the specialized experience and selective factors should clearly describe what criteria are desirable. The selecting official should work closely with the HR specialist assigned to the vacancy to ensure that the PD meets criteria for the desired grade.

Advertising: The announcement should be sent to a variety of sources, including professional journals, professional organizations, university departments that offer degrees in the field sought, and universities that target underrepresented groups, as well as the ARS and OPM websites. The ARS recruitment office and the Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager should be consulted for assistance with identifying sources. Vacancy announcements should be advertised for at least 30 days prior to the application deadline, with longer lead times whenever feasible.

Search Committee: Most successful applicants learn of the position through word of mouth. The Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager will discuss with the selecting official underrepresentation figures, strategies on how to design and conduct a search that will target underrepresented groups, and specific recruitment procedures. Selecting officials are strongly encouraged to form a search committee and assign another individual (e.g. senior scientist) to chair the committee. The committee should be comprised of several individuals with ties to industry, university, state and federal institutions. Invitation of the relevant NPLs is also encouraged. Size of the committee is not necessarily limited. Diversity within the search committee should be sought, not only in race, gender, and ethnicity, but also in educational preparation, scientific discipline and knowledge of research. The chair will contact potential members of the committee to ascertain their interest in applying for the position; interested individuals shall not serve on the committee. Meetings will be held face to face or by conference call; additional information (position announcement, this PM) will be communicated via email. The committee will focus on identifying individuals who possess the qualifications sought, and establishing a process to solicit potential candidates. Discussions of potential candidates shall be held internal to the committee and confidentiality is expected. Committee members are encouraged to contact potential applicants but the chair of the committee will be the single point of contact for formally encouraging potential applicants to apply for the position. If committee members contact potential applicants, it must be clear that no expectation of future employment is guaranteed. **Committee members should not approach potential references about a prospective applicant to ensure the confidentiality of the individual.**

Selection Process

Evaluation Panel: The selecting official is responsible for compiling the evaluation panel. Individuals who served on the recruitment committee should not serve on the evaluation committee. It is paramount that the panel be composed of individuals who are committed to hiring a diverse workforce and are willing to devote the necessary time and energy to the process. Additionally, where feasible, the panel should include members of underrepresented groups. To achieve a diverse panel, members from outside the immediate research unit and/or location, may be included. The Area Director and Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager are to be consulted when developing the panel; the National Program Staff may also be consulted. In the case of RL selections, a representative from the Area Office will participate as a panel member. Evaluation panels should be limited to no more than seven individuals; larger panels tend to become logistically unwieldy. Recommended panel composition includes:

- Chair (the Center Director or Research Leader, or designee)
- One or more Unit Scientists.
- One or more members representing customers, stakeholders, and partners.
- A Research Leader, where feasible, from a different unit.
- A staff member from the Unit.
- An Area Office Representative when RL candidates are evaluated.

Screening Applications: The initial screening of applicants is performed by the HR specialist who forwards a list of certified applicants to the selecting official, who in turn forwards the certificate and applications to the panel chair. **Note: Once the certificate is received, the selecting official has 45 calendar days to make a selection for the position.**

- Screening matrix: The selecting official (or panel chair) in consultation with the Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager, develops the screening matrix, based on the PD and vacancy announcement. **The matrix is finalized prior to reviewing any applications.**
- Copy of certificate. The panel chair provides a copy of the certificate to the Area Civil Rights Manager/EEO Specialist.
- Panel screening. The certified applicant packages are made available to the evaluation panel by the chair. The panelists rank all applicants using the matrix. The top candidates are recommended to the chair, and the chair, in consultation with the Center Director/Area Director, determines which applicant(s) to interview.
- The panel chair sends the names of the candidates selected for interview to the Area Civil Rights Manager/EEO Specialist.

Interviews: Each interview should be similar in length and format (research seminar, formal interview with panel), and should be of sufficient time for the candidate to meet with staff and other interested parties, and to check out the research facilities and the community. The Behavioral Event Interview process will be used for Research Leaders and Center Directors.

Checking references: The chair (or selecting official) determines when references will be checked – either before a candidate is invited for an interview or after the interview. References are supplied by the candidate and must be checked before a tentative offer is extended.

Ranking of candidates interviewed: The evaluation panel prepares a written ranked summary narrative listing strengths and weaknesses of all candidates interviewed. This list will also serve to identify ranked alternatives in the event the top candidate withdraws from consideration or declines the offer. This written summary is submitted to the selecting official. The selecting official can either accept or reject the panel's recommendation.

