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Policies and Procedures

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This P&P establishes policy for the ARS Research Position Evaluation System (RPES).

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1. Purpose and Coverage

The Research Position Evaluation System (RPES) provides for review of Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Category 1 positions on a cyclical basis to ensure classification accuracy.

The RPES is based on the "person-in-the-job" concept. Under this concept, research scientists have open-ended promotion potential based on their personal research and leadership accomplishments, which can change the complexity and responsibility of their positions.

The RPES applies **only** to ARS Category 1 research positions. Other professional scientific positions are evaluated by application of appropriate U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) classification standards.

2. Delegation of Position Classification Authority

For Category 1 positions **only**, properly appointed Chairs, panelists, and Personnel Representatives are hereby delegated authority to determine **both** the propriety of coverage by the Research Grade-Evaluation Guide (RGEG) and the appropriate grade level for positions in accordance with procedures established herein. The Personnel Representative will exercise signatory authority for the panel.

3. Panel Administration

General

Panel administration is the responsibility of the Head, Research Position Evaluation (RPE) Staff, Human Resources Division (HRD). That official will monitor system operations to ensure ARS-wide consistency and compliance with policies and procedures and will also administer the RPES travel budget.

Panelist Training

The RPE Staff will conduct periodic training sessions to ensure an adequate pool of qualified Research Position Evaluation Committee (RPEC) members to meet panel service needs. Training will provide a thorough orientation to the RPES, RGEG, sample cases for evaluation, and observation of actual panels.

Scheduling of Panels

The RPE Staff will prepare draft fiscal year schedules based upon cyclic reviews due that year and requested reviews approved by the Area Directors (AD).

The schedule will indicate names of scientists whose positions are to be reviewed, names of panelists and Chairs, panel meeting date, and the mandatory cutoff date for final case writeups to be received by the AD.

The schedule will be sent to the AD's for approval of Chair/panelist designees and confirmation of cases to be reviewed. Coordination among AD's is required when reviewing draft schedules. AD's must designate substitutes for Chairs/panelists who they determine are not available or not appropriate to serve as scheduled.

Case Writeup Submission Notice

At least 90 calendar days before the final case writeup is due in the AD's office, the RPE Staff will issue (through channels) a specific notice to the supervisor of each scientist whose position is scheduled for review.

4. Panel Review Requirements

General. Reviews are either mandatory or requested.

Mandatory Reviews

Cyclic Reviews

Except as noted below, research positions will be reviewed by panels on a cyclic basis to ensure continued accuracy of classification. Positions will be scheduled for review within 6 months (before or after) the anniversary date of the last panel review or other classification decision (including initial appointment to the position) in accordance with the following schedule:

Maximum Interval Between Reviews	
Current Grade	Maximum Interval
GS-12 and below	3 years
GM/GS-13	4 years
GM/GS-14 and above	5 years

Note: Scientists serving in **ARS overseas research assignments** are reviewed by RPES panels in accordance with the regular mandatory cycle while serving in such assignments.

Exceptions

No Category 1 position will be subject to panel review if the performance rating of record is **less than "Fully Successful" on a Critical Element** or if management will assign such a rating before the scientist's case is reviewed. Immediate supervisors are responsible for notifying the AD and RPE Staff of such rating or probable rating. The position will be rescheduled for review by the next available panel once the performance problem has been resolved.

Research positions filled by appointment under demonstration project authority (and subject to the 3-year extended probationary period) will not be reviewed until a tenure determination has been made. Exceptions to this policy may be made for reasons acceptable to the AD and the Director, HRD. Justifications for exception must be submitted by AD's to the RPE Staff, which will advise the Director on approval.

Category 2 research positions are excluded from the RPES and the mandatory review cycle. However, when management wishes to have the incumbent of a Category 2 research position reappointed at a higher grade level, the position will be reviewed upon notification of RPE Staff.

- Proposed allocation to GS-12 or below will be reviewed by the servicing Human Resources Specialist.
- Proposed allocation to GS-13 or above will be reviewed by a panel. The RPE Staff will schedule the position for review by the next available panel in the scientist's peer group.
- Grade level upon initial appointment to a Category 2 research position will be determined based on the same grade level distinctions explained above.

