



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, D.C. 20240



**AUG 18 2005**

**PERSONNEL BULLETIN NO. 05-06**

**SUBJECT:** Departmental Policy on Alternative Rating and Ranking Procedures

1. **Purpose.** This bulletin establishes the Department of the Interior policy on category-based rating as one of the government wide hiring flexibilities contained in Title XIII of the Homeland Security Act of 2002. The Department recognizes the value of utilizing this hiring flexibility to increase the selection of high quality candidates and achieve goals identified within the Department's Strategic Human Capital Plan.

2. **Authorities.** Public Law 107-296; Title 5 United States Code (U.S.C.) 3319; 5 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), Part 337, Subpart C.

3. **Responsibility.** The Department of the Interior, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Performance, Accountability and Human Resources, Office of Human Resources has primary responsibility for this policy.

4. **Policy.** The Department of the Interior (DOI) plans to increase flexibility in selecting quality candidates through a category-based rating method. This approach is a way of assessing and rating job applicants for positions filled through competitive examining procedures. The policy is established in accordance with regulation issued by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in 5 CFR Part 337, Subchapter C. The DOI policy must be used in conjunction with this regulation. Heads of bureaus and equivalent organizations are responsible for effective administration of this plan.

a. **Coverage.** Heads of bureaus, equivalent organizations or their designee will determine which positions are appropriate for the category-based rating method based on their recruitment needs in specific occupational series, grades, and geographical areas in lieu of the traditional method of assigned numerical scores and/or consideration for selection based on the "rule of three". This authority may be delegated by the heads of bureaus, equivalent organizations or their designee to the level which will provide greater flexibility to the regional or field offices.

b. **Assessment.** Candidates will be assessed against job related criteria assigned to at least two previously defined quality group categories, e.g., best qualified and qualified, depending upon the quality and relevance of their qualifications to the job. The categories will be defined through a job analysis conducted in accordance with the OPM Delegated Examining Handbook, prior to commencement of recruitment activity. The competencies and knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) identified in the job analysis will serve as the foundation for the bureaus and equivalent offices assessment strategy. Bureaus and equivalent offices will spend adequate time in the beginning of the process performing a thorough assessment of the needed competencies and KSAs.

c. **Quality Categories.** The Department will use multiple categories to assess each candidate against job related criteria. The higher category, **best qualified**, will be used for those candidates who possess the type and quality of experience that substantially exceeds the minimum qualifications of the position, including all selective factors and appropriate quality rating factors as determined by the bureau or equivalent office. To be best qualified, the candidates are considered by the

Human Resources Office and the selecting supervisor as being highly proficient in all the requirements of the job and can perform effectively in the position almost immediately or with a minimum amount of training and/or orientation.

Subsequent categories will be developed and used for those candidates that meet the minimum qualifications of the position and are proficient in some, but not all, of the requirements of the position. Candidates may require extensive training and/or orientation in order to satisfactorily perform the duties of the position.

**d. Announcement.** For each position to be filled, a bureau or equivalent organization must decide in advance if they will assess candidates by using the traditional numerical ranking and “rule of three” procedures or category rating, and must publish this information in the job announcement. When using category rating procedures, the job announcement must clearly define the categories each applicant will be assessed against based on the competencies and KSAs directly related to the job. The application and use of veteran’s preference in Alternative Rating and Ranking will be clearly stated in the vacancy announcement. A rating method can not be changed without re-advertising the vacancy. If the rating method is changed and the vacancy is re-advertised the bureau or equivalent organization must be able to provide clear and appropriate reasons for doing so. These reasons will be documented and kept in the vacancy case file. The Human Resources Specialist will develop the crediting plan with the selecting supervisor and/or subject matter expert which identifies at least two category levels related to the desired skill. The credit plan must ensure that the levels clearly differentiate between the competencies of the candidates as they related to the duties of the job.

**e. Ranking.** Assessed candidates will be placed in the appropriate quality category and ranked according to preference eligibility and non-preference eligibility. Within the category all veterans’ preference eligibles are listed first. All veterans will be alphabetized and listed as a single group, regardless of preference type. Any veteran may be selected from that group. Non-veterans follow veterans and are also listed in alphabetized order. Where appropriate, CP<sup>1</sup> and CPS<sup>2</sup> veterans float up to the top category, irregardless of where they fall in the category ranking (**Note: Unless they fail to meet positive education requirements, training, screen-out factors, etc**). If the groups are combined, the veterans’ names from both groups will be placed at the top of the merged list.

For all positions other than professional and scientific at the GS-09 grade level (and equivalent) or higher, qualified preference eligibles who have a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more shall be listed at the top of the highest quality category.

Alternative rating and ranking procedures may be conducted using an automated system. Applications will be initially assessed by an automated staffing system which evaluates the described experience, education and training as described in the application against the rating information loaded into the automated system. Candidates must initially meet OPM Qualification standards regarding the quality and length of experience for the position under recruitment. If the automated system allows for the input for criteria which will rank candidates into the various “categories” then the output will be used as the final product for determining which applicants are referred for selection. (**Note: The proper application of veteran’s preference must be verified by the Human Resources Office**). If the automated system is not capable of “ranking” applications based on the criteria stated in the vacancy announcement, then there is no substitution for the seasoned judgment of the Human Resources Specialist. The automated system will collect and sort applications based on applicable criteria, the

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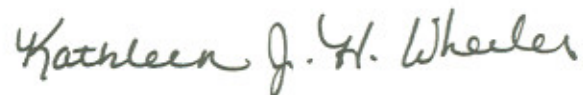
<sup>1</sup> A veteran who served at any time and who has a compensable service connected disability rating at least 10 percent , but less than 30 percent.

<sup>2</sup> A veteran who served at any time and who has a compensable service connected disability rating of 30 percent or more.

Specialist will examine the applications to ensure that they are all properly categorized by on the criteria stated in the vacancy announcement.

**g. Selection.** Selecting officials should be provided with a reasonable number of qualified candidates from which to choose. All candidates in the highest quality group will be referred for consideration. If less than three candidates are referred to management from the best qualified level the categories may be merged. When more than one group is referred, candidates shall be identified in group order from the best qualified to the qualified group. If a preference eligible is in the category, a bureau or equivalent organization may not select a non-preference eligible unless a request is submitted to and sustained for a pass over of the veteran. All requests for the pass over of a veterans preference eligible must be made in writing to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Performance, Accountability, and Human Resources, Office of Human Resources. Staff members in the Office of Human Resources will decide if the request is required to go to the U. S. Office of Personnel Management for adjudication. Authority to act on proposals to pass over preference eligibles for suitability or qualifications will follow the provisions of the Delegated Examining Unit Handbook. The bureaus and equivalent offices will assess qualifications, and other reasons considered to be disqualifying under 5 U.S. C. 3318 (b) and follow the procedures in Title 5 CFR 332.406.

**h. Records Retention and Reporting Requirements.** Supporting documentation will be maintained in a case file and is neither published in the vacancy announcement nor released to applicants. The categories must be designed to differentiate between the quality of candidates relative to the job, group individuals with similar levels of job-related competencies and define the terms of increasing levels of difficulty or complexity required to successfully perform the job. Bureaus and equivalent organizations will be required to submit an annual report to the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Performance, Accountability, and Human Resources on the use of their category rating and selection procedures. Specific requirements for the report will be issued when data submission is required. Bureaus and equivalent organizations will maintain records on the number of veterans' applied, number of selections of preference eligibles versus non-preference eligibles and the use of the alternate rating and ranking process over traditional hiring procedures.



Kathleen J. H. Wheeler  
Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer