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ADS Chapter 418

Merit Staffing Program for Civil Service (CS) Employees

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ADS 418 – Merit Staffing Program for Civil Service (CS) Employees
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ADS 418 – Merit Staffing Program for Civil Service (CS) Employees

418.1 OVERVIEW

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

This chapter provides the policies and procedures for managing the merit staffing program for Civil Service (CS) employees at USAID. The objectives of this program are to:

- Provide the Agency with the best-qualified candidates to fill competitive and excepted service positions in the CS;
- Ensure fair and equitable consideration of all candidates in compliance with regulations; and
- Provide career opportunities for current staff.

This chapter meets the requirements for a merit promotion plan contained in [5 CFR 335.103](#) and establishes a systematic means of selection based on merit in accordance with [5 USC 2301, Merit Systems Principles](#) and [5 USC 2302, Prohibited Personnel Practices](#).

This chapter does not apply to Foreign Service (FS) employees at USAID (see the following ADS chapters for policy directives and required procedures for staffing under those authorities:

- [ADS 414, Foreign Service \(FS\) Appointments](#)
- [ADS 415, Civil Service \(CS\) to Foreign Service \(FS\) Appointment Program](#)
- [ADS 468, Foreign Service \(FS\) Personnel Recruitment](#)

418.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

a. The Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), Office of Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM) is responsible for:

1. Providing broad policy guidance on merit staffing matters and assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Agency's CS Merit Staffing Program,
2. Administering the Merit Staffing Program, and
3. Ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

b. The Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, Human Capital Service Center (HCTM/HCSC) is responsible for:

1. Administering the merit staffing process, from announcement to selection, to ensure the integrity of the system and to meet time-to-hire goals;
2. Managing vacancies, recruitment, and hiring processes and procedures;
3. Ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements and making changes to the merit staffing process as new government-wide policies are issued;
4. Approving exceptions to merit staffing policy and procedures; and
5. Engaging external and internal stakeholders in the “End-to-End” recruitment and hiring processes and assisting with barrier analyses of the full process.

c. The Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, Office of Workforce Planning, Policy, and Systems Management (HCTM/PPSM) is responsible for:

1. Providing critical data analytics and tools to inform leadership decisions on the workforce and target an Area of Consideration (AOC) to meet current and future organizational goals and objectives, and
2. Conducting a gap analysis to define and prioritize workforce gaps and strategize how to close them through the merit staffing program.

d. The Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, External Outreach and Strategic Recruitment (HCTM/XOSR) is responsible for:

1. Promoting recruitment strategies that support the Agency’s diversity goals and job opportunities through various external venues, and
2. Conducting barrier analyses to assist with developing and implementing recruitment and retention strategies that support a diverse and well-qualified workforce reflective of the U.S. population.

e. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is responsible for:

1. Fostering a work environment free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation that promotes equitable, fair, and inclusive employment policies and practices;
2. Collaborating with HCTM to develop and implement recruitment strategies that support a diverse and well-qualified workforce; and
3. Managing the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Disability Employment (Reasonable Accommodations) Programs.

f. The **Office of the Administrator, Immediate Office, Office of the Chief Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Officer (A/AID/DEIA)** is responsible for:

1. Collaborating with HCTM on the “End-to-End” recruitment and hiring process to ensure strategies that support a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible workforce; and
2. Advising management on internal systems, policies, programs, and practices that potentially inhibit inclusive efforts to attract talent from diverse sources.

g. **Supervisors** are responsible for:

1. Initiating personnel actions to recruit and fill positions;
2. Making reasonable efforts to ensure employees under their direct supervision receive appropriate consideration for promotions which occur under the supervisor’s immediate jurisdiction, including while employees are on detail, on leave, at training courses, in the military service, or serving in public international organizations, or on Intergovernmental Personnel Act assignments;
3. Providing full and fair consideration to the qualifications of each candidate referred for a vacancy; and
4. Selecting the best candidate to perform the position’s duties and responsibilities, as measured by job-related selection criteria.

h. **Bureau and Independent Office (B/IO) Administrative Management Services (AMS) Staff** is responsible for:

1. Providing assistance and guidance to supervisors and employees on basic merit staffing and other promotion policies and procedures;
2. Ensuring B/IOs stay within their CS staffing allocation levels;
3. Authorizing the submission of Personnel Action Requests with appropriate documentation to HCTM to fill vacant positions while coordinating the actions through completion; and
4. Providing technical guidance to supervisors and employees on the use of merit staffing automated processes.

i. **Employees** are responsible for:

1. Complying with merit staffing policies and procedures, as outlined in this ADS chapter;
2. Informing their supervisors of promotional opportunities for which they wish to be considered during periods of absence and assignments away from their normal duties; and
3. Submitting all required application materials and supporting documentation within specified time limits, in accordance with vacancy announcements, and fulfilling the conditions for career ladder promotions.

418.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

The following sections contain the policies and procedures for filling CS positions under the merit staffing program, in accordance with [5 CFR 330, Recruitment, Selection, and Placement](#) and [5 CFR 335, Promotion and Internal Placement](#).

