

ARS □ CSREES □ ERS □ NASS

Policies and Procedures

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This P&P describes a Federal program designed to assist employees who have been affected by downsizing, reorganization, streamlining, or budget constraints. It also describes the transition services to be provided to eligible employees.

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1. Introduction

In September of 1995, the President instructed the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to develop new regulations governing the placement of surplus and displaced employees. Under these regulations, Federal organizations were required to develop and implement Career Transition Assistance Plans (CTAPs) to provide career transition services for their surplus and displaced employees and offer them special selection priority for vacancies. Due to the success of these programs, these regulations were made permanent on June 4, 2001.

This P&P supplements the Departmental plan and discusses major CTAP issues.

Authority

This plan complies with and supplements the USDA CTAP issued by the Office of Human Resources Management and Part 330 of Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

2. Anticipating a Smaller Work Force

To the maximum extent possible, managers should anticipate changing or declining human resource needs and take action to minimize the disruption, cost, and human suffering. Before declaring an employee surplus, management should explore the following options:

- Training employees for different positions in the same organization or elsewhere in the Federal Government, thus facilitating the continued employment of individuals who might otherwise be separated.
- Offering noncompetitive reassignments or relocations within the organization or elsewhere (qualification requirements may be waived to facilitate placement).
- Offering early retirement, subject to OPM and Departmental approval.
- Arranging developmental details to other positions to enable employees to acquire new skills or allow management to assess potential for permanent assignment to other occupations.

Should these options prove insufficient, management may consider declaring an employee surplus. Requests to effect such actions must be in writing and must outline the rationale, ensuring that the surplus designation is not based on performance or on any other inappropriate reasoning. Such requests must be submitted through the supervisory chain for approval by the following officials: Agency Administrators (CSREES, ERS, NASS), Area Directors (ARS), and the Deputy

Administrator (AFM). Surplus letters will be issued by the respective servicing branch in the Human Resources Division (HRD).

3. Employees Eligible for CTAP Services

CTAP is a two-part program, consisting of **career transition services** and **priority placement**. Not all affected employees are eligible for both parts of the program.

To be eligible for **career transition services**, an employee must meet the following criteria:

- holds or held a position in the competitive or excepted service in tenure group I or tenure group II, **or** a position in the Senior Executive Service, **and**
- has been identified as surplus, has received a notice of separation, or has been separated through downsizing, reorganization, or as a result of a disability or compensable injury.

REE agencies may extend transition services to other employees (e.g., employees with time-limited appointments).

To be eligible for **priority placement**, an employee must meet the following criteria:

- holds or last held a position in the competitive service in tenure group I (career) or tenure group II (career conditional), **and**
- was rated at least fully successful on their most recent performance rating, **and**
- has been identified as surplus in one of the REE agencies and has applied for a vacant position within USDA in the local commuting area, **or**
- has been displaced within the past year and has applied for a vacant position in either USDA or another Federal organization in the local commuting area, **and**
- has applied for a position whose grade and promotion potential are no higher than the position from which the employee is being (or may be) separated.

Eligibility for career transition services and placement priority will begin on the date the agency issues a Reduction in Force (RIF) separation notice, certificate of expected separation, notice of proposed separation for declining a transfer of function or a directed reassignment outside the local commuting area, or other official agency certification identifying the employee as being in a surplus organization or occupation, whichever comes first. For a former employee returned to duty from compensable injury or illness and whose former agency is unable to place them,

eligibility will begin on the date the employee is notified that the disability annuity has been or is being terminated.

Eligibility for priority placement ends (the earliest date applies):

- 1 year after separation, or 1 year after an individual is notified that the disability annuity has been or will be terminated.
- Upon cancellation of the RIF separation notice, certificate of expected separation, notice of proposed removal for declining a transfer of function or directed reassignment outside the local commuting area, or other official certification identifying the employee as surplus.
- When the employee receives a career, career-conditional, or excepted Federal appointment without time limit at any grade level.