When a Category 1 scientist occupying a Research Leader position voluntarily accepts a nonsupervisory Category 1 assignment, assignment change will be made without panel review. Incumbent's mandatory panel review date will be set no earlier than 5 years from the effective date of assignment change.

Incumbents of Category 1 positions covered by internship or other formal Agency developmental programs may be promoted without panel review, based on supervisory certification, through grade GS-12. **However**, no incumbent may be promoted to GS-12 without panel review **until** the Ph.D. degree has actually been conferred.

Filling Vacant Research Positions

A vacant research position may be filled through various routes. It may also be filled at any one of several grade levels depending upon the level of qualifications of the person selected. Therefore, before it is filled, the grade of a vacant position must be determined with the selectee's qualifications fully considered.

Certain minimal information required by the RGEG's "impact-of-the-person-in-the-job" concept is not provided in the vacancy application. This supplemental material may be provided in either "streamlined" or--when allocation at GM/GS-13 and above is desired--standard Factor IV format, at the selecting official's discretion.

The final grade level will be determined (using Factor IV of the RGEG) by either an ad hoc panel or a Human Resources Specialist. Method of review is dependent on the grade level proposed for the selectee and whether the selectee already occupies an ARS research position. **See Exhibit 2.**

Requested Reviews

Early Review. Scientists or their supervisors may request review by an RPES panel before the cyclic review is due when there has been a significant change which may affect the grade level of the position. Approval for early review may be requested **no earlier than 1 year after the scientist's last review.** All requests for early review must be submitted through supervisory channels to the AD for consideration/approval. If disapproved at any level, the disapproving office will provide an explanation to the scientist.

Delayed Review. Scientists or their supervisors may request delayed review for justifiable reasons, such as prolonged illness, mobilization for military service, or other absence from the worksite during the notice period. Except in unusual circumstances, the maximum delay is 6 months after the scheduled panel review date. **Delayed review will not be approved solely to allow time for acceptance of publications, patents, etc.** All requests for delayed review must be submitted through supervisory channels to the AD for consideration/approval. If disapproved at any level, the disapproving office will provide an explanation to the scientist.

Reevaluation. Scientists or their immediate supervisors who are dissatisfied with the latest panel decision may make a written request to reevaluate (repanel) the decision. All requests for reevaluation must be submitted through supervisory channels to the AD for consideration/approval **within 60 calendar days after issuance of the panel report.** If disapproved at any level, the disapproving office will provide an explanation to the scientist. A case may be reevaluated only once within the review cycle appropriate to the employee's grade level.

Scheduling. Upon notification of approval of a requested review, the RPE Staff will issue a specific case submission notice. Positions approved for early or delayed review, or reevaluation, will be scheduled for the next available panel for the employee's peer group. "Availability" is a function of variables such as panel composition and workload. Employees should, therefore, neither expect nor request to be reviewed at a **specific** meeting.

Classification Appeal

Category 1 employees through grade GS-14 may appeal the classification of their positions to either the USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) or OPM. GS-15 researchers may appeal only to OHRM. Appeal procedures are explained in P&P 431.1, Position Classification and Position Management.

5. Panel Composition

General. Planning of each panel will:

- Provide for assignment of cases on a zonal basis. Positions in the North Atlantic, Beltsville, South Atlantic, and Mid South Areas constitute Zone I. Positions in the Southern Plains, Northern Plains, Pacific West, and Midwest Areas constitute Zone II. Zone crossing is routine in order to improve panel composition and workload balance.
- Never include a panelist whose case is to be reviewed at the meeting.
- Ensure scientific discipline (peer group) diversity in representation to allow for greater objectivity in decision making. Peer scientists from two different peer groups will serve on each panel.
- Avoid selecting panelists who have a supervisor/subordinate relationship with any incumbent whose position is being reviewed.
 - When, despite due diligence, panel composition requirements necessitate service by panelists who have a supervisor/subordinate relationship with any position being reviewed, the supervisor or subordinate will be excused from the meeting during the evaluation of the subordinate's or supervisor's case.
 - There is no comparable restriction on a panelist reviewing a coworker's case.
- Avoid situations which require the Chair to perform indepth review (IDR) of any position.