418.3.1 Hiring the Best Qualified Person for the Position

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

It is USAID's policy to fill positions with the best-qualified candidates. Supervisors may elect to fill positions from recruitment sources (such as USAID Employees Only, Open to All Federal Employees (Government-wide), and Open to the Public, among other sources) that best meet the needs of the organization in terms of productivity, short- and long-term staffing plans, and Agency strategies and objectives.

Recruitment through the merit staffing process is only one means to fill a position. When USAID can obtain qualified candidates for positions through other alternative recruitment sources (e.g., Pathways Program, People with Disabilities Appointing Authority, 30% Disabled Veterans Appointing Authority), USAID can use these methods concurrent with, or to the exclusion of, the merit staffing process.

The supervisor may cancel the merit staffing process if they elect to fill a position(s) using another recruitment source (e.g., accommodation of an employee exercising reemployment rights or a displaced employee).

418.3.2 Merit System Principles

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

USAID adheres to the merit system principles contained in [5 USC 2301\(b\)](#), which states all federal personnel programs should be implemented consistent with the following:

1. Agencies should recruit qualified candidates from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve a workforce from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability,

knowledge, and skills, after fair and open competition which assures all receive equal opportunity.

2. All employees and applicants for employment should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or disability, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights (see [ADS 110, Equal Employment Opportunity Program](#)).
3. Equal pay should be provided for work of equal value, with appropriate consideration of both national and local rates paid by employers in the private sector, and appropriate incentives and recognition should be provided for excellence in performance.
4. All employees should maintain high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest.
5. The federal workforce should be used efficiently and effectively.
6. Employees should be retained on the basis of the adequacy of their performance, inadequate performance should be corrected, and employees should be separated who cannot or will not improve their performance to meet required standards.
7. Employees should be provided effective education and training in cases in which such education and training would result in better organizational and individual performance.
8. Employees should be:
 - a. Protected against arbitrary action, personal favoritism, or coercion for partisan political purposes; and
 - b. Prohibited from using their official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with, or affecting the result of, an election or a nomination for election.
9. Employees should be protected against reprisal for the lawful disclosure of information which the employee reasonably believe evidences:
 - a. A violation of any law, rule, or regulation; or
 - b. Mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.

USAID also follows policies intended to protect against discrimination, retaliation, bias, and other prohibited personnel practices in selection and placement, as required by [5 USC 2302](#).

418.3.3 The Merit Staffing Program

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

The Merit Staffing Program governs the recruitment and placement of CS positions in the General Schedule (GS) grades 01 through 15 (or equivalent) in the competitive service. The Agency also uses this plan to fill Excepted Service positions under [Title 5](#).

The Agency adheres to the policies and procedures outlined in [5 CFR 330, Subparts F and G](#) in regards to Career Transition Assistance Plans (CTAP) and Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plans (ICTAP) for mandatory placement and employee entitlements under Reduction in Force (RIF). Eligible CTAP and ICTAP applicants are given priority consideration for competitive service and excepted service vacancies under the Merit Staffing Program. This type of priority consideration provides qualified CTAP and ICTAP candidates the opportunity to be considered first before screening other applicants under merit staffing procedures.

The goal of the Merit Staffing Program is to provide an open, systematic, and discrimination and bias-free placement system aimed to fill positions with the best-qualified candidates available. Supervisors determine when the use of merit staffing is appropriate for filling vacant positions. The Merit Staffing Program strives to ensure selections are based on merit without regard to race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, sexual orientation, or transgender status), national origin, age, physical or mental disability, genetic information, political affiliation, parental status, marital status, and veteran status, and retaliation for engaging in EEO activity (see [ADS 110](#)).

418.3.3.1 Actions Subject to Competitive Procedures

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Unless specifically exempted, the following actions must follow competitive procedures, as required by [5 CFR 335.103\(c\)\(1\)](#):

- a. Time-limited promotions for more than 120 calendar days to higher graded positions.** Prior service during the preceding 12 months under noncompetitive time-limited promotions and noncompetitive details to higher graded positions counts toward the 120-day total. A time-limited promotion is an appropriate mechanism for supervisors to use in filling temporary positions to accomplish project work, or to meet other temporary needs for a specified period of no more than five years, unless the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) authorizes the Agency to make and/or extend time-limited promotions for a longer period. HCTM/HCSC must give the employee advance written notice of the conditions of the time-limited promotion, or provide the notice within 30 calendar days from the effective date of the promotion under a non-discretionary provision (see [5 CFR](#)

[335.102\(f\)](#)). A supervisor may make a temporary promotion permanent without further competition, provided: (1) the temporary promotion opportunity was stated in the vacancy announcement and the promotion was originally made under competitive procedures; and (2) it was made known to all potential candidates that the temporary promotion may lead to a permanent promotion.

