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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: 01/12/2017

This chapter provides the policies and procedures for managing the promotion and internal placement, or merit staffing, program for Civil Service (CS) employees at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) at the GS-15 level and below. The objectives of the program are to provide the Agency with the best-qualified candidates to fill competitive and excepted service positions; to ensure fair and equitable consideration of all candidates in compliance with regulations; and to provide career opportunities for current staff. This ADS chapter meets the requirements for a merit promotion plan contained in [5 CFR 335.103](#).

418.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

- a. The **Chief Human Capital Officer, Office of Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM)** is responsible for providing broad policy guidance on merit staffing matters and assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Agency's Civil Service (CS) Merit Staffing Program.
- b. The **Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer, Office of Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM)** has overall responsibility for the administration of the Merit Staffing Program, as well as its overall compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.
- c. The **Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, Office of Employee and Labor Relations (HCTM/ELR)** is responsible for:
 - Negotiating with the local labor organization, as required and/or appropriate, under the provisions of the Federal Labor-Management Relations Program;
 - Informing the local labor organization about regulatory and administrative requirements that have an impact on conditions of employment, including the way in which jobs are filled; and
 - Reviewing and adjudicating employee appeals or grievances related to the promotion process.
- d. The **Director, Office of Human Capital and Talent Management Human Capital Service Center (HCTM/HCSC)** is responsible for:
 - Managing the overall vacancies, recruitment, and hiring processes and procedures;

- Ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements and making changes to the program as new government-wide policies are issued;
- Engaging the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the “End-to-End” recruitment and hiring processes;
- Providing access to the automated selection certificates/referral lists to OCR simultaneously with sending to selecting officials;
- Managing the Official Personnel Records Center; and
- Approving exceptions to merit staffing policy and procedures as outlined in this ADS chapter.

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

- Providing technical advice and guidance as necessary to Bureaus and Independent Offices (B/IOs) on the use of automation in the merit staffing process;
- Working with B/IO Administrative Management Staff (AMS) and selecting officials to develop the evaluation criteria and vacancy announcements for their positions;
- Administering the merit staffing process, from announcement to selection, to ensure the integrity of the system and meet time-to-hire goals; and
- Providing oversight of staffing and recruitment programs and activities to ensure compliance and effectiveness.

f. The Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, External Outreach and Strategic Recruitment (HCTM/XOSR), in collaboration with HCSC/CSS and OCR, is responsible for:

- Promoting recruitment strategies that support the Agency’s diversity goals and job opportunities through various external venues such as educational institutions and community job fairs or other events;
- Partnering with USAID Employee Resource Groups and external organizations and institutions, such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as appropriate, to support the Agency’s recruitment strategies; and
- Working to develop and implement recruitment strategies that support a diverse and well-qualified workforce.

g. Supervisors, Selecting Officials, and/or AMS are responsible for:

- Initiating actions to recruit and fill positions;
- Establishing diversity goals and objectives and monitoring achievement of those objectives;
- Using the automated system, when necessary, to accomplish the range of activities associated with the merit staffing program;
- Working with HCTM/HCSC/CSS, or providing a subject matter expert (SME), to develop assessment tools (i.e., job analysis and assessment questions) to properly evaluate and distinguish applicants' qualifications according to the level and quality of their experience;
- Giving full and fair consideration to the qualifications of each candidate referred for a vacancy;
- Selecting the candidate best able to perform the job as measured by job-related selection criteria; and
- Ensuring that selections are based on merit without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, physical or mental disability, sex (including gender identity and pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, genetic information, reprisal for engaging in the EEO complaint process or opposing protected activity, parental status, marital status, political affiliation, or other non-merit factors.

h. AMS is responsible for:

- Providing assistance and guidance to selecting officials and employees on basic merit staffing and other promotion policies and procedures;
- Authorizing the submission of Personnel Action Requests with appropriate documentation to HCTM to fill vacant positions while coordinating the actions through completion; and
- Providing technical guidance to selecting officials and employees on the use of merit staffing automated processes.

i. Employees are responsible for:

- Complying with merit staffing policies and procedures as outlined in this ADS chapter;

