

# ARS ' CSREES ' ERS ' NASS

## *Policies and Procedures*

**Title:** Alternative Merit Promotion System (AMPS)

**Number:** 420.2

**Date:** April 27, 2004

**Originating Office:** Human Resources Division, REE Policy Branch, AFM/ARS

**This Replaces:** New

**Distribution:** REE Headquarters, Areas, and Locations

This Policy & Procedure (P&P) describes the procedures/requirements and identifies responsibilities when using the Alternative Merit Promotion System (AMPS) in REE.

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## **1. Introduction**

Mission areas in the Department of Agriculture are authorized to use Alternative Merit Promotion System (AMPS) as an alternative method to rate and rank status applicants (current career/career-conditional employees and former employees who are reinstatement eligible) for agency positions. This P&P supplements REE P&P 420.1, here after referred to as Merit Promotion Plan (MPP), to describe the requirements/procedures and responsibilities when using this alternative method in REE. Therefore, this document must be used in conjunction with the MPP, and requirements and procedures in that plan are applicable unless a specific exception is listed herein.

## **2. Purpose**

AMPS is a streamlined, customer-oriented, flexible system to be used for filling positions with internal candidates. With this system, merit promotion principles remain intact; there are more flexibilities; and it is designed to be more responsive to employees and managers/supervisors.

## **3. Policy**

It is REE's policy to utilize every possible tool available in order to hire and promote a highly qualified, diverse workforce. Therefore, selecting officials may choose to have internal applicants ranked by their servicing specialist using AMPS in lieu of the traditional rating and ranking procedures outlined in the MPP. This program supports diversity by broadening the pool of candidates eligible for selection. All selections will be made on the basis of merit promotion principles; with no regard to political, religious, or labor organization affiliation, marital or family status, race, color, gender, age, national origin, sexual orientation, or non disqualifying disability.

Selecting officials, human resources specialists, employees and applicants are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this system. Any questions should be referred to the appropriate Human Resources Division (HRD) servicing human resources specialist, hereafter referred to as servicing specialist.

## **4. Authorities**

- Memorandum dated November 29, 1993, from the Director Personnel, United States Department of Agriculture to Agency Personnel Officers and Attachments
- Memorandum dated January 4, 1994, from Assistant Secretary for Administration, Department of Agriculture to Under and Assistant Secretaries

## **5. Covered Positions**

Except for those positions covered by a negotiated agreement and mutually agreeable terms have not been reached, AMPS may be used to fill all wage grade positions and positions covered by the general schedule at grades 1 through 15 in the competitive service.

## **6. Differences**

AMPS was designed to be quicker, more flexible, and less procedural than traditional merit promotion. It replaces the laborious job analysis/crediting plan and rating/ranking processes with the knowledge, skills, and abilities already listed in the position description and candidate groupings. See Exhibit 1 for a quick reference guide of similarities and differences between the MPP and AMPS.

## **7. Evaluation Criteria**

The knowledge, skills, and abilities described in the official position description will provide the basis for candidate evaluation. However, since no additional job analysis is necessary, it is very important to have accurate, well-written position descriptions.

The servicing specialist in consultation with the selecting official will develop the Recruitment and Justification Form prior to announcing the vacant position. This form identifies:

- S** minimum qualification requirements to include specialized experience in terms of knowledge, skills, and/or abilities that are directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the position to be filled;

- S any selective placement factors;
- S specific examples of acceptable experience and/or education that evidences the possession of each knowledge, skill, ability, and/or selective placement factor identified; and
- S a quality experience definition that describes specific job related experience that is considered above minimum qualifications requirements and has equipped the candidate with superior ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position.

## 8. Vacancy Announcements

### Area of Consideration

The area of consideration will be determined by the selecting official in consultation with the servicing specialist. Minimum area of consideration restrictions listed in the MPP should be used as a guide. Consideration must be given to ensure announcements are opened to an adequate number of qualified, diverse candidates and that they adhere to all negotiated agreements. Accordingly, circumstances in which the area of consideration is restricted further than that listed in the MPP (i.e., local commuting area) should be rare.

### AMPS Statement

In addition to the requirements listed in the MPP, vacancy announcements will contain a statement to indicate the position is being filled using AMPS.

## 9. Evaluating Candidates

Using the Recruitment and Justification Form described in section 7, the servicing specialist will evaluate all competitive eligibles and assign them to the appropriate group: Eligible or Quality as defined below. Servicing specialists may obtain assistance from a subject matter expert (other than the selecting official) to determine candidates' appropriate group.

**Eligible Group:** candidates who meet minimum qualification requirements and any selective placement factors established for the position.