Note: In the event of panel cancellation due to inclement weather or other unavoidable causes, the assigned panelists will be convened at the earliest possible time to complete their task.

Peer Group members will:

- Include Category 1 scientists in grade GM/GS-13 or above who will serve indefinite terms of appointment.
- Usually not be subject to panel duty more than once a year. This does not, however, preclude an employee from occasionally serving on a panel more than once a year in the event of a special ARS need.
- Complete mandatory training before being allowed to serve.
- Be required to serve on panels to which assigned except for instances of illness, family emergency, or other compelling reason acceptable to the AD.

Personnel Representative will:

- Be an ARS Human Resources Specialist GS-11 or above, familiar with ARS research organizations and programs.
- Complete mandatory training before being allowed to serve.
- Be a continuing member of the RPEC and participate as a voting member in all panel meetings to which assigned.
- Provide technical personnel advice at panel meetings and be responsible for ensuring consistency and continuity of RPES operations on such panels.
- Exercise classification authority with respect to title, series, and other non-grade level aspects, and finalize all classification documentation resulting from panel decisions. This includes finalizing the panel report to document the panel's decision.

Chair will:

- Complete mandatory training before being allowed to serve.
- Preside over individual panel meetings.
- Assign specified cases to individual panelists for indepth review prior to meeting.

- Share responsibility with the Personnel Representative for ensuring consistency and continuity of panel operations.

6. Confidentiality Requirement

The content of all indepth review factfinding interviews will remain **absolutely confidential**. The IDR will not disclose this information to any person outside the panel meeting.

All panel deliberation of individual cases will be kept **absolutely confidential**. Panelists and observers (panelist trainees) will not divulge details or results of deliberations. All questions regarding decisions or determinations will be referred to the Personnel Representative.

The identity of RPEC members who served on a specific panel is confidential information and not subject to release.

Violations of the confidentiality policy will be handled in accordance with disciplinary procedures.

Note: The confidentiality policy does **not** apply to answering inquiries from official investigators or Equal Employment Opportunity Counselors.

7. Panel Decision Options

General. Authorized panel decision options are explained in **Exhibit 3**.

Panels must decide and document one of the authorized decision options for each position assigned for review. **Panels are not permitted to "nondecide" a case.**

Assignment of Degrees and Points. In evaluating research positions:

Panels will assign only the full degrees and corresponding point values established in the RGEG; i.e., Degrees A, B, C, D, E or In Excess of E.

Assignment of odd number points or split degrees is **not** authorized.

Resolution of Borderline Scores

The RGEG contains a "Grade-Determination Chart" which prescribes the conversion scale between total points and grade level. Each grade level is defined in terms of a point range; e.g., GS-13 = 26 to 32 points.

A gap exists between the highest number of points in each grade range (always ending in a 2; i.e., 22, 32, 42), and the lowest number of points in the next higher grade range (always ending in a 6; i.e., 26, 36, 46). ARS policy and RGEG guidance preclude assignment of odd points, but a score ending in a 4 (i.e., 24, 34, 44) may sometimes occur. This is termed a borderline score. Scores ending in a 4 are at the "ceiling" of a point range, and scores ending in a 6 are the "floor" of a point range.

Panels must resolve borderline scores based on application of sound classification judgment. This will include a careful assessment of strengthening and weakening aspects of the position which may not have been fully considered in arriving at the point values. When the consensus decision results in a borderline score, the decision must be documented in the panel report. **See Part II of Manual 431.3-ARS, RPES Case Writeup Preparation and Guidance for Panelists.**

Supervisory Research Positions. In some instances, the supervisory component of a research position may be grade determining. Application of the OPM General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) is the responsibility of the servicing Human Resources Specialist, not the RPES panel. Grades derived by GSSG application are irrelevant for RGEG application.

8. Preparation and Submission of Evaluation Materials

Case writeups serve as the basis for research position evaluation. They include a description of the incumbent's duties and responsibilities and personal data which show the incumbent's contributions, stature, and recognition.

Prescribed case writeup format, and procedures for review, approval, and submission to RPE Staff, are detailed in Chapter 7 of Manual 431.3-ARS.