- 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 (see **418.3.5.2**); and
- Assuming responsibility for their own self-development and exercising diligence in pursuing job opportunities for which they are interested and qualified, including during periods when they are temporarily absent for legitimate reasons (e.g., on detail, temporary duty assignment, leave, at military training courses in the military service, or serving in Public International Organizations or Intergovernmental Personnel Act assignments).

j. The **Office of Civil Rights (OCR)** is responsible for promoting the Agency's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) requirements and diversity and inclusion objectives and strategies by:

- Collaborating with HCTM to develop and implement recruitment strategies that support a diverse and well-qualified workforce;
- Consulting with Agency officials, including the Executive Diversity Council, and supporting activities regarding EEO, diversity, and inclusion;
- Partnering with USAID Employee Resource Groups and external organizations and institutions, as appropriate, to support the Agency's recruitment strategies; and
- Addressing equal employment opportunity matters and allegations of discrimination pursuant to [29 CFR Part 1614](#).

k. The **Office of General Counsel (GC)** is responsible for:

- Providing controlling legal guidance and analysis; and
- Litigating claims against the Agency that implicate the issues involved in this ADS chapter.

418.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

This section contains the policies and procedures for filling Civil Service (CS) positions under the merit staffing program, in accordance with [5 CFR Part 330, Recruitment, Selection, and Placement](#) and [5 CFR Part 335, Promotion and Internal Placement](#).

418.3.1 Hiring the Right Person for the Job

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

It is the Agency's policy to fill positions with the best qualified candidates. Accordingly, managers may elect to fill positions from recruitment 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, USAID can use these methods concurrent with, or to the exclusion of, the merit staffing process.

The merit staffing process may be cancelled any time management elects to fill a position or positions using another recruitment source, i.e., accommodation of an employee exercising reemployment rights or a displaced employee (see [ADS 469, Civil Service Personnel Recruitment](#)).

418.3.2 Merit System Principles

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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

1. Recruitment should be from qualified individuals 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 that 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.
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 who

cannot or will not improve their performance to meet required standards should be separated.

7. Employees should be provided effective education and training in cases where the 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.

The Agency also follows policies that ensure selection and placement that is free of bias and other prohibited personnel practices as stated in [5 USC 2302](#).

418.3.3 Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

It is the Agency's policy that its workplace is a model of equal opportunity, diversity, and inclusion. Our workforce reflects America's diversity by drawing on the talents of all parts of our society.

OCR is charged with advancing the Agency's diversity goals in collaboration with HCTM and Agency officials. OCR is responsible for the following:

- a. Develops and issues an annual diversity profile that identifies under-representation;
- b. Provides the diversity profile to each Bureau/Independent Office (B/IO) Head, and discusses diversity goals and strategies for each year at the start of the fiscal or calendar year;
- c. Collaborates and engages with HCTM to develop and implement recruitment and retention strategies for a diverse and well-qualified workforce;

- d. Provides the diversity profile data to selecting officials as part of the hiring process via the automated referral system; and
- e. Participates actively with hiring managers and HCTM/HSCS/CSS during the recruitment process prior to selection:
 - 1. Upon receipt by HCTM/HSCS/CSS of the [SF-52, Request for Personnel Action](#), and prior to posting the job opportunity announcements; and
 - 2. Upon issuance of the referral lists to selecting officials.

418.3.4 The Merit Staffing Program

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

USAID adheres to the policies and procedures regarding filling competitive positions contained in [5 CFR 335.103](#) as well as the policies and procedures outlined in [5 CFR 330, Subparts F and G](#), in regard to Career Transition Assistance Plans (CTAP) and Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plans (ICTAP) (see [ADS 452, Civil Service Reduction in Force \(RIF\)](#) for mandatory placement and employee entitlements under RIF).

The Merit Staffing Program provides an open, systematic, and bias-free placement system that ensures positions are filled with the best qualified individuals available. B/IO management, in consultation with HCSC/CSS, determines when the use of merit staffing is appropriate for filling vacant positions.

The Merit Staffing Program governs the recruitment and placement of Civil Service (CS) positions in General Schedule (GS) grades 01 through 15 in the competitive service. USAID also uses this plan to fill excepted service positions.