Issuing Surplus Certifications and Separation Notices

Surplus certifications and separation notices must be in writing and will include the following information:

- employee's name;
- title, series, grade, location, and full performance level of current position;
- reason for the notice (i.e., why the employee is being separated [e.g., RIF, failure to accept relocation to a different commuting area] or the position has been declared surplus);
- name and telephone number of a human resources contact point to verify current eligibility and to notify in the event of selection for another position; and
- information regarding CTAP entitlement, including information on placement priority, guidance on how to apply for vacancies under CTAP, and what documentation will be needed as proof of eligibility.

HRD branch chiefs exercise delegated authority to issue surplus/separation notices.

Briefing on CTAP Entitlement

In addition to receiving information in writing, surplus or displaced employees must also attend a briefing session on the provisions of CTAP. These sessions will outline eligibility requirements for placement priority and provide information on how to apply for vacancies under CTAP. In the REE agencies, this CTAP briefing/orientation requirement may be fulfilled through site visits to offices slated for closure or downsizing. For locations that are not visited, live satellite

broadcasts or telephone communication will be used to share the necessary information and answer employee questions. Informational packages will be provided to all affected personnel.

Tracking Affected Employees

The HRD servicing branches must monitor the status of REE agency employees who have been issued surplus certifications or separation notices and take action whenever a change in status occurs. The CTAP Program Coordinator must be advised when surplus letters are issued or rescinded.

4. Career Transition Services

Types of Services

Eligible employees will be offered the following:

- Information on employment opportunities, including position vacancies in both the Federal Government and the private sector.
- Assistance in preparing resumes and other application materials.
- Skills inventory and assessment.
- Use of equipment such as computers, printers, copying and fax machines.
- Counseling available through the agency's Employee Assistance Program.

Employees with disabilities who are entitled to career transition services will be given reasonable accommodations to meet their needs.

HRD's Self-Motivated and Administered Reading and Training (SMART) Center has a wide range of instructional materials, including videotapes and computer software, designed to improve job-hunting skills such as resume writing and interviewing techniques.

Use of Excused Absence

Eligible employees must be afforded a **minimum of 40 hours** of administrative leave (excused absence) to use for career transition services. These hours are recorded as transaction code 66 on the Time and Attendance (T&A) report and are to be identified in the Remarks Section as "CTAP Services." Employees may be granted more than 40 hours if their situation so merits.

Supervisors are encouraged to grant administrative leave (excused absence) to surplus employees for job interviews in the local commuting area. These hours are recorded as transaction code 66 on the Time and Attendance (T&A) report and are to be identified in the Remarks Section as “CTAP Interview.”

Supervisors must ensure that the time granted for transition services and for interviews is recorded on the employee’s T&A and is used appropriately.

Use of Facilities After Separation

Displaced employees will have access to career transition services and facilities for a **minimum of 90 days** following separation.

Training

HRD’s Employee Development Staff is available to assist employees and managers who have general questions about training opportunities or wish to develop a training program to help surplus or displaced employees qualify for new positions.

5. Priority Placement Services

Identifying Well-Qualified Candidates

Priority placement consideration under CTAP regulations is available only to those displaced or surplus employees who are determined to be well-qualified for the position in question. The following definition applies:

“**Well-qualified** means the applicant meets the basic qualification and eligibility requirements and all selective placement factors; is rated above minimally qualified against the knowledge, skills, and abilities or quality criteria; and is able to satisfactorily perform the duties of the position upon entry.”

This definition will be included in all vacancy announcements for competitive service positions. All vacancies will either be posted electronically in accordance with Departmental instructions or the Departmental CTAP website will be utilized to determine if there are surplus employees in a commuting area.

Actions Covered by CTAP and Actions Excluded from Coverage

In most cases, whenever a position is being filled in the competitive service, CTAP provisions will apply. Some employment actions are, however, excluded from CTAP. Among the exceptions are:

- Details.
- Temporary appointments of fewer than 121 days in total duration.
- Exchange of positions between or among USDA employees when no increase in grade or promotion potential is involved.
- Excepted appointments, conversion of excepted employees into the competitive service (when the appointment provides for noncompetitive conversion), and the movement of excepted employees within USDA.
- Career ladder promotions, accretion of duties promotions, or actions resulting from the application of a new position classification standard.
- Recall of seasonal or intermittent employees from nonpay status.
- Extensions of temporary or term actions up to the full period allowed if the original vacancy announcement specified that the position was open to CTAP candidates and that the appointment may be extended without further competition.
- Actions pursuant to the settlement of a formal complaint, grievance, appeal, or other litigation, or position changes resulting from disciplinary action.
- Action taken to return an employee to the original (or similar) position following a supervisory probationary period.
- Internal placement of an injured or disabled worker as an accommodation, or reemployment of a former employee returning from illness or injury.
- Selection (including reassignment) of an employee from within the agency and within the local commuting area after all eligible surplus and displaced applicants of the agency have been accorded priority.
- Noncompetitive movement of surplus or displaced employees within USDA and within the same local commuting area.

- Noncompetitive movement of displaced employees between Executive Departments as a result of reorganization, transfer of function, or mass transfer.
- Actions taken pursuant to a RIF.
- Noncompetitive placement of an employee into a different position as a result of a formal reorganization when the former position ceases to exist and no actual vacancy results.
- Assignments made under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA).
- Placement of members of the Senior Executive Service.

Internal Placement Actions

If management decides to fill a position from **within an agency component** (i.e., NASS), priority consideration must first be given to well-qualified surplus or displaced employees within that agency component in the same commuting area. After this CTAP obligation has been met (and no well-qualified priority candidates have been identified), management is free to select from among the remainder of the component's work force within the commuting area without being obligated to give selection priority to USDA CTAP candidates.

If management decides to fill a position from **within USDA but outside the agency component**, priority consideration must first be given to well-qualified surplus or displaced employees within the Department in the same commuting area. If no priority candidates apply, management is free to select any other USDA competitive service tenure group I or II candidate within the work force.

Candidates for internal placement actions will be considered in the following order:

- (1) Well-qualified surplus/displaced agency component employees (still on the rolls) in the local commuting area.
- (2) Other candidates from within the agency component within the commuting area.
- (3) Well-qualified surplus/displaced USDA employees (still on the Department's rolls) in the local commuting area.
- (4) Other candidates from within USDA.

External Placement Actions

The Reemployment Priority List (RPL) is another mechanism that agencies must use to give reemployment consideration to their former competitive service employees separated by reduction

in force (RIF) or fully recovered from a compensable injury after more than one year. The RPL is a required component of agency placement programs and is maintained at the Departmental level. The RPL must be cleared by the servicing human resources specialist before any **external** recruitment can take place. If any **basically-qualified** RPL candidates are available, they must receive selection priority before anyone from outside USDA may be hired. External selections must be made in the following order:

- (1) Well-qualified USDA surplus and displaced employees within the commuting area (who are still on the Department's rolls).
- (2) Reemployment priority list eligibles.
- (3) Other well-qualified former employees displaced from USDA.
- (4) Well-qualified displaced employees (whether currently on the rolls or separated) from other Federal agencies in the local commuting area.
- (5) All other candidates.

Qualification Reviews

Whenever a determination is made that an otherwise eligible CTAP candidate is not well-qualified for a particular position, the candidate's application and overall qualifications will be reviewed again. This second review will normally be conducted by a senior human resources specialist within HRD, although other agency personnel may become involved (e.g., subject matter experts may be needed to review professional scientific positions). Most frequently, this review will be performed by the Team Leader of the servicing branch or unit that announced the vacancy and is processing the action.

Notifying Candidates of Application Results

Candidates applying under CTAP/ICTAP **must** be notified in writing of the results of their application and whether or not they were found to be well-qualified. If they were not found to be well-qualified, this written notice must explain the reason(s) why and describe the findings of the independent second review. If a well-qualified CTAP/ICTAP eligible was not selected for a position because another CTAP eligible was selected instead, the non-selectee must be informed of this fact.

6. Summary of Responsibilities

Agency Heads (CSREES, ERS, NASS)

Area Directors (ARS)

Deputy Administrator (AFM)

- Review and approve or deny management requests to make surplus declarations.