No entry at variance with prescribed format will be accepted. Noncompliant writeups will not be accepted by the Area Office.

Disagreements on writeup content should be resolved at the lowest level possible. If agreement cannot be reached, **the version submitted will appear as the AD directs**, and a signed statement of disagreement from subordinate and/or supervisor may be attached.

No person will include in the case writeup or exhibits any statement recommending promotion or other action, or mention work habits, attitude, or personality.

Scientists may **update** any portion of their case writeup up to the day the panel actually meets (approximately 2 months after the cutoff date). Updates are to be e-mailed directly to the RPE Staff **with a copy to the AD.**

Note: The provision for updating case writeups does **not** permit substitution of Demonstrated Accomplishments or exhibits.

9. Supergrade Evaluation Panels

An ARS-wide Supergrade Panel will be scheduled at least annually to perform:

- Cyclic review of current ST positions;
- Cyclic review of GM/GS-15 positions scored at 54 points by a previous Supergrade Panel;
- Referral review of GM/GS-15 positions scored 54 points or higher by a regular panel (termed "panel referral"); and
- Referral review of GM/GS-15 positions scored at 52 points or higher by a regular or Supergrade Panel at any time during the GM/GS-15 scientist's 5-year mandatory review cycle at the AD's discretion (termed "management referral").

The Supergrade Panel will consist of seven members: a Chair (Associate Administrator for Research Operations and Management, or designee); Head, RPE Staff, or designee; and five current RPEC panel Chairs or Supergrade RPEC members.

With the exception of required completion and submission of ARS Form 229 (Special Form - RGEG Factor IV, In Excess of Degree E Criteria.), standard panel procedures will apply to Supergrade Panel operations. **See Manual 431.3-ARS.**

Note: GM/GS-15 positions kept in grade by the Supergrade Panel with a score of 52 or fewer points will be reviewed under the normal cyclic schedule by a regular panel. Those scored at 54 points will be reviewed under the normal cyclic schedule by a Supergrade Panel.

10. Panel Review Records

The RPE Staff will maintain a research file on each Category 1 scientist. This file will consist of a copy of the latest case writeup (less exhibits); a copy of the current official position description with a fully completed Form AD-332, Position Description Cover Sheet, attached; copies of pertinent correspondence; and panel reports.

Research files maintained by the RPE Staff are subject to the provisions of both the Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

Personal information required for classification of research scientist positions under the RGEG is solicited in accordance with the Privacy Act. Authority, principal purpose, routine uses, and effects on the individual of nondisclosure of personal information are explained in ARS Form 514, Research Position Evaluation Case Writeup (Cover Sheet).

The case writeup cannot be released without the written consent of the incumbent for any purpose other than position evaluation, decision on internal placement within ARS, or in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and conditions of disclosure stated in the Privacy Act.

Copies of a scientist's panel evaluation records maintained by ARS are available to the scientist upon written request.

11. Summary of Responsibilities

Research scientists

- Learn system requirements.
- Affiliate with one of the ten Peer Groups shown in Exhibit 1.
- Prepare case writeups in accordance with Manual 431.3-ARS.

Supervisors

- Assist scientists in preparing case writeups.
- Review and certify case writeup accuracy and completeness.
- Notify AD and RPE Staff of less than "Fully Successful" Critical Element performance ratings of research scientists scheduled for panel review.
- Serve as a mandatory IDR contact.

Area Directors

- Perform final review and certify case writeups for accuracy and completeness.
- Approve fiscal year panel review schedules in conjunction with other AD's.
- Consider and rule on early, delayed, and reevaluation requests.
- Determine whether to refer GM/GS-15 positions scored at 52 points or higher by a regular or Supergrade Panel for Supergrade Panel review.
- Forward RGEG score results to scientists' supervisors after panel meetings.
- Resolve Grade/Category Problem panel decision situations.
- Nominate Area representative to the RPES Advisory Committee.

Note: AD's may delegate the above authorities to their respective Associate or Assistant AD's. Hereafter, "AD" should be understood to include Associate or Assistant AD's where such delegation has occurred.