418.3.4.1 Actions Subject to Competitive Procedures

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Unless specifically described in **418.3.4.3**, the following actions must follow competitive procedures as required by [5 CFR 335.103\(c\) \(1\)](#):

- a. Time-limited promotions for more than 120 days to higher graded positions. Prior service during the preceding 12 months under non-competitive time-limited promotions and non-competitive details to higher graded positions count toward the 120-day total period. A temporary promotion may be made 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 might lead to a permanent promotion. A time-limited promotion is an appropriate mechanism for managers 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 OPM authorizes the Agency to make and/or extend time-limited promotions for a longer period. HCSC/CSS gives the employee advance written notice of the conditions of the time-limited promotion, or within 30 days from the date of the promotion when the promotion is effected under a non-discretionary provision (see [5 CFR 335.102\(f\)](#)).

- b. Details for more than 120 days to a higher-grade position or to a position with known promotion potential. Prior service during the preceding 12 months under non-competitive details to higher graded positions and non-competitive time-limited promotions count toward the 120-day total period) (see [ADS 432, Details – Civil and Foreign Service](#) and [ADS 434, Details and Transfers to International Organizations—Civil Service and Foreign Service](#) for more information on details).
- 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 reduction in force (RIF) regulations (see [ADS 452](#) for information on RIF).
- 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 of an employee 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.
- g. When applicable, appointment of other candidates with non-competitive eligibility under authorities regulated by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), under interchange agreements 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.

418.3.4.2 Evaluation Criteria

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

USAID's merit staffing process requires that selections be made from among the best-qualified candidates who apply for announced vacancies ([5 CFR 335.103, Agency Promotion Programs](#)). Therefore, USAID must evaluate the candidates who meet basic eligibility criteria to determine to what extent their qualifications exceed the

minimum requirements. Evaluation criteria must be reasonable, related to the job, and applied equitably to all candidates. To do this, the selecting official works with HCTM/HCSC/CSS to:

- a. Analyze positions to identify the basic duties and responsibilities;
- b. Conduct job analysis 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, skill, or ability (KSA) that is essential for successful performance on the job. A selective factor is an additional qualification requirement that applicants must have to meet the basic eligibility requirements of the position. Applicants who do not have the selective factor(s) are rated ineligible for the announced position.

418.3.4.3 Exceptions to Competitive Requirements

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Competitive procedures do not apply to certain actions; other actions may be accepted at the Agency's discretion ([5 CFR 335.103, Agency Promotion Programs](#)).

At USAID, the following actions are not subject to competition:

- a. A promotion resulting from a review of a new classification standard, or the correction of an initial classification error;
- b. 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, Personnel Operations: Position Classification](#));
- c. Consideration of a candidate not given proper consideration in a previous competitive promotion action, as stated in **418.3.4.1**;
- d. 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, as stated in **418.3.4.1**;

- e. A career promotion when the employee has previously competed for a position with promotion potential (the intent must be made a matter of record, i.e., career ladders must be documented on the job opportunity announcement (JOA), as well as on the initial position description and initial personnel action);
- f. A temporary promotion, or detail of 120 days or less to a higher graded position or a position with known promotion potential;
- 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, unless required by [5 CFR 330.705](#);
- h. Selection of employees from the Agency's Reemployment Priority Lists, when established, for positions at a grade previously held in the competitive service (see [ADS 452](#));
- i. Conversions to the competitive service under various formal programs and authorities, (e.g., the Pathways Programs), subject to satisfactory completion of requirements or meeting appropriate criteria (see [ADS 469](#)); and
- j. Reassignment pursuant to a Reasonable Accommodation (see [ADS 110, Equal Employment Opportunity](#)).

418.3.5 Additional Provisions

418.3.5.1 Promotion Eligibility

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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.

418.3.5.2 Career Ladder Promotion

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Some positions are announced and filled as career ladders. 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, when certain conditions (see below) are met.

NOTE: B/IO staff, including managers, supervisors, AMS Officers, and employees must use [ADS 418mad, Career Ladder Promotions – Checklist for Managers](#) when employees are in career-ladder positions.