- b. Details for more than 120 calendar days to a higher-grade position or to a position with known promotion potential.** Prior service during the preceding 12 months under noncompetitive details to higher graded positions and noncompetitive time-limited promotions count toward the 120-day total (see [ADS 432, Details – Civil and Foreign Service](#) and [ADS 434, Details and Transfers to International Organizations—Civil Service and Foreign Service](#)).
- c.** Selection for training that is part of an authorized training agreement, part of a promotion program, or required before an employee may be considered for a promotion (see [5 CFR 410.306](#)).
- d.** Reassignment or demotion to a position with greater promotion potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service (except as permitted by RIF regulations) (see [ADS 452, Reduction in Force – Civil Service](#)).
- e.** Transfer to a position at a higher grade or with more promotion potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service (see [5 CFR 330.705](#)).
- f.** Reinstatement to a permanent or temporary position at a higher grade or with more promotion potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service if the candidate did not wait one year or more after separating from federal employment before applying for reinstatement, or did not receive a rating of record of at least Fully Successful (or equivalent) on their most recent career or career-conditional position performance annual appraisal.
- g.** When applicable, appointment of other candidates with noncompetitive eligibility under authorities regulated by OPM under interchange agreements (see section **418.6**) with other merit systems, and under miscellaneous authorities not regulated by OPM (statutes and court orders) to positions higher than the last equivalent grades held by the employees, or to positions which would offer promotion potential.

418.3.3.2 Actions Exempt from Competitive Procedures

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

At USAID, the following actions are not subject to competitive procedures:

- a.** A promotion resulting from a review of a new classification standard, or the correction of an initial classification error (see [ADS 456, Personnel Operations](#):

[Position Classification](#)).

- b. A position change permitted by RIF procedures (see [ADS 452](#)).
- c. A career promotion when the employee has previously competed for a position with promotion potential. In the job opportunity announcement (JOA), position description, and initial personnel action HCTM must document it as a career ladder position.
- d. A promotion resulting from an employee's position being classified at a higher grade because of additional duties and responsibilities (accretion of duties), when certain conditions are met (see [ADS 456](#)).
- e. A temporary promotion, or detail of 120 calendar days or less to a higher graded position or a position with known promotion potential.
- f. Promotion to a grade previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service (or in another merit system with which OPM has an approved interchange agreement) from which an employee was separated or demoted for other than performance or conduct reasons.
- g. Promotion, reassignment, demotion, transfer, reinstatement, or detail to a position having promotion potential no greater than the potential of a position an employee currently holds or previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service (or in another merit system with which OPM has an approved interchange agreement) and did not lose because of performance or conduct reasons.
- h. Consideration of a candidate not given proper consideration in a previous competitive promotion action.
- i. Appointments of career Senior Executive Service (SES) appointees with competitive service reinstatement eligibility to any position for which they qualify in the competitive service at any grade or salary level, including Senior-Level positions established under [5 CFR 319](#)—Employment in Senior-Level and Scientific and Professional positions.
- j. Reinstatement in accordance with [5 CFR 315](#) to any position in the competitive service for which the candidate is qualified at a higher grade level or with more promotion potential than a career or career-conditional position previously held by the candidate; provided:
 - 1. The candidate has been separated for at least one year before applying for reinstatement; and

2. The candidate must have received a rating of record of at least Fully Successful (or equivalent) for their most recent career or career-conditional position.

418.3.3.3 Evaluation Criteria

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

The Agency's merit staffing process requires supervisors to make selections from among the best-qualified candidates who apply for announced vacancies (see [5 CFR 335.103, Agency Promotion Programs](#)). Supervisors must evaluate the candidates who meet basic eligibility criteria to determine to what extent their qualifications meet or exceed the minimum requirements. Evaluation criteria must be reasonable, related to the position's duties, and applied equally to all candidates. Supervisors work with HCTM/H CSC to:

- a. Analyze positions to identify the basic duties and responsibilities;
- b. Conduct job analyses and develop the assessment questionnaires appropriate for the position;
- c. Assign weights to competencies and to each element of the assessment questionnaires, where appropriate;
- d. Review the specialized experience statement to ensure it specifically describes the experience candidates must have in order to be qualified and is supported by the Position Description; and
- e. Use selective (screen-out) factors, as appropriate, to define the required knowledge, skills, or abilities (KSAs) that are essential for successful performance on the job.

418.3.4 Additional Provisions

418.3.4.1 Promotion Eligibility

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

To be eligible for promotion or placement, candidates must meet the minimum qualification standards prescribed by OPM. In addition, candidates must have at least one year of relevant experience at the next lower grade level and a summary rating of "Fully Successful" or better on their most recent performance appraisal.

418.3.4.2 Career Ladder Promotion

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

A career ladder is a series of developmental positions of increasing difficulty in the same line of work, with the intention of preparing the employee for successive, non-competitive promotions up to the full performance level of the position. HCTM/H CSC

encourages consideration of career ladder positions to enable entry at lower levels into the Agency and promote career advancement opportunities.