Associate Administrator for Research Operations and Management

- Designates peer groups, appoints peer scientists to the RPEC from each established peer group, and designates Chairs.
- Resolves Split Decisions.
- Approves Grade/Category Problem correction plans and subsequent position review.
- Appoints RPES Advisory Committee members and selects the Chair.

Administrator

- Delegates position classification authority to RPES panels to determine RGEG coverage and proper grade level of positions under review.

RPES Advisory Committee

- Advises the Administrator and Associate Administrator for Research Operations and Management (AA-ROM) on major policy and procedural aspects of RPES.

Head, RPE Staff

- Administers RPES on a national basis.
- Provides staff support to the Administrator and AA-ROM on RPES matters.
- Provides staff support to the RPES Advisory Committee.
- Advises scientists and supervisors on preparation of case writeups and related matters.

Panelists

- Serve when scheduled.
- Evaluate positions based on approved evaluation criteria.
- Conduct thorough and objective IDR factfinding.
- Maintain confidentiality of IDR contacts and panel deliberations.

12. Glossary

AA-ROM. Associate Administrator for Research Operations and Management.

AD. Area Director.

AD-332. (Available in InForms.) Position Description Cover Sheet.

ARS-229. (Available from the RPES Internet Home Page.) Special Form - RGEG Factor IV, In Excess of Degree E Criteria.

ARS-514. (Available from the RPES Internet Home Page.) Research Position Evaluation Case Writeup (Cover Sheet).

ARS-516. (Available from the RPES Internet Home Page.) Research Position Evaluation Worksheet.

ARS-517. Research Evaluation Score Sheet.

ARS-570. (Available from the RPES Internet Home Page.) Indepth Reviewer Contact Sheet.

Borderline Score. Occurs when the total number of points assigned by a panel when evaluating a position is at the top of a grade range and ends in a 4 (i.e., 24, 34, 44).

Case Writeup. The research position description (see definition below), Factor IV, exhibits, forms ARS-514, ARS-570, and (for Supergrade Panels) ARS-229, considered as a package.

Category. An ARS system of administrative designations for groups of positions having generally similar characteristics, primarily for personnel and budgetary tracking purposes. Category has no legal or administrative significance outside of ARS. Some positions may perform duties from more than one category. ARS categories established for professional scientific positions are as follows:

- **Category 1 (Research Scientist).** Permanent positions in which the highest level of work, for a major portion of time, involves personal conduct or conduct and leadership of theoretical and experimental investigations primarily of a basic or applied nature, such as: determining the nature, magnitude, and interrelationships of physical, biological, and psychological phenomena and processes; creating or developing principles, criteria, methods, and a body of knowledge generally applicable for use by others. Such positions meet all or most of the criteria enumerated in the RGEG. Category 1 positions are SY positions.
- **Category 2 (Nonpermanent Research/Service Scientist).** Professional scientific positions which are established on a nonpermanent basis, are filled through temporary or term appointments, and entail research and/or service science work. Examples are Research Associate, Research Affiliate, Visiting Scientist, and individuals reemployed in ARS after having retired from Category 1 or Category 4 positions.

- **Category 3 (Support Scientist).** Professional scientist positions which function to provide direct support or service to one or more Category 1 or 4 positions. The work of such positions is characterized by responsible involvement in one or more, but not all, phases of research (particularly not the problem selection and definition phases); responsible participation in analysis and preliminary interpretation of data (but not including responsibility for final interpretation and conclusion which relate the results to the field of research involved). Examples include but are not limited to conducting literature searches, selecting procedures and conducting experiments, collecting and analyzing data or specimens, or preparing technical reports.
- **Category 4 (Service Scientist).** Permanent positions whose incumbents either primarily or exclusively serve as project or program leaders over or personally perform, work assigned to ARS involving professional scientific services to the public or to other governmental agencies, such as: identification of animals, plants, or insects; diagnosis of diseases; mass production of plants, animals, or insects; collection, introduction, and maintenance of germplasm or specimens; vaccine production; education, extension, or technology transfer activities; or nutrient data and food intake surveys. Category 4 positions are SY positions.
- **Category 6 (Specialist).** "Specialist" positions which perform scientific program management, administration and/or analytical duties and therefore, require professional education and training. Examples are: Area Director, Center Director, Agricultural Administrator, and National Program Leader.