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

- a.** AMS notifies the supervisor, in writing, 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 that an individual learning & training plan (ILTP) is developed specific to the employee's needs;
 - Assigns the employee some developmental work and/or projects of sufficient complexity and responsibility to allow the employee to demonstrate 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 each level of the career ladder, the employee must meet the following requirements:
 - Have progressed steadily within the terms of their ILTP or program;
 - By initiating the action in HR Connect, the supervisor has certified to HCSC/CSS that the employee demonstrated the ability to perform at the next highest level, that the work continues to exist, and that the supervisor recommends the employee for promotion to the next higher grade;
 - Have 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 that is also 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 a written response within 10 work days of receiving the employee's request. If the employee is dissatisfied with the response from the supervisor, the employee may contact HCTM/ELR for further guidance.
- e. The promotion is effective at the beginning of the first pay period after approval by HCTM/HCSC.

418.3.5.3 Upward Mobility Positions

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Upward mobility positions allow B/IO hiring managers 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. These positions can provide a career avenue for employees in positions with no, or limited, growth potential. B/IO hiring managers must develop structured training and experience features for these positions and carefully monitor them to ensure success of employees selected for upward mobility positions. Placement in these positions is accomplished through the competitive merit staffing procedures outlined in this ADS chapter. For more information about how to create and use such positions, see [ADS 481mac, Upward Mobility Positions](#).

418.3.5.4 Priority Consideration

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

If a candidate failed to receive proper consideration in a previous competitive placement action(s), USAID gives priority consideration for the next appropriate vacancy or vacancies before the position is filled by competitive means. Such an employee is entitled to one priority consideration for each selection made from a vacancy where there was an instance of lost or improper consideration. The employee 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 considerations until appointed or until the candidate has received the number of bona fide employment considerations that they would have received had the fault not occurred, whichever comes first (see **418.3.13** for information on addressing employment concerns or complaints),

418.3.5.5 Re-Promotion Consideration

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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. If

selected, the employee is promoted without competition to the grade formerly held. USAID's policy is to minimize the impact involuntary actions have on employee careers.

Under this section, HCSC/CSS establishes a roster of employees eligible for re-promotion. 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.

418.3.6 Drug Testing

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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

418.3.7 Nepotism - Employment of Relatives

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

USAID adheres to all restrictions of the employment of relatives contained in [5 USC 3110](#) as follows: 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 he is serving or over which he exercises jurisdiction or control, any individual who is a relative of the public official. An individual 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 individual.

418.3.8 The Hiring Process

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

HCTM will consult with B/IO hiring managers and AMS Officers regarding strategies for filling their positions. The following sections describe the areas that will be discussed during the consultations.

418.3.8.1 Areas of Consideration

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Areas of consideration (AOC) are established to ensure that an adequate supply of well-qualified candidates can be located. The AOC describes the area in which the search for highly qualified candidates is directed and from which applications will be accepted. The AOC balances such needs as open and fair competition, adequate numbers of qualified applicants, outreach to diverse applicant pools, and equal employment opportunity goals and objectives.

The AOC in USAID are:

- USAID-wide (permanent competitive service GS employees).

- Government-wide (status candidates, including veterans who qualify under the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) of 1998).
- Other eligible applicants under special hiring authorities, i.e., Schedule A, 30% or More Disabled Veteran, and Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA).
- U.S. Citizens or employees without “status” or special appointing eligibility, who may apply under competitive examination (delegated examining), which is governed by the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook (DEOH), https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/competitive-hiring/deo_handbook.pdf.

418.3.8.2 Who may apply?

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

1. If the position is advertised “USAID only”: Agency employees in permanent, competitive service positions.
2. If the position is advertised as “status candidates”, in addition to 1) above, the following are eligible to apply:
 - Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP) eligibles;
 - Current permanent competitive service federal employees;
 - VEOA eligibles;
 - Reinstatement eligibles; and
 - Persons eligible for non-competitive appointment under special authorities, such as:
 - Appointment of a career Foreign Service Officer into the competitive service, under [Executive Order 12292](#) and [5 CFR 315.606](#);
 - Appointment of Peace Corps personnel with non-competitive eligibility to a competitive service position, under [5 CFR 315.607](#);
 - Appointment of certain former overseas employees with non-competitive eligibility to a competitive position, under [Executive Order 12721](#) and [5 CFR 315.608](#); and
 - Appointment of other candidates with non-competitive eligibility under authorities regulated by OPM, under interchange agreements with

other merit systems, and under miscellaneous authorities not regulated by OPM statutes and court orders (see [5 CFR 315](#) and [5 CFR 6.7](#)).