If a supervisor selects an employee for a career ladder position, the following procedures apply:

- a.** The AMS notifies the supervisor of the effective date of the employee's entrance on duty in the position and their responsibilities at the time of the assignment.
- b.** The supervisor:
 - Develops and provides the employee with a clear description of benchmark performance criteria required at each level of the career ladder;
 - Ensures the employee develops an Individual Learning and Training Plan (ILTP) specific to their needs;
 - Assigns the employee relevant developmental work or projects of sufficient complexity and responsibility to allow the employee to demonstrate the capability to perform satisfactorily at the next higher level;
 - Provides feedback on the employee's performance during and at the completion of any developmental assignment; and
 - Provides timely evaluation of the employee's overall performance at the end of the rating cycle.
- c.** Entrance into a career-ladder position does not guarantee promotion. To be eligible for promotion to the next level of the career ladder, the employee must meet the following requirements:
 - Demonstrated progress within the terms of their ILTP or program;
 - Demonstrated the ability to perform at the next highest level, the position requirements are relevant, and the supervisor recommends the employee for promotion to the next higher grade;
 - A current rating of record of "Fully Successful" (level 3) or higher. An employee may not receive a career-ladder promotion if their rating is below "Fully Successful" on a critical work objective critical to performance at the next higher grade of the career ladder (see [5 CFR 335.104](#)); and
 - Meet the one year time-in-grade and qualification requirements for the higher grade of the position.

- d. If an employee's supervisor, or designee, has not initiated a request for the employee's promotion by the anniversary date of the employee's last promotion, the employee may request, in writing, that the supervisor explain the reason for the delay. The supervisor must provide the employee with a written response within ten working days of receiving the employee's request. If the employee is dissatisfied with the response from the supervisor, the employee may contact HCTM's Employee Labor and Relations Division (HCTM/ELR) for further guidance (see [ADS 490, Agency Administrative Grievance Procedure](#)).
- e. The promotion is effective at the beginning of the first pay period after HCTM/HCSC approval.

418.3.4.3 Upward Mobility Positions

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Upward mobility positions enable B/IO supervisors to structure new and vacant positions to allow entry by current employees at lower levels, thereby encouraging high performance and rewarding excellence with greater opportunity. Upward mobility allows an employee to change occupations which they may not normally qualify at their current grade level. The employee may elect to go down a grade level, allowing them to learn the occupation and then be repromoted or promoted to higher grade levels.

These positions can provide a career avenue for employees in positions with no, or limited, growth potential. B/IO supervisors must develop structured training and developmental assignments for these positions and carefully monitor them to ensure the success of employees selected for upward mobility positions. Placement in these positions is accomplished through the competitive procedures (see section **418.3.3**).

418.3.4.4 Priority Consideration

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Priority consideration is a special placement priority given to a candidate who failed to receive proper consideration in a previous competitive placement action(s). The Human Resources Specialist, or designee, lists the name of the candidate who failed to receive proper consideration at the top of the referral list (commonly called, Certificate of Eligibles) for the next appropriate vacancy (same grade, same promotion potential, and same tenure) and provides this name to the supervisor of the vacancy.

If a referral list containing the name of a priority consideration candidate is not used, then priority consideration has not occurred, and the candidate is entitled to additional referrals. A candidate is entitled to one priority consideration for each selection made from a vacancy for which there was an instance of lost or improper consideration. The candidate receives priority consideration for a period of one year from the date of the decision or grievance approval.

In the case of an open-continuous announcement, the candidate would continue to receive priority consideration until appointed, or until the candidate has received the

same amount of *bona fide* employment consideration that they would have received had the fault not occurred, whichever comes first.

418.3.4.5 Re-Promotion Consideration

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

USAID's policy is to minimize the impact involuntary actions have on employee careers. An employee demoted without personal cause (e.g., RIF) receives special consideration for vacancies at or below the grade level from which the employee was demoted.

Under this section, HCTM/HCSC establishes a roster of employees eligible for re-promotion. Prior to the announcement of a vacancy, HCTM/HCSC adjudicates employees on the roster if they are potentially qualified for the vacancy and shares matches with the supervisor for consideration. The names of eligible employees remain on the roster for a period of three years unless they are selected for re-promotion to their original grades, or receive promotions to grades higher than those from which they were demoted.

418.3.5 Merit Staffing Plan - The Hiring Process

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

HCTM/HCSC consults with supervisors and AMS staff regarding strategies for filling their positions. The following sections describe the areas discussed during these consultations.

418.3.5.1 Areas of Consideration (Who May Apply)

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

HCTM/HCSC utilizes AOC to encourage an ample and diverse supply of well-qualified candidates. The AOC defines the search area for well-qualified candidates and specifies the eligible applicants (i.e., those who may apply). The AOC balances several needs, such as open and fair competition, adequate numbers of qualified applicants, outreach to diverse applicant pools, and EEO goals and objectives.

When the AOC are outside the USAID workforce, the Agency is required to post these JOAs on [USAJOBS](#).

The AOC in USAID are:

1. USAID-Only (permanent competitive service GS employees);
 - If a JOA is advertised as "USAID-only" only Agency employees in permanent, competitive service positions may apply.
2. Government-wide
 - If the JOA is advertised Government-wide or outside the USAID workforce, the following are eligible to apply:

- ICTAP eligibles;
- Current permanent competitive service federal employees;
- Eligible preference eligibles or veterans who have been honorably discharged from the armed forces after three or more years of active service (see [5 CFR 335.106](#));
- Reinstatement eligibles; and
- Persons eligible for certain non-competitive appointments under special authorities listed in [5 CFR 315](#) who meet the criteria, such as, but not limited to:
 - Persons With Disabilities,
 - Current or former FS officers or employees,
 - Certain military spouses,
 - Current and former overseas employees,
 - Former Peace Corps or AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers, and
 - Present and former Peace Corps federal employees.