CD. Center Director.

Chair. An ARS official designated to lead (but not direct) panel deliberations. The Chair also acts as the management representative on the panel. Chairs are usually supervisory or managerial personnel, such as Research Leaders, Laboratory Directors, Center Directors, or Associate Area Directors.

GM. General Schedule employees in the former Performance Management and Recognition System.

GS. General Schedule.

GSSG. OPM General Schedule Supervisory Guide.

HRD. Human Resources Division, ARS.

IDR. Indepth Review or Reviewer.

Indepth Reviewer. A panelist designated to conduct the factfinding for one or more cases to be considered by a given panel.

LD. Laboratory Director.

Leadership. For RPES purposes, is either formally recognized leadership--Level I, II or III as defined in Manual 431.3-ARS--or scientific leadership (apart from any supervisory or managerial duties) which reflects a researcher's personal stature and promotes research activity on the part of other scientists.

Mixed Position. For RPES purposes, a position performing duties classifiable by two or more standards, e.g., the RGEG and GSSG.

New Hire. For RPES purposes, a selectee for Career or Career-Conditional appointment to a Category 1 position. Persons serving in an ARS position on other than Career or Career-Conditional appointment are therefore considered "New Hires," regardless of length of service under such other appointment.

OHRM. Office of Human Resources Management, USDA.

OPM. U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

Panel. A group of RPEC members chosen to review and determine the proper category and grade level of positions currently designated as Category 1, using criteria of the RGEG. Panels exercise delegated classification authority and render final (not advisory) grade level decisions.

Panelist. A member of the RPEC (Chair, Peer Scientist, or Personnel Representative) assigned to serve on a particular panel.

Peer Group. A group of research scientists in similar fields of research who can make valid judgments on research methodology, available literature, and the significance and impact of research findings in their respective fields. Research scientists self-affiliate with the peer group most appropriate for their research discipline and may change their affiliation at any time by notifying RPE Staff. **See Exhibit 1.**

Peer Scientist. A research scientist assigned to serve on a panel.

Personnel Representative. An ARS Human Resources Specialist assigned to serve on a panel.

Position Description. For RPES purposes, the position description consists of Factors I and II, and Factor III-A and III-B of the case writeup. Factor III-C and Factor IV are not part of the position description (see **Manual 431.3-ARS**).

Research Affiliate. See Category 2 above.

Research Associate (Post-Doctoral). A Category 2 position, funded by the Office of the Administrator or locally for up to 2 years, filled by a professional scientist who received a Ph.D. within 3 years of appointment. Incumbents of such positions serve on a nonpermanent appointment to perform projects of a limited nature which are segments of broader projects assigned to senior ARS research scientists.

Research Associate (Visiting Scientist). A Category 2 position normally filled by a senior scientist or technical expert who performs research in an ARS facility on a short-term basis. Such scientists may be on leave of absence (sabbatical) from their parent organization. The positions are locally funded and do not represent a plan or promise of continued employment.

Research Position Evaluation Committee. All persons trained and appointed to serve on ARS RPES panels (Chairs, Peer Scientists, and Personnel Representatives).

RGEG. OPM Research Grade-Evaluation Guide.

RL. Research Leader.

RPE. Research Position Evaluation.

RPEC. Research Position Evaluation Committee.

RPES. Research Position Evaluation System (or Staff).

RPES Advisory Committee. A committee which advises the Administrator and AA-ROM on major policy and procedural aspects of RPES. It consists of a Chair and seven members selected from among panel-experienced Research Leaders and research scientists. Head, RPE Staff (or designee) serves as an *ex officio* member of, and staff advisor to, the committee. Committee composition provides for a mix of ethnic, sex, discipline, and Area representation.

Scientist Year. An ARS administrative designation for Category 1 and 4 scientist positions. SY positions comprise the core mission workforce in ARS.

ST. Scientific and Professional Pay Plan.

SY. Scientist Year (Category 1 or 4 position).