- If the recommendation is accepted by the selecting official, the name is forwarded to the Area Director for approval.
- If the recommendation is rejected, the selecting official is expected to communicate with the panel chair and the Area Director to work out issues to reach a final decision.
- Once the finalist is agreed on, the selecting official should review with the Area Director the offer package (salary, recruitment incentives, start date, etc.).
- In the case of Research Leader and Center Director selections, the Area Director forwards the name of the selectee, along with supporting documentation to the Associate Administrator for final approval.
- **All original application materials and the certificate must be returned to HRD following completion of the search.**

The Job Offer

Tentative offer: The selecting official contacts the desired candidate, by telephone, and extends a tentative offer, which is often open to negotiation between the selecting official and the candidate. Once the offer is agreed upon between the selecting official and the candidate, the selecting official submits the REE-11 along with the original certificate for the Area Director's approval.

Ad Hoc Case Write-up: In situations where the selectee is from outside ARS and the grade level proposed is higher than GS 12, the selectee will go through an ad-hoc RPES panel that determines the grade level. Consult the RPES website for information related to new hires. The Assistant Area Director may assist but it is the responsibility of the selecting official to help the candidate draft the case write-up. Typically, the ad-hoc process takes 2 -3 weeks once the case is submitted.

Recruitment Incentives: Consult P&P 412.5 for details on the types of available recruitment incentives. The selecting official has the option of extending recruitment incentives, provided that location funding is available and any of the following apply:

- Incentives are necessary to fill the position.
- The position is difficult to fill.
- The prospective candidate is receiving competing offers.

Recruitment incentives should not be considered if any of the following apply:

- There are an adequate number of qualified candidates for the position.
- A quality candidate will join ARS without additional incentives.
- A quality candidate will join ARS for an advanced in-step salary

Approval of offer: The Area Director and, in the case of Research Leader and Center Director selections, ARS Administrator must approve the tentative offer before HRD is notified. Upon approval by the Area Director and ARS Administrator, the selecting official contacts HRD to secure approval of the salary.

Official offer letter: Once the grade level is determined, the recruitment incentives negotiated and approvals are secured, the official offer letter is sent by HRD. The selecting official contacts the candidate to tell them that the official offer letter will be sent by HRD.

Maintain contact with new employee: The Center Director or Research Leader should take the lead in maintaining contact with the new employee and work with that employee to make the transition as seamless as possible. Assisting new employees with the transition to a new living and working environment is crucial to retention and successful job performance.

Record Retention

- All panelists return any and all application materials (resumes, vitas, applications, etc.) in their possession to the chair, who in turn submits all materials to the selecting official. Original applications and the original certification are returned to HRD by the selecting official. Any copies retained by the selecting official should be destroyed after three years.
- The panel chair is responsible for sending copies of the following records to the Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager once a candidate has accepted the offer:
 - Outreach efforts (for expanding the applicant pool, announcement sources), etc.
 - Names of members of the selection panel, interview schedule, and core questions (not answers) asked of candidates and of references.
 - The screening matrix, noting the ranking of each applicant.
 - A copy of the recommendation summary of candidates interviewed.
 - The final outcome of the search: name(s) of candidates offered the position, reason if offer was rejected; name of candidate who accepted the position, salary/grade, and incentives.

Probationary Period

Candidates hired for positions covered under the Research Grade Evaluation Guide will be placed in Tenure Group II (career-conditional and probationary employees), which requires a three year probationary period. The newly hired scientists will be placed in the Newly Appointed Scientist Professional Development Program (NASPDP) and assigned a mentor. Semi annual performance evaluations are conducted by the supervisor. It is

the responsibility of the scientist to demonstrate professional competence, and it is the responsibility of the supervisor to accurately and objectively assess performance throughout this probationary period and convey to the employee any concerns relating to his/her performance. If the employee has prior experience with ARS, the experience may be applied against the probationary period, thus shortening from three years to a shorter time frame the ability of the supervisor to make an informed decision as to whether the candidate should be retained. In situations such as this, the supervisor is delegated responsibility to make this decision in consultation with the Area Director. For employees that enter duty with three years of probation, six months prior to the end of the probationary period, the scientist and the supervisor will be asked to provide written information to a panel convened by the Area Office. The panel will evaluate the materials and recommend to the Area Director whether the scientist should be retained. Removal of a probationary employee is not subject to grievance. Typically the first opportunity for promotion occurs early in the fourth year, during the Research Position Evaluation (RPE) comprehensive review process. The first-line supervisor should explain the annual review, NASPDP, probationary review and RPE processes in detail as soon as the new scientist begins his/her position.

Point of Contact

For further information, please contact the Area Civil Rights Manager/EEO Specialist at 970-492-7053, or the Assistant Area Director at 970-492-7058.

/s/
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Northern Plains Area