3. All U.S. Citizens

- If the JOA is advertised as “All Sources,” all U.S. citizens are eligible to apply.

Employees or applicants who are uncertain about their eligibility to apply should consult with the point of contact (POC) identified on the JOA.

418.3.5.2 Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA)

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

When announcing a position, HCTM/HCSC coordinates efforts with the supervisor to develop a JOA that helps identify applicants who possess the critical competencies needed to perform successfully in the position. Supervisors should meet with their servicing HR Specialist in HCTM/HCSC to discuss their various options in completing the JOA and assessment questionnaire.

USAID may provide reasonable accommodation to applicants with disabilities on an individualized basis. The JOA provides a POC for those who need reasonable accommodation for any part of the application and hiring process (see [ADS 111, Procedures for Providing Reasonable Accommodation](#)).

418.3.5.3 Multiple Vacancy/Multiple B/IO Duty Location Announcements

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

In certain cases, HCTM/HCSC may use “multiple positions/multiple duty locations” JOAs to advertise merit promotion vacancies. HCTM/HCSC implements this type of JOA to allow multiple positions in various B/IOs to be filled under a single announcement for a particular job category (e.g., Administrative Officer). In these cases, HCTM/HCSC announces vacant positions concurrently with the generic JOA for the particular job category. Use of these JOAs is intended to streamline the internal staffing process.

418.3.5.4 Job Posting Periods

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Employees should be cognizant of opening and closing dates of job announcements so they can apply in time to be considered. All announcements are open for at least ten working days. Exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis, such as for hard-to-fill positions or to solicit more applicants.

In occupational categories where there is frequent turnover or great demand, JOAs may remain open continuously to respond timely to an office's need to fill additional vacancies. HCTM/HCSC includes information on cut-off dates, application retention periods, and other relevant details in each open continuous announcement.

418.3.5.5 Accessing Announcements

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Merit promotion announcements are listed on USAID's external website with a direct link to OPM's [USAJOBS](#) website. They are also accessible through the Agency's internal website. Agency employees and other applicants can go directly into the application process by clicking on the appropriate announcement number.

418.3.5.6 Recruitment Methods

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

HCTM/HCSC may use a wide range of methods to identify candidates depending on the AOC, type of position, and other similar considerations. HCTM/HCSC distributes announcements to appropriate resources, as necessary, to recruit and hire a diverse and talented workforce.

418.3.5.7 Application Procedures

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Applications are primarily received and processed through the automated system. Applicants must submit online applications no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on the closing date of the announcement. Applicants may contact the POC identified in the announcement prior to the closing date if they are unable to apply electronically.

418.3.5.8 Eligibility and Qualifications

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Applicants must meet both eligibility and qualification requirements for the position of interest by the closing date of the JOA. Specifically:

- Time-in-grade requirements as specified in [5 CFR 300, Subpart F](#);
- Qualification requirements outlined in OPM's Operating Manual, [Qualifications Standards for General Schedule Positions](#); and
- Selective (screen-out) factors, if any.

The automated system notifies applicants of the status of their applications (i.e., receipt, eligible/ineligible, qualified/not qualified, referred/not referred, or selected/not selected for the position).

418.3.5.9 Evaluation Methodology

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Per the Agency's Merit Staffing Program, HCTM must evaluate all eligible applicants to determine to what extent their qualifications exceed the minimum requirements. The automated system evaluates eligibility and minimum qualifications, and rates applications according to defined competencies/KSAs that best describes the applicant's level of experience. Based on the applicant's resume, the HR Specialists reviews the eligibility, qualifications, and the rating and ranking of the application according to these evaluation criteria.

418.3.5.10 Rating and Ranking

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Candidates are rated and ranked based on their resumes and selection of the defined levels of competencies that best describe their level of experience.

Note: ICTAP is automatically applied when announcements are advertised as government-wide. Veterans' preference is not applied for merit staffing vacancies.

418.3.5.11 Referral of Best Qualified Candidates

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Referral lists are generated from the results of the rating and ranking process. These lists may include:

- Candidates who lost proper consideration or were demoted without personal cause (e.g., RIF), these employees are referred ahead of others;
- Well-qualified ICTAP candidates who are eligible for special selection consideration under ICTAP regulations (see [5 CFR 330 Subpart G](#));

- Promotion-eligibles;
- Eligible Veterans under the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act (VEOA) (see [5 USC 3304](#));
- Transfer-eligibles from other federal agencies, or reassignment-eligibles from another organization within USAID; and
- Candidates who are eligible for consideration under other non-competitive authorities.

418.3.5.12 Automated Human Resources System

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

The Agency uses a human resources web-based application that automates the JOA, the assessment and referral of eligible and qualified candidates, and notifications of status to applicants.

The system allows applicants to create, edit, and archive electronic resumes; rates and ranks the candidates according to pre-established criteria; and generates referral lists of best-qualified candidates. The HR Specialist reviews output and ensures candidates are properly rated and ranked before issuing referral lists to the supervisor.

