

MERIT PROMOTION PLAN

- Sections**
- I. Purpose**
 - II. Introduction**
 - III. Reference**
 - IV. Requirements**
- Appendix**
- A. Career Ladders**
 - B. Merit Promotion Rating Plan**
 - C. Affirmative Employment Program Target Groups**

I. PURPOSE

This chapter establishes the policy and guidance for operation of the CDC¹ Merit Promotion Program (MPP). The MPP supports the systematic, competitive placement of individuals based on merit and implements the policies and procedural requirements contained in Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 335: Promotion and Internal Placement and Health and Human Services (HHS) Personnel Instruction, 335-6, HHS Merit Promotion Program.

II. INTRODUCTION

In conformance with HHS and U.S. Office of Personnel Management (USOPM) guidelines, it is CDC policy to fill positions with the best qualified candidates available. Selecting officials provide eligible candidates fair and equitable consideration for promotion and position change based on considerations of merit. Merit promotion is only one of many mechanisms available for filling vacancies. Other methods include career promotion, reassignment, initial appointment from USOPM certificate and/or Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) certificate, transfer, reinstatement, and/or the use of special noncompetitive placement and employment authorities. The MPP may be used alone or in concert with any of these methods of filling vacancies. The MPP does not guarantee either initial selection or subsequent promotion. All selections will be based on merit and without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, political affiliation, age, or any other nonmerit factor.

¹References to CDC also apply to ATSDR.

III. REFERENCES

- A. 5 CFR 335: Promotion and Internal Placement
- B. HHS Personnel Instruction 335-6: HHS Merit Promotion Program
- C. HHS Personnel Instruction 771-3: Employee Grievances
- D. HHS Personnel Instruction 1613-3: Processing Discrimination Complaints

IV. REQUIREMENTS

A. Coverage

This policy applies to filling all competitive service, full-time or part-time, general schedule (GS) grades 15 and below, and Federal Wage system equivalents (WG/WL/WS) within CDC. This policy does not apply to: non-status employees serving on temporary appointments, to employees serving in the excepted service, the employees serving in the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service, or employees in the Senior Executive Service. Commissioned Corps personnel interested in assignment to positions covered by this plan may apply and be considered according to placement policy of the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service.

B. Definitions

1. Ability - Competence to perform an observable behavior or a behavior that results in an observable product.
2. Accretion of Duties - Phrase used to describe situations in which under **rare and highly controlled circumstances** and as an authorized exception to competitive promotion procedures, higher graded duties and responsibilities are added to a position that did not have known promotion potential. Situations such as this must be documented and approved by the Director, HRMO prior to any promotion action.
3. Area of Consideration - The intended applicant pool in organizational and/or geographical terms and specifies any restrictions regarding who may compete for a position.
4. Best Qualified - a description of relative merit in relation to a specific merit promotion action and specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. Candidates who are rated above the "cut off" score in a competitive ranking of candidates are described as the best qualified.

5. Career Ladder - Formally recognized progression of two or more grade level positions within a single series that represents the anticipated career path for large groups of permanent employees assigned to a specific occupational function. (See Appendix A, Career Ladders, for further details.)
6. Career Ladder Promotion - Promotion when competition was held at an earlier stage (e.g., USOPM certificate, Merit Promotion certificate) for a position within a recognized career ladder.
7. Career Promotion - Promotion without current competition when prior competition was held for a position with known (and documented) promotion potential; however, the position is not associated with an established career ladder.
8. Certificate - Document used to provide selecting officials with a list of candidates that has been developed through competitive procedures (e.g., USOPM certificate, Merit Promotion certificate).
9. Crediting Plan - Instrument designed for the evaluation of candidates for a specific position. Application of the crediting plan serves as the basis for determining the best qualified candidates.
10. Cut Off Score - The numerical score established by the merit promotion rating panel to identify best qualified candidates. (See Appendix B, Merit Promotion Rating Plan, for further details.)
11. Demotion - Change of an employee to a lower grade when both the old and new positions are under the same type graded wage schedule, or to a position with a lower rate of basic pay when both the old and new positions are under the same type ungraded schedule or in different pay-method categories.
12. Detail - Temporary assignment of an employee to different duties, or to a different position, for a specified period of time, with the employee returning to his/her regular duties at the end of the detail.