3. If the position 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 POC identified on the Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA).

418.3.8.3 Job Opportunity Announcements (JOAs)

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

When announcing a position, HR Specialists coordinate efforts with the selecting official to ensure that the end product yields positive results. It is critical that selecting officials give considerable thought when identifying the breadth and depth of the competencies required for successful performance in the position. The selecting official must review and approve the JOA, and, if appropriate, can add, delete, or edit assessment questions and screen-out question(s), if any. Screen-out questions are optional; if used, they must be added to the applicant questionnaires. Screen-out questions are intended to identify applicants who possess the critical competencies needed to perform successfully on the job, and to screen out those who are unlikely to do so or will require extensive training. Selecting officials are advised to meet with their servicing HR Specialist to discuss options.

Reasonable accommodation is afforded to applicants with disabilities, on a case-by-case basis. The vacancy announcement provides a point of contact (POC) for those who need a reasonable accommodation for any part of the application and hiring processes.

JOAs should be free from any information that is discriminatory based on race, color, religion, national origin, physical or mental disability, sex (including gender identity and pregnancy), age, genetic information, reprisal for engaging in the EEO complaint process or opposing protected activity, sexual orientation, parental status, marital status, or political affiliation.

418.3.8.4 Multiple Vacancy/Multiple B/O Duty Location Announcements

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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

418.3.8.5 Job Posting Periods

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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

418.3.8.6 Open Continuous Announcements

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

In occupational categories where there is frequent turnover or great demand, JOAs may remain open continuously to respond quickly to an office's need to fill additional vacancies. Information on cut-off dates, application retention period, and other relevant details will be included in each open continuous announcement.

418.3.8.7 Accessing Announcements

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Merit promotion announcements are listed on the Agency's External Web site with a direct link to OPM's USAJOBS. They are also accessible through the Agency's internal Web site located at <http://www.usaid.gov/work-with-us/careers/vacancy-announcements>. USAID employees and other applicants can go directly into the application process by clicking on the appropriate announcement number.

418.3.8.8 Circulation of Announcements

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Candidates may be located using a wide range of methods that may vary with each JOA depending on AOC, type of position, and other similar considerations. Announcements will be distributed to appropriate resources, as necessary, to recruit and hire a diverse and talented workforce.

418.3.8.9 Application Procedures

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

The automated system is the primary means by which applications are received and processed. Online applications must be received 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.

418.3.8.10 Eligibility and Qualifications

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Applicants must meet both eligibility and qualification requirements for the position of interest by the closing date of the JOAs. 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](#).
- Selective (screen-out) factors, if any (see **418.3.4.2** for discussion of selective factors). Applicants must meet all identified selective factors in order to be considered for the JOA in question.

NOTE: Applicants are notified by a system-generated email of the status of their applications, i.e., receipt, eligible/ineligible, qualified/not qualified, referred/not referred or selected/not selected for the position.

418.3.8.11 Evaluation Methodology

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

The Agency's Merit Staffing Program requires that all eligible applicants be evaluated 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 criteria. HCSC/CSS HR Specialists review the eligibility, qualifications, and the rating and ranking of the applications according to the evaluation criteria.

418.3.8.12 Rating and Ranking

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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

NOTE: ICTAP is automatically applied when announcements are advertised federal-wide (status applicants). Veterans' preference is not applied for merit staffing vacancies.

418.3.8.13 Referral of Best Qualified Candidates

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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 (see **418.3.5.4**);
- Well qualified ICTAP candidates who are eligible for special selection consideration under ICTAP regulations as outlined in [5 CFR 330 Subpart G](#);
- Promotion eligibles;

- VEOA eligibles;
- 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.