418.3.5.13 Selection

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Supervisors must base their selections using job-related factors as outlined in the position description, job analysis, and OPM occupational qualification standards. Supervisors must consider candidates who are eligible for special selection priority under ICTAP. Special selection priority means unless specifically excepted, surplus and/or displaced federal employees must be selected over any other candidate for vacancies in the local commuting area for which they apply and are found well-qualified. The term well-qualified is defined in [5 CFR 330 Subpart F](#). If there are no well-qualified ICTAP candidates, the supervisor has the right to select any candidate on the referral list(s).

The supervisor has a maximum of 21 calendar days from the date the referral list is issued to interview and make a selection. The Agency grants extensions on a case-by-case basis.

Supervisors must follow the instructions below for processing the referral lists:

- Interviews:** Supervisors can choose to interview all, some, or none of the candidates on a referral list. If they choose to interview only some candidates, they can choose how many to interview, subject to the guidelines below:

1. **USAID Employee Interviews:** If a selection is made from the promotion-eligible referral list, all direct hire USAID employees must be interviewed, unless the employee is on leave or unavailable for an extended period, or waives the interview process. If a candidate declines or misses an interview and does not contact the POC to reschedule, no further consideration is given to the candidate's application. If a candidate fails to respond, the supervisors must contact the HR Specialist for further guidance.
 2. **External Candidates:** Supervisors have the option to interview candidates external to USAID, but are not required. They may also pay the candidate's travel expenses if it is required for the candidate to travel to the interview and the candidate is located outside the local commuting area.
- b. **Conducting the Interview:** Supervisors, or their designees, may conduct interviews. Supervisors must ensure all interviews are properly conducted, all questions are job-related, and every effort is made to obtain the same type of information from each candidate. An interviewer may not ask about or discuss a candidate's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, age (as defined by the [Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967](#), as amended), disability, genetic information (including family medical history), marital status, political affiliation, sexual orientation, labor organization affiliation or non-affiliation, status as a parent, or any other non-merit-based factor. It is important to emphasize that interview questions must avoid prompting or encouraging the disclosure of protected classes, whether in a hypothetical or actual context. Applicants must be given fair and equal consideration in the interview process.

USAID may provide reasonable accommodation to an interview candidate with disabilities on an individualized basis. The JOA provides a POC for those who need reasonable accommodation for the interview process.

- c. **Responding to Referral Lists:** The supervisor completes the selection process and forwards the list(s) to the servicing HR Specialist.

A supervisor who returns the referral lists without a selection may:

1. Request the AOC be extended to recruit additional candidates;
2. Fill the vacancy by other means (e.g., detail, reassignment); or
3. Formally withdraw or cancel the request to fill the vacancy, specifying the reason.

- d. **Reissuance of Referral Lists (Sharing Certificates):** Once a referral list is returned and selection is completed, any supervisor may request the reissuance of the referral list within 120 days from initial selection when vacancies with all the same conditions occur. These conditions include the same title, series, grade, target grade, B/IO, and type of appointment (i.e., permanent, temporary or term).
- e. **Number of Selections:** Standard JOA language provides more than one position can be filled from an announcement. When the JOA language explicitly advertises for one position, the supervisor can make only one selection.
- f. **Additional Referrals:** If the selected candidate: (1) declines the job; (2) once appointed, submits separation papers (i.e., letter of resignation, retirement papers); or (3) separates (i.e., dies, transfers) from the Agency before 120 calendar days of the initial selection, the supervisor may use the referral list(s) used to select the candidate again to make a subsequent selection (i.e., the second- or third-choice candidate).

418.3.6 Release of Employees for New Assignment

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

In consultation with the supervisor, HCTM/HCSC arranges release dates for candidates selected immediately after making a job offer. The release date for promotion is two weeks from the beginning of the pay period nearest the date the candidate accepts the job offer. The release date for reassignment is up to 30 calendar days from the date the Bureau or Agency is notified.

418.3.7 Privacy and Records Management

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

The USAID Merit Staffing Program adheres to the requirements in [ADS 502, The USAID Records Management Program](#) and [ADS 508, Privacy Program](#) to ensure appropriate recordkeeping and privacy standards are met. These practices include maintaining a temporary record of each promotion sufficient to allow reconstruction of the promotion action, including documentation on how candidates were rated and ranked. These records may be destroyed after two years or after OPM has formally evaluated the program (whichever comes first) if the time limit for grievance has lapsed before the anniversary date (see [5 CFR 335.103\(b\)\(5\)](#)).

418.3.8 Program Evaluation

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

USAID has an OPM-approved Human Capital (HC) Accountability System that ensures its HC and human resources management (HRM) programs and practices are efficient, effective, and merit-based. USAID conducts a periodic evaluation of its HC programs and initiatives that includes a transactional review of a sample of personnel actions and

appointment, workforce surveys, data/trend analyses, metrics, and measures to ensure compliance and to drive continuous improvement.

418.3.9 Drug Testing

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

The Agency has a drug-free workplace policy. USAID competitive service positions are subject to drug testing (see [ADS 410, Drug Free Workplace Program](#)).