EDWARD B. KNIPLING
Administrator
Agricultural Research Service

Exhibit 1 - Peer Groups

Peer Group and Code	Typical Areas of Research	Typical Disciplines
Animal Bioscience (ABS)	Animal bio science; animal biology, genetics, physiology, production, and related fields of animal science; and range and feed nutrition science	Animal physiologists, animal scientists and animal geneticists
Animal Health (AHL)	Animal pathology, toxicology, microbiology, virology, pharmacology, zoology, parasitology, nematology and veterinary sciences	Veterinarians, animal pathologists, microbiologists, pharmacologists and toxicologists
Chemistry and Chemical Engineering (CCE)	Biochemistry; analytical, physical, organic, and inorganic chemistry; chemical engineering; pharmacology; and toxicology	Chemists and chemical engineers
Entomology (ENT)	Entomology as related to plants, animals, humans, or agricultural products; insecticide analysis and chemistry; insect genetics; invertebrate pathology; and microbiology	Entomologists, chemists and microbiologists
Food Science and Human Nutrition (FHN)	Food and nutritional science and technology; food processing, engineering, fortification, composition analysis; food safety, toxicants; nutritional requirements; nutrient bioavailability to humans; and medical aspects of nutrition	Nutritionists, food technologists, physiologists, biochemists, microbiologists and chemists
Plant Bioscience (PBS)	Genetics, weed science, horticulture, plant physiology, microbiology, biochemistry and biophysics; agronomy; environmental, systematic and applied crop production biology; nutrition and plant metabolism; feed science; range science, range production, conservation and management; and arid pasture management	Plant physiologists, agronomists, geneticists, horticulturists, botanists, plant biochemists, range scientists and animal scientists <i>Continued on next page</i>

Peer Group and Code	Typical Areas of Research	Typical Disciplines
Plant Health (PHL)	All aspects of plant health; immunology; entomology (arthropod as vectors); nematology; zoology; parasitology; pathology; virology; pest resistance; and breeding	Plant pathologists, zoologists, nematologists, agronomists and horticulturists
Pre/Post-Harvest Science, Engineering (PHS)	Sciences and technology related to facilities, structures, containers, modes of transportation; harvesting, storage, marketing, conditioning, treatment, transportation and preservation; processing and use of commodities and agricultural byproducts	Agricultural, chemical, mechanical, industrial engineers, physiologists, entomologists, pathologists, biochemists and chemists
Soil and Water Science (SWS)	Soil management and fertility and plant nutrition chemistry; soil physics and microbiology; waste management; environmental quality aspects of soil, water and air resources; environmental, civil and agricultural engineering; hydrology; geology and geography as they relate to soil and water management; and environmental quality	Soil scientists, physicists, microbiologists, chemists, hydrologists, civil and agricultural engineers and geologists
Systematics/Taxonomy (STX)	Arthropod, plant, microbial, and plant and animal parasite systematics and taxonomy	Systematists and taxonomists

Exhibit 2 - Filling Vacant Research Positions

Method of Filling	First Consideration	Second Consideration
<p>New Hire</p>	<p>Servicing Human Resources Specialist exercises delegated classification authority without panel review for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Initial appointment of non-Ph.D. at GS-9 either by reassignment of current ARS employee or selection from a certificate of eligibles ■ Initial appointment of Ph.D. at GS-11 or -12 from a certificate of eligibles when the Specialist judges selectee's qualifications meet RGEG criteria for the desired grade (when this condition is not met, Specialist may require the case be paneled) ■ Selection at GS-11 or -12 of an ARS employee who has not previously occupied a Category 1 position (Agency Merit Promotion Plan requires that such employees compete for movement to a Category 1 position; noncompetitive "conversion" is not authorized) 	<p>Panel review (usually ad hoc) is required for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Selection at GS-11 or above of non-Ph.D. (including DVM) ■ Selection for positions at GS-13/15 from a certificate of eligibles of an individual who does not currently occupy a Category 1 position (regardless of source) ■ Selection for positions at GS-13/15 of an on-board Category 1 scientist who has never previously held that grade
<p>Reassignment</p> <p>Definition (for RPES purposes)-- any significant change in duties and responsibilities without grade impact, such as change in organization, location, or type of research; addition or deletion of supervisory duties; or changes made to existing position description</p>	<p>Servicing Human Resources Specialist will review and approve actions which will not result in grade changes</p> <p>Apparent grade change situations must be referred to RPE Staff for panel review</p>	<p>When researcher is selected for a Research Leader position and upgrade appears likely under RGEG criteria, panel must determine grade level before appointment</p> <p>See page 6 of this P&P for procedure when a Research Leader voluntarily accepts a nonsupervisory Category 1 assignment</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Continued on next page</i></p>