**Quality Group:** All eligible group candidates who also possess additional education or experience as follows:

- S** specific, job-related work experience that is clearly above minimum qualification requirements and any selective placement factor(s) that has equipped the candidate with superior ability to perform the duties of the position;
- S** superior or higher performance rating that is directly related to the position being filled;  
or
- S** specific, job-related education (i.e., BA, MS, Ph.D.) that is clearly above minimum qualification requirements and any selective placement factors that has equipped the candidate with superior ability to perform the duties of the position;
- S** successful completion of a trade or vocational school program typically related to the position.

## **10. Referral and Selection**

All competitive candidates who meet the quality group criteria requirements will be referred to the selecting official on the certificate of eligibles (Exhibit 2) in alphabetical order. If there are not enough (less than three) candidates for a quality grouping, all candidates in both the eligible and quality groupings will be referred. Noncompetitive candidates will be referred separately.

Upon receipt of the certificate of eligibles, selecting officials in consultation with their servicing specialist, will determine the best method to evaluate the candidates' possession of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the duties of the position, including, but not limited to any combination of the following:

- S** reviewing the written materials submitted by each candidate and making a selection on that basis. References should be contacted and that information taken into consideration;
- S** obtaining evaluations from peer panels or subject matter experts who may review the materials submitted by the candidates and recommend a selection or identify the most qualified; or
- S** interviewing all, some, or none of the candidates using a panel, behavioral event, or other method or combination of methods.

## **11. Case File Documentation**

Selecting officials are required to document the reason(s) for selection of the candidate in the space provided on the certificate of eligibles. This documentation must be kept in the case file.

## **12. Candidate Inquiries**

In addition to what is listed in Section 12. of the MPP, the Human Resources Division servicing operations branch will provide the following information if requested by a candidate:

- S** an explanation of AMPS and how it works; and
- S** if the applicant was determined to be minimally qualified, the grouping in which the applicant was placed (i.e., eligible or quality).

## **13. Summary of Responsibilities**

### **All Selecting Officials, REE Mission Area**

- In consultation with the servicing specialist, decide whether to use merit promotion or alternative merit promotion procedures to fill vacant positions (see Exhibit 1).
- Work with the servicing specialist to review position description for accuracy and complete the Recruitment and Justification Form..
- After receiving certificate of eligibles, determine the need for and method of evaluating candidates; interview all, some, or none of the candidates; and make selection(s).
- Document job-related reason(s) for selections in the space provided on the certificate of eligibles (see Exhibit 2).

### **Applicants and Employees, REE Mission Area**

- Familiarize themselves with AMPS.

### **Servicing Specialists, HRD, AFM**

- Advise selecting officials on the use of AMPS.
- Classify positions and work with the selecting official to complete the Recruitment and Justification Form.
- Prepare vacancy announcements in accordance with established procedures.
- Make eligible and quality group determinations.
- Forward appropriate candidates to the selecting officials.
- Advise selecting officials on the options available to identify distinctions among candidates referred, i.e., interviews, review of application packages, use of peer panels/subject matter experts.

### **Employment Officer, Policy Branch, HRD, AFM**

- Develop policy guidance on the use of AMPS.
- Review the use of AMPS in REE to determine its effectiveness and recommend changes needed to resolve problem areas and/or to ensure compliance with requirements.

James H. Bradley  
Deputy Administrator  
Administrative and Financial Management

**QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE**

**Overview**

<b>Merit Promotion Plan</b>	<b>AMPS</b>
process and regulation oriented	streamlined, customer-oriented
servicing specialist has increased procedural responsibilities	servicing specialist has increased advisory responsibilities
selecting official follows established processes	selecting official chooses from among a variety of options
processes and regulations build in a safety net for selecting official	selecting official is accountable for exercising discretionary responsibilities

**Selecting Official's Role**

<b>Merit Promotion Plan</b>	<b>AMPS</b>
writes or assists in writing the position description	same
assists with job analysis and crediting plan development	assists with completing the Recruitment and Justification Form
determines how long the vacancy should be advertised	same
receives applications of the best qualified candidates or all well qualified candidates if there are ten or fewer qualified candidates	receives applications of all quality candidates or all eligible and quality candidates if there are three or fewer quality candidates
determines the need for and method of evaluating candidates	same
makes selection	same
N/A	Documents job-related reason(s) for selection

### Servicing Specialist's Role

Merit Promotion Plan	AMPS
writes or assists in writing the position description	same
classifies position	same
works with selecting official to complete job analysis and develop crediting plan	works with selecting official to complete Recruitment and Justification Form
prepares vacancy announcement	same
reviews applications for minimum qualification and eligibility requirements	same
evaluates candidates against crediting plan to assign numerical scores	evaluates candidates using the Recruitment and Justification Form to make categorical grouping determinations
forwards to the selecting official three to ten best qualified candidates or all well qualified candidates if there are ten or fewer qualified candidates	forwards to the selecting official all quality candidates or all eligible and quality candidates if there are three or fewer quality candidates
completes personnel action and documentation for case file	same