13. Full Performance Level - Highest level of work projected either within a career ladder or in association with a position's established promotion potential. It is intended that employees assigned to career ladders or positions with known promotion potential will advance to the full performance level; however, promotions are neither automatic nor mandatory. Promotion to the full performance level is predicated on demonstrated ability to perform work at the higher grade level and the availability of higher graded duties.
14. Highly Recommended - In situations where large numbers of well qualified and/or highly qualified candidates are referred for final selection consideration, and at the option of the selection official, these candidates may be further screened to "narrow the field" and determine the "highly recommended." Authorized screening procedures include: preliminary interview and preliminary application screening. In both instances screening is accomplished by designated subject matter experts and screening criteria is based on substantive job related matters. Candidates that are determined to be "highly recommended" are referred to the selecting official for final selection interview.
15. Job Analysis - Systematic, documented review of a job to be filled to determine what knowledge, skills, and abilities an employee must bring to the job to be able to perform satisfactorily in a reasonable period of time.
16. Knowledge - Body of information applied directly to the performance of a function.
17. Open Period - Time between the opening and closing dates listed on the vacancy announcement during which applications will be accepted.
18. Outside Candidates - Candidates with Federal competitive status who are not current employees of CDC, ATSDR, or HHS.
19. Position Change - Promotion, demotion, or reassignment made during an employee's continuous service within the agency/department.
20. Priority Consideration - Special, one-time consideration extended to an employee who was denied proper consideration in a prior competitive action.
21. Promotion - Change of an employee to a position at a higher grade level or to a position with a higher rate of basic pay.

22. Promotion Potential - Possibility of further career promotion without the need for further competition (e.g., a position filled at an entry or mid-level within an established career ladder).
23. Qualification Requirements - Experience, training, and/or education specified in the USOPM Qualification Standards for a specific occupation and any selective placement factor(s) established for the particular position.
24. Qualified Candidates - Candidates who meet the basic USOPM qualification requirements for the position and any time-in-grade restrictions.
25. Reassignment - Change of an employee from one position to another without promotion or demotion.
26. Referral List - List of candidates that are eligible for selection based on noncompetitive consideration (e.g., status candidate noncompetitive referral list, appointment referral list).
27. Reinstatement - Reemployment of a former career or career-conditional employee. Eligibility is based on career tenure and/or veteran's status.
28. Selective Placement Factor - Specific knowledge, skill, or ability (KSA) that is not required by the OPM Qualification Standards but is determined to be essential for successful job performance. The necessity for the particular KSA must be well documented in the position description and identified through job analysis. Examples of selective placement factors include: ability to speak and/or write a language other than English, knowledge or ability pertaining to a certain program or mission when these cannot readily be acquired within 90 days after promotion and ability in a functional area (e.g., ability to evaluate alternative Automatic Data Processing systems).
29. Skill - Observable competence to perform a learned psychomotor act.
30. Subject Matter Expert (SME) - An individual thoroughly knowledgeable about the duties and responsibilities of a specific position. A SME is normally at or above the grade of the position being filled.

31. Supplemental Qualification Statement - Document prepared by a candidate that expresses in terms of specific knowledge, skills, and abilities, all job-related background data (e.g., work history, education, training, awards, volunteer work, outside activities) relevant to the position being filled.
32. Voluntary Applications - Applications received from candidates who are outside the announced area of consideration. Voluntary applications will be accepted and be given full consideration unless the vacancy announcement contains a statement that specifically limits consideration to candidates from within the area of consideration.
33. Well Qualified Candidates - Candidates who meet both (1) the basic USOPM qualification requirements for the position and (2) the acceptable level for each of the identified rating knowledge, skills, and abilities identified for the rating process.

C. Responsibilities

1. Management:

- a. Observe merit principles.
- b. Ensure that selecting officials and subject matter experts provide Human Resources Management Representatives (HRMRs) with thorough position information and requisite program resources to meet merit promotion program needs.
- c. Assume responsibility for any actions under their jurisdiction (including violation of law, regulation, or agency policy).

2. Selecting Officials:

- a. Observe merit principles in all aspects of the recruitment and selection process.
- b. Work with HRMRs to provide:
 - (1) Accurate position descriptions.
 - (2) Thorough job analysis information.
 - (3) Well qualified Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

- c. Make selection decisions based on job related criteria and according to merit principles.
3. Human Resources Management Representatives (HRMRs):
 - a. Counsel employees regarding merit promotion procedures, promotion opportunities, qualification requirements, and results of merit promotion actions.
 - b. Find and certify and/or refer the best available candidates.
 - c. Help in the resolution of merit promotion related complaints from employees.
 - d. Give managers and employees comprehensive and technically sound guidance regarding merit promotion and related staffing matters.
 - e. Ensure that the CDC Priority Placement Program, HHS Reemployment Priority List, the local Repromotion Priority List, and other special placement programs are checked before advertising any vacancy.
 - f. Ensure all merit promotion procedures are conducted in conformance with merit principles; that crediting plans are job related, objective, and measurable; and that all candidates are treated fairly.
 - g. Ensure that MPP records and files are appropriately maintained.
 4. Subject Matter Experts (SMEs):
 - a. Work with the HRMRs to conduct the job analysis and to develop the crediting plan for the position to be filled.
 - b. Serve on merit promotion panels as rating officials.
 - c. Serve on interview screening panels as a recommending official.
 5. Administrative Officers:
 - a. Work with selecting officials and the HRMRs to coordinate administrative matters associated with the operation of the MPP.