Method of Filling	First Consideration	Second Consideration
<p>Transfer</p> <p>Definition (for RPES purposes)--a change of an employee, without a break in service, to a research position in ARS from a research position in another Federal agency</p>	<p>When no grade change is involved, servicing Human Resources Specialist assigns grade</p>	<p>When a higher grade is requested, must be paneled</p>
<p>Reinstatement</p>	<p>To reinstate at GS-12 and below, servicing Human Resources Specialist assigns grade</p>	<p>To reinstate at GS-13 and above, panel review is required</p>
<p>Return from Overseas Assignment</p>	<p>Scientists returning from an ARS overseas research assignment will be treated as a Reassignment</p>	<p>Scientists returning from an ARS overseas nonresearch assignment will be returned to a Category 1 position at the overseas grade if supportable (Reassignment), or paneled as a New Hire</p>

Exhibit 3 - Panel Decision Options

Decision Option/Code	Meaning
Upgrade (UPG)	<p>Scientist is performing sufficient high-quality research to positively impact the position grade level, or the research and research leadership component of a mixed position. If the position is mixed, it is classified to the highest grade level consistent with mixed position classification principles.</p> <p>If promotion results from the Upgrade, the promotion action is effected ASAP but within 2 pay periods.</p> <p>Except in those rare instances when an incumbent has previously held an RGEG-based grade two or more levels higher than the current grade, position may be upgraded no more than one grade level.</p> <p>Note: Grades of mixed position components derived from any standard other than the RGEG (such as the GSSG) are irrelevant for panel purposes, and are not considered in applying the RGEG.</p>
Remain in Grade (RIG)	<p>Scientist is performing at a level of quality/quantity sufficient to maintain current position grade level.</p> <p>Panel may find evidence of emerging productivity problems which could adversely affect scientist's impact, stature and recognition--perhaps resulting in a Grade/Category Problem decision on a future panel review if not addressed. A "bottom of grade" point score may indicate that the panel has identified emerging productivity problems. Panel report will specify such problems when encountered.</p>
Grade/Category Problem (GCP)	<p>The panel is unable to evaluate the position at or above its current grade level, and concludes that a significant position management or performance problem may exist. Within 30 calendar days of issuance of the panel report, management will: (1) determine the nature and cause of the problem (with input from the servicing Human Resources Management and Employee Relations Specialists, and/or National Program Leader); (2) determine corrective action needed; (3) prepare a correction plan, to be satisfied no later than 1 year from the date of the GCP decision; and (4) submit the plan to the AA-ROM. If the position remains in Category 1, it will not be paneled again until the Area Director certifies to the AA-ROM that corrective action has been successful.</p>
Insufficient Factual Basis (IFB)	<p>Panel does not have sufficient factual information to render a fair evaluation applying RGEG criteria. Case may be overwritten ("science fiction") or underwritten (inadequate clarity), or there may be major unresolved discrepancies between case writeup content and IDR factfinding report. In a few rare instances, facts may be so unclear that the panel cannot determine whether position <i>is</i> covered by the RGEG. Panel report must identify unresolved discrepancies and direct that case be rewritten and submitted for evaluation to next available panel for the scientist's peer group. RPE Staff will issue a formal resubmission notice.</p>
Refer to Supergrade (REF)	<p>When a "regular" panel assigns total of 54 or more points to GM/GS-15 position, position is automatically subject to review by next Supergrade Panel. Only the REF decision itself is recorded, not the points assigned by the referring panel. RPE Staff will issue a formal submission notice.</p>

Decision Option/Code	Meaning
Split Decision (SPL)	This is the only non-consensus decision option. Panel cannot unanimously agree on proper evaluation of all four factors, or whether RGEG is applicable, and/or contents of final panel report. Majority/minority reports are filed with RPE Staff for resolution by AA-ROM.