418.3.8.14 Automated Human Resources System

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

USAID uses a human resources Web-based application that automates the announcement of positions, the assessment and referral of 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 list(s) of best qualified candidates. The HR Specialist reviews the outcome and ensures candidates are properly rated and ranked before issuing the referral list(s).

418.3.8.15 Selection

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Hiring managers 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](#).

The selecting official has a minimum of 14 and a maximum of 21 calendar days to interview and make a selection from any one of the referral lists issued. USAID will grant extensions up to an additional five work days, on a case-by-case basis. A written request for the extension must be submitted to the Chief, HCTM/HCSC/CSS, for a decision at least five work days before the initial referral listing expires.

Generally, HCTM will provide hiring managers with three referral lists based on the AOC of the vacancy announcement:

- Competitive (Merit Promotion) lists;
- Non-Competitive (Reassignment/Change to Lower Grade/Schedule A); and
- Competitive (All Sources) lists.

Selecting officials must follow the instructions below for processing the referral lists:

- a. Interviews:** Hiring managers 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 to be made from the promotion referral list, all direct-hire USAID employees (if any) must be interviewed, unless the employee is on leave or unavailable for an extended period, or waives the interview process. Alternatively, telephone interviews may be conducted, particularly when candidates are outside the commuting area. If a candidate declines or misses an interview and does not call to reschedule, no further consideration is given to the candidate's application. If a candidate fails to respond, the selecting official must contact the HR Specialist for further guidance.
 - 2. External Candidates:** Selecting officials have the option to interview candidates external to USAID, but are not required to do so. They may also pay for interviews of candidates outside the commuting area under their own B/IO budget.
- b. Conducting the Interview:** Selecting officials or designees may conduct interviews. It is important that applicants be given fair and equal consideration in the interview process. Accordingly, the questions asked must essentially be the same for all candidates. The selecting official or designee must not show or give preference to any candidate based on factors other than the candidate's qualifications for the job.
- c. Responding to Referral Lists:** The selecting official completes the selection process according to procedures or guidance provided, and forwards the list(s) electronically to the servicing HR Specialist.
- A selecting official who returns the referral lists without any candidate(s) chosen must provide an explanation. Concurrently, the selecting official may:
- 1.** Request that 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. Upon receipt of a withdrawal justification, HCSC/CSS will evaluate a subsequent request to fill the same or similar vacancy within 30 days from date of the request.
- d. Duration of Referral Lists:** A referral list may be used within 120 days from initial selection when vacancies with all the same conditions occur. These conditions include the same title, series, grade, target grade, Bureau, and type of appointment (i.e. permanent, temporary or term).

- e. **Number of Selections:** If the JOA was advertised for one position, the selecting official can make only one selection unless the language in the JOA allows for more than one selection. The standard language provides that more than one position can be filled from an announcement.

418.3.9 Release of Employees for New Assignment

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

HCTM/HCSC/CSS, in consultation with the selecting official, arranges release dates for candidates selected immediately after job offers are made. The release date for promotion will be 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 days from the date the Bureau or Agency is notified.

418.3.10 Additional Referrals

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

If the selected individual: (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 referral list(s) used to select that individual may be used again by the selecting official to make a subsequent selection (for example, the second- or third-choice candidate).

418.3.11 Recordkeeping

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

USAID must adhere to the policies and procedures regarding recordkeeping contained in [5 CFR 335.103](#).

418.3.12 Program Evaluation

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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 include 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.

418.3.13 Employment Concerns and Complaints

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

Applicants with concerns or complaints about the operation of the merit staffing program should:

- a. Contact the relevant HCTM/HCSC/CSS HR Specialist or CSS Division Chief to address questions or concerns about aspects of the merit staffing process in general and/or a specific announcement;
- b. If dissatisfied with the explanation provided by the Specialist, submit, in writing, a formal request to the Division Chief, HCTM/HCSC/CSS to review the case. The employee should also consult with HCTM/ELR at this time. The employee must specify the relief requested; or
- c. If the employee is still dissatisfied with the response from HCTM/CSS, s/he must submit, in writing, a formal request to the Director, HCTM/HCSC, for reconsideration.