6. Employees:

- a. Become familiar with the provisions of this plan.
- b. Participate on merit promotion panels as needed.
- c. Manage own career progression.
- d. Establish a successful pattern of on-the-job performance.
- e. Identify merit promotion career opportunities that reflect their specific career interests.
- f. Apply for positions in a timely manner and provide all required documentation.

D. Competitive Requirements

1. The CDC MPP competitive procedures **must be** used for the following:
 - a. Promotions (except as excluded in paragraph 2 below).
 - b. Reassignment or demotion to a position with greater promotion potential than any position currently or previously held in the competitive service.
 - c. Transfer to a position with greater promotion potential than any position currently or previously held in the competitive service.
 - d. Reinstatement to a position with greater promotion potential than previously held in the competitive service.
 - e. Details of more than 120 days to higher grade positions or positions with promotion potential beyond the potential identified in prior competition. (Note: Qualified employees detailed/temporarily assigned to a higher graded position for more that 30 calendar days and functioning at the higher grade level, will be temporarily promoted. The temporary promotion will be initiated at the earliest date it is known by management that the detail/temporary assignment is expected to exceed 30 calendar days. This does not preclude temporarily promoting such an employee for an assignment of 30 days or less.)

- f. Selection for training which is part of an authorized training agreement, part of a promotion program, or is required before an employee may be considered for a promotion -- unless the selection for training meets the conditions for noncompetitive selection as specified in an authorized Training Agreement.
2. The CDC MPP competitive procedures are not required for the following:
 - a. Promotion within an established career ladder when prior competition established competitive eligibility for promotion (this is a **career ladder promotion**). (See Appendix A, Career Ladders, for further details.)
 - b. Promotion from a trainee or lower graded position to a position's "known promotion potential" when prior competition identified the promotion potential of the specific position or group of positions (this is a **career promotion**).
 - c. Promotion resulting from an employee's position having been reclassified at a higher grade because of additional duties and responsibilities. This should be a nonroutine occurrence and must be processed following guidelines on accretion of duties.
 - d. Promotion of a research position following recommendation through the peer review panel process.
 - e. Promotion resulting from the upgrading of a position without significant change in duties and responsibilities based on a new classification standard or the correction of a classification error.
 - f. Position change permitted by reduction-in-force (RIF) regulations.
 - g. Demotion or reassignment from one position to another having no greater promotion potential.
 - h. Career or career ladder promotion following noncompetitive conversion of a cooperative education student.

- i. Temporary promotion for 120 days or less provided the employee has not received a temporary promotion or detail to a higher graded position in the last 12 months. (Note: Qualified employees detailed/temporarily assigned to a higher graded position for more that 30 calendar days and functioning at the higher grade level, will be temporarily promoted. The temporary promotion will be initiated at the earliest date it is known by management that the detail/temporary assignment is expected to exceed 30 calendar days. This does not preclude temporarily promoting such an employee for an assignment of 30 days or less.)
- j. Detail to a higher grade position, or a position with known promotion potential, for 120 days or less. (Note: Qualified employees detailed/temporarily assigned to a higher graded position for more that 30 calendar days and functioning at the higher grade level, will be temporarily promoted. The temporary promotion will be initiated at the earliest date it is known by management that the detail/temporary assignment is expected to exceed 30 calendar days. This does not preclude temporarily promoting such an employee for an assignment of 30 days or less.)
- k. Repromotion to the highest grade previously held on a permanent basis under career or career-conditional appointment, provided: (1) the employee was not demoted from that grade because of deficiencies in performance or "for cause" reasons and (2) no additional grade potential is realized.
- l. Promotion effected after competitive selection for detail or temporary promotion when the possibility of permanent promotion was included in the original vacancy announcement.
- m. Promotion resulting from priority consideration granted a candidate not given proper consideration in a previous competitive promotion action.
- n. Placement in a position having known promotion potential when the employee previously held a position with the same promotion potential on a permanent basis under career or career-conditional appointment even if the employee never reached the full performance level. Placement includes promotion, reassignment, demotion, transfer, reinstatement, and detail