418.3.10 Nepotism - Employment of Relatives

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

The Agency adheres to all restrictions of the employment of relatives contained in [5 USC 3110](#). A public official may not appoint, employ, promote, advance, or advocate for appointment, employment, promotion, or advancement, in or to a civilian position in the agency in which they are serving or over which they exercise jurisdiction or control, any candidate who is a relative (as defined in [5 USC 3110](#)) of the public official. A candidate may not be appointed, employed, promoted, or advanced in or to a civilian position in an agency if such appointment, employment, promotion, or advancement has been advocated by a public official, serving in or exercising jurisdiction or control over the agency, who is a relative of the candidate.

418.3.11 Employment Concerns and Complaints

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

Employees have the right to file a complaint relating to an employment practice or promotion action. These complaints must be resolved under USAID administrative grievance procedures ([ADS 490](#)) or negotiated grievance procedures.

A candidate may file a complaint with USAID when they believe an employment practice that was applied to them discriminates against them on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, age (as defined by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended), disability, genetic information (including family medical history), or in retaliation for exercising rights with respect to the categories enumerated above (see [ADS 110](#)).

418.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES

418.4.1 External Mandatory References

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

- a. [5 CFR 6.7, Movement of persons between the civil service and other merit systems](#)
- b. [5 CFR 213, Excepted Service](#)
- c. [5 CFR 300, Employment \(General\)](#)

- d. [5 CFR 302, Employment in the Excepted Service](#)
- e. [5 CFR 310, Employment of Relatives](#)
- f. [5 CFR 315, Career and Career Conditional Employment](#)
- g. [5 CFR 330, Recruitment, Selection and Placement \(General\)](#)
- h. [5 CFR 335, Promotion and Internal Placement](#)
- i. [5 CFR 410.306, Selection and assignment of trainees](#)
- j. [5 USC Sec 2301, Merit Systems Principles](#)
- k. [29 CFR Part 1614 – Federal Sector Equal Employment Opportunity](#)
- l. [Executive Orders 11478, 13087 and 13152 – Non-discrimination Because of Sexual Orientation and Status as a Parent](#)
- m. [Executive Order 12292, Eligibility of Foreign Service Officers for Non-competitive Appointments](#)
- n. [Executive Order 12721, Eligibility of Overseas Employees for Non-competitive Appointments](#)
- o. [U.S. Office of Personnel Management \(OPM\) Operating Manual: Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions](#)
- p. [Veteran’s Employment Act of 1998 codified as 5 USC 3304, Competitive service; examination](#)

418.4.2 Internal Mandatory References

Effective Date: 07/12/2024

- a. [ADS 110, Equal Employment Opportunity Program](#)
- b. [ADS 111, Procedures for Providing Reasonable Accommodation](#)
- c. [ADS 410, Drug-Free Workplace Program](#)
- d. [ADS 413, Civil Service Appointments and Employment](#)
- e. [ADS 432, Details – Civil and Foreign Service](#)
- f. [ADS 434, Details and Transfers to International Organizations](#)

- g. [ADS 452, Reduction in Force – Civil Service](#)
- h. [ADS 456, Personnel Operations: Position Classification](#)
- i. [ADS 490, Agency Administrative Grievance Procedure](#)

418.5 ADDITIONAL HELP
Effective Date: 07/12/2024

There are no additional help documents for this chapter.

418.6 DEFINITIONS
Effective Date: 07/12/2024

See the [ADS Glossary](#) for all ADS terms and definitions.

Agency Employees

Direct-hire permanent employees with competitive or non-competitive status for appointment or promotion. (**Chapter 418**)

All U.S. Citizens

Anyone with U.S. citizenship may apply, including those applicants who are currently working for the Federal Government. (**Chapter 418**)

Area of Consideration (AOC)

The area of consideration describes the candidates from whom the Agency will accept applications to compete for the position. The AOC may also be referred to as “Who May Apply” within the job opportunity announcement. The AOC may be a broad or a limited group of candidates. (**Chapter 418**)

Best Qualified Candidates

Best qualified candidates are those candidates who rank at the top when compared with other eligible candidates for a position. (**Chapter 418**)

Career Ladder Position

A position of increasing difficulty in the same line of work through which an employee may progress from a lower or entry level to the level of full performance.

1. Entry Level - The lowest grade level in a career ladder.
2. Full-Performance Level - The ultimate grade reached in a career-ladder position as a result of the original merit staffing action, or as a result of the original competitive appointment. (**Chapter 418**)

Career Transition Assistance Plans (CTAP)

When filling a vacancy, USAID must place a qualified surplus or displaced Agency employee before posting the vacancy or filling the vacancy with any other candidate. **(Chapter 418)**

Competency

A measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs), behaviors and other characteristics that an individual needs in order to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully. **(Chapter 418)**

Competitive Service

All civilian positions in the Federal Government that are not specifically excepted from civil service laws by or pursuant to statute, by the President, or by OPM under Rule VI, and that are not in the Senior Executive Service. **(Chapter 418)**

Demotion

Also called change to lower grader or reduction in grade; a change of an employee to a lower grade or to a position with a lower rate of pay. **(Chapter 418)**