All REE Managers and Supervisors

- Ensure that all surplus declarations are based on mission-related reasoning; forward all such declarations in writing to the appropriate senior official for approval.
- Give full and fair consideration to all candidates referred for possible selection and be receptive to the hiring of CTAP/ICTAP eligibles.
- Ensure that vacancy information is made available to surplus or displaced employees.
- Support training programs designed to assist employees affected by downsizing.
- Authorize administrative leave (excused absence) for affected employees to utilize career transition services and allow time off for job interviews, as appropriate.

Branch Chiefs, HRD Servicing Branches, AFM

- Exercise delegated authority to issue surplus letters.

Head, Employee Development Staff, HRD, AFM

- Provide information on training opportunities and develop training programs as needed to assist surplus/displaced employees.

Senior Human Resources Specialists, HRD Servicing Branches, AFM

- Review the qualifications of any CTAP applicant who was found to be not well-qualified for a particular position and prepare a written explanation of findings.

Servicing Human Resources Specialists, HRD Servicing Branches, AFM

- Ensure that all placement actions subject to CTAP are advertised, if required, and that CTAP/ICTAP candidates are afforded placement priority in accordance with their entitlement.

- Monitor the status of REE agency personnel to whom they have issued surplus/separation notices.
- Inform all CTAP/ICTAP applicants of the results of their applications, including whether or not they were found to be well-qualified; when not found well-qualified, make sure the applicants are advised in writing of the results of the second qualifications review.
- Clear the RPL before recruiting outside USDA.

CTAP Program Coordinator, REE Policy Branch, HRD, AFM

- Provide information and assistance to managers, employees, and human resources specialists on CTAP issues.
- Maintain information on individual surplus letters that have been issued or rescinded.

Surplus or Displaced REE Agency Employees

- Take full advantage of career transition services.
- Keep abreast of vacancies within USDA and elsewhere.
- Conform with the instructions and special criteria outlined in vacancy announcements and provide proof of CTAP eligibility when applying for vacancies.

7. Glossary

Agency. For purposes of these CTAP regulations, Agency is defined as USDA.

Agency Component. One of the major components of USDA which is assigned a separate agency code. ARS, CSREES, ERS, and NASS are agency components of USDA.

Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP). A program established to comply with a Presidential memorandum dated September 12, 1995, entitled, “Career Transition Assistance for Federal Employees,” Part 330 of Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, and the Office of Personnel Management’s Federal Register issuance at 66 FR 29895, dated June 4, 2001. Career transition services and priority placement consideration are to be provided to employees affected by downsizing, reorganization, or budget constraints. CTAP applicants must be **well-qualified** to be eligible for selection priority.

Displaced Employee. A current career or career-conditional competitive service employee in tenure group I or II at grade GS-15 or below, who has received a specific RIF separation notice

or notice of proposed removal for declining a transfer of function or a directed reassignment outside the local commuting area. Also included under this definition are individuals who have been separated due to compensable injury or illness.

Interagency CTAP (ICTAP). ICTAP is that portion of the CTAP program which extends beyond USDA. When displaced USDA employees receive priority consideration for jobs in other Federal organizations and, in turn, their counterparts in other organizations receive priority within USDA, ICTAP provisions apply. Apart from reporting requirements, ICTAP is a term not frequently used, “CTAP” being the common reference for the entire program.

Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA). Authority used to temporarily assign a Federal employee to a position in State, local, or Native American government; a college or university within the United States; or an organization or association related to local or State government. IPA is also used to temporarily assign employees from these organizations into Federal positions.

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 back and forth daily to work.

Reemployment Priority List (RPL). A placement assistance program contained in the Veterans’ Preference Act of 1944, presently codified in Sections 3501-3503 of Title 5, United States Code. This program is in addition to CTAP. Registrants on the RPL must be given automatic consideration over hires outside USDA for temporary, term, or permanent positions. RPL registrants must be basically qualified to be eligible for selection priority.

Reorganization. Planned elimination or redistribution of work functions within an Executive Department; reorganizations are normally announced in writing.

Surplus Employee. A current permanent employee in the competitive service who has received a notice of expected separation or other certification which identifies the employee as being in a surplus organization or occupation.

Vacancy. A competitive service position filled for a total of 121 days or more.

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