### Evaluation Criteria

Merit Promotion Plan	AMPS
position description is developed and classified	same
a separate job analysis is required to identify knowledge, skills, and abilities required	knowledge, skills, and abilities in the position description form the basis for candidate evaluation
a crediting plan is developed	a Recruitment and Justification Form is completed
qualified candidates are rated and ranked against crediting plan for each knowledge, skill, and/or ability identified	qualified candidates are placed in either the eligible or quality group based on above the minimum experience or education criteria
time-in-grade and qualification requirements must be met within 30 days of the closing date of the vacancy announcement	same

*Certificate of Eligibles*

	<b>DATE ISSUED:</b> [Date Issued] <b>EXPIRATION DATE:</b> [Expiration Date] <b>An extension may be granted, if necessary.</b>
<b>TO:</b> [To]	<b>ANNOUNCEMENT #:</b> [Announcement #]
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b> [Organization]	<b>POSITION TITLE, SERIES, AND GRADE:</b> [Title, Series&Grade]

INTERVIEWING POLICY:

We encourage you to contact and interview candidates as soon as possible. Often times a delay may result in a candidate no longer being available. You are not required to interview all candidates. However, an interview can be useful to evaluate attributes that are not effectively assessed by other selection devices. The following suggestions are provided:

- Ⓒ Interviews should be structured, standardized, and based on job requirements.
- Ⓒ Interview questions should be determined ahead of time.
- Ⓒ Interviewers should take notes on applicants' responses.
- Ⓒ Do not ask questions based on non-merit factors (e.g., race, sex, marital status, age, disabling condition).

**MERIT PROMOTION/ALTERNATIVE MERIT PROMOTION (AMP):**

NAME OF CANDIDATE	TITLE	CURRENT GRADE	AGENCY AND DUTY STATION

Reasons(s) for selection (AMP only): (To be completed by the selecting Official)

**ISSUED BY:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**NAME:** [Name]  
**TITLE:** [Title]  
**ADDRESS:** [Address]  
**PHONE:** [Phone]  
**FAX#:** [Fax #]  
**Email:** [Email Address]

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SELECTING OFFICIAL:**

It is strongly recommended that you contact the current and past supervisors of any tentative selectee(s). Responses from supervisors and other references to your questions regarding the applicant's work performance and conduct are a critical part of the selection process. Contact your servicing Personnel Management Specialist if derogatory information is obtained through these reference checks.

You must also request that any tentative selectee complete Optional Form (OF) 306, Declaration for Federal Employment, and return it with the certificate. This document can be obtained from your Location Administrative Officer or the Servicing Personnel Management Specialist and will be used to make a decision regarding the applicant's suitability for Federal employment.

You must sign and date the certificate, indicating below the selectee's name and desired entry on duty date or that no selection was made. You may contact the candidate(s) to notify them of their tentative selection and verify acceptance of the position. However, the official offer will be made by the Human Resources Division after all necessary clearances/approvals are received.

Should you determine a conflict of interest may exist between the applicant's financial interests or outside activities and the official duties of this position, please contact your Ethics Advisor for an official determination prior to the selection of this applicant.

NOTE: For SY Positions in ARS, the Research Grade Evaluation Guide must be applied prior to offering the position. Contact your servicing Personnel Management Specialist to discuss.

<b>NAME OF SELECTEE(S)</b>	<b>DESIRED ENTRY ON DUTY DATE</b>
<b>SIGNATURE OF SELECTING OFFICIAL</b>	<b>DATE</b>

<b>CONCURRENCE OF AREA DIRECTOR (Required for SY vacancies in ARS only)</b>	<b>DATE</b>
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**KEY FOR VETERAN PREFERENCE AND DECLINATION CODES**

***VETERAN PREFERENCE CODE DEFINITIONS:***

CPS	Compensable disability preference of 30% or more
CP	Compensable disability preference
XP	10-pt. Veteran preference
TP	5-pt. Veteran preference
NV	Non Veteran

***REASON FOR DECLINATION CODES:***

01	Other offer
02	Poor working conditions
03	No longer desire position offered
04	Salary
05	Location/area
06	Relocation
07	Benefits
08	Poor impression of the federal service
09	No growth potential
10	Duty hours/schedule
11	Poor impression of the agency
12	Poor impression of the selecting official
13	Other
14	Unknown