If an employee believes s/he has been discriminated against based on race, color, religion, national origin, physical or mental disability, sex (including gender identity and pregnancy), age, genetic information, sexual orientation, or reprisal for engaging in the EEO complaint process or opposing protected activity, at any stage of the hiring process, s/he must contact the Office of Civil Rights and Diversity. The regulations require that if an employee wants to engage in the EEO process, s/he must do so within 45 days of the date of the matter alleged to be discriminatory or, in the case of personnel action, within 45 days of the effective date of the action. The time-period is not held in abeyance pending the outcome of raising concerns pursuant to [29 CFR Part 1614](#).

NOTE: Non-selection for promotion from a group of properly ranked and certified candidates, or failure to receive a non-competitive promotion is NOT a basis for a grievance (see [5 CFR 335.103 \(d\)](#)).

418.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES

418.4.1 External Mandatory References

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

- a. [5 CFR 6.7, Movement of persons between the civil service and other merit systems](#)
- b. [5 CFR 300, Employment \(General\)](#)
- c. [5 CFR 310, Employment of Relatives](#)
- d. [5 CFR 315, Career and Career Conditional Employment](#)
- e. [5 CFR 330, Recruitment, Selection and Placement \(General\)](#)
- f. [5 CFR 335, Promotion and Internal Placement](#)

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

418.4.2 Internal Mandatory References

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

- a. [ADS 110, Equal Employment Opportunity](#)
- b. [ADS 410, Drug-Free Workplace Program](#)
- c. [ADS 418mac, Upward Mobility Positions](#)
- d. [ADS 418mad, Career Ladder Promotions – Checklist for Managers](#)
- 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 469, Civil Service Personnel Recruitment](#)

418.5 ADDITIONAL HELP

Effective Date: 01/12/2017

There are no Additional Help documents for this chapter.

418.6 DEFINITIONS
Effective Date: 01/12/2017

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**)

areas of consideration (AOC)

The area of consideration describes the individuals 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. It may be a broad or a limited group of individuals. (**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) for surplus and displaced employees

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. (**Chapters [412](#), [413](#), [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](#)** and **[487](#)**)

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 that the employee will return to the official position of record upon the expiration of the detail. (**Chapters [418](#), [432](#), [434](#)**)

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 for Displaced Employees (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](#)**)

job analysis

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

local commuting area

The geographic area that usually constitutes one 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](#)** and **[452](#)**)

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 (5 USC 5362). 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 is used 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 on 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**)

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. (**Chapters [413](#), [415](#), and [418](#)**)

referral list

The form used to send the names of the best-qualified candidates being considered for placement to the hiring official for consideration and to document their selection decisions. (**Chapter 418**)

reinstatement eligibility

Refers to the ability for those individuals 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 acquired career tenure by completing three years of substantially continuous creditable service. (**Chapter [413](#) and 418**)

selecting official

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**)

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 candidates qualified under the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan to selecting officials. (**Chapter 418**)

status applicants

Refers to those individuals who are current or former federal civilian employees who hold or held non-temporary appointments in the competitive service, not the excepted service. When a vacancy announcement indicates that status candidates are eligible to apply, Federal Government employees who have served at least 90 days after competitive appointment may apply. Certain veterans eligible under the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) may also apply and be considered under vacancy announcements limited to status candidates. (**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. Temporary promotions can be used in situations such as unanticipated absences, temporary shortage of employees, emergency or project work, or pending permanent fill positions. Promotion lasting more than 120 days must be made competitively. (**Chapter 418**)

trainee position

A position involving a well-defined training program established for a career or career conditional employee of a definite duration. 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. A trainee who does not satisfactorily complete the training period will be reassigned to a different position. (**Chapter 418**)

transfer

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

Veterans Employment Opportunities Act (VEOA) eligible

A special hiring authority, which gives eligible Veterans access to positions that otherwise may have only been available to current competitive service employees. In VEOA appointments, preference eligibles and Veterans are not accorded preference, but they are allowed to compete for job opportunities that are not offered to other external candidates. A VEOA eligible who is selected will be given a career or career-conditional appointment. (**Chapter 418**)

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