Detail

The temporary assignment or loan of a direct-hire employee to a different position within USAID, or an outside organization, for a specified period, with the expectation the employee will return to the official position of record upon the expiration of the detail. **(Chapter 418)**

Eligible Candidates

Candidates who meet regulatory requirements (e.g., citizenship, time-in-grade) and the Office of Personnel Management qualification standards for the position, including appropriate selective placement factor(s), by the closing date of the announcement. **(Chapter 418)**

Evaluation Criteria

Weighted criteria used to measure the value of a candidate's qualifications (e.g., experience and education) against the knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs) and other characteristics required by the vacant or new position. **(Chapter 418)**

Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP)

ICTAP provides eligible displaced federal employees with interagency selection priority for vacancies that are being filled from outside the Agency's competitive service workforce. The ICTAP selection priority does not prohibit movement of permanent competitive service employees within the Agency. **(Chapter 418)**

Interchange Agreement

Under [5 CFR 6.7](#), OPM and an agency having an established merit system in the excepted service may enter into an agreement prescribing conditions under which employees may be moved from the agency's system to the competitive service. **(Chapter 418)**

Job Analysis

The process of identifying the competencies/KSAs directly related to performance on the job. (**Chapter 418**)

Local Commuting Area

The geographic area for employment purposes. It includes any population center (or two or more neighboring ones) and the surrounding localities, in which people live and can reasonably be expected to travel to their place of employment on a daily basis. (**Chapter 418**)

Position Change

A move by an employee from one position to another position during their continuous service within the same agency. The move may establish an employee's eligibility for grade retention. Moves when the employee is not entitled to grade retention are called promotion, change to lower grade, or reassignment. A position change may also involve a change of official headquarters or post of duty within the Agency. (**Chapter 418**)

Priority Consideration

A non-competitive opportunity for selection to a new or vacant position granted to a qualified employee who failed to receive proper consideration for selection for an equivalent position under another vacancy announcement. (**Chapter 418**)

Promotion

The change of an employee to a position at a higher grade level within the same job classification system and pay schedule, or to a position with a higher rate of basic pay in a different job classification system and pay schedule. (**Chapter 418**)

Promotion Potential

The promotion potential of any position is the highest grade to which a person may be promoted without additional competition for the position, e.g., career ladder promotion. (**Chapter 418**)

Qualification Requirements

Education, experience, and other prerequisites to employment or placement in a position. The Office of Personnel Management's Operating Manual for Qualifications Standards for General Schedule Positions or modified Agency standards to determine basic qualifications of applicants for a specific position. (**Chapter 418**)

Qualified Candidates

Qualified candidates are those being considered for any competitive placement action who meet all established minimum eligibility and qualification requirements for the position. (**Chapter 418**)

Quality Ranking Factors

Quality ranking factors are competencies identified in the vacancy announcement for the positions to be filled that could be expected to significantly enhance performance in a position, but unlike selective factors, are not essential for satisfactory performance. (For example, oral communication might be used as a quality-ranking factor for a position in an organization where policy changes are communicated to the public in several ways). (**Chapter 418**)

Reasonable Accommodation

Any change in the work environment or application process that enables a person with a disability to perform the basic functions of the position or to otherwise access equal employment opportunities. (**Chapter 418**)

Reassignment

The change of an employee within the Agency from one position to another without promotion or demotion. (**Chapter 418**)

Reemployment Rights

Rehire rights granted to a former Agency employee(s) when hired by another executive agency without a break in service of a full workday by transfer, reinstatement, or by excepted appointment, in a position which the Agency is currently authorized to fill with reemployment rights. (**Chapter 418**)

Referral List

The form used to send to the supervisor the names of the best-qualified candidates to be considered for placement and to document selection decisions. (**Chapter 418**)

Reinstatement Eligibility

Refers to the ability of those candidates who previously held a career or career-conditional appointment to apply for jobs in the competitive federal service open to status applicants. There is no time limit on reinstatement eligibility for those who either have veterans' preference, or who acquired career tenure by completing three years of substantially continuous creditable service. (**Chapter 418**)

Selective or Screen-out Factors

Specific knowledge, skills, and abilities essential for satisfactory performance on the job and which represent an addition to the basic qualification standards for a position. (**Chapter 418**)

Special Selection Priority Referral List

A list used to refer to supervisors those candidates qualified under the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan. (**Chapter 418**)

Supervisor

The individual responsible for making a careful analysis of the qualifications of each candidate certified for a vacancy and judging which candidate on the referral list(s) could perform best in the job to be filled. (**Chapter 418**)

Temporary Promotion

The temporary assignment of an employee to a higher graded position for a specified period of time, with the employee returning to their permanent position upon the expiration of the temporary action. (**Chapter 418**)

Trainee Position

A position of a definite duration involving a well-defined training program established for a career or career conditional employee. The training may be on-the-job or formal training. Assigned tasks are performed on a rotating or non-rotating basis and under close guidance and instruction, with promotion scheduled upon satisfactory completion of the training period. (**Chapter 418**)

Transfer

The employment of a career or career-conditional employee, when the employee moves from one agency to another without a break in service of one full workday. (**Chapter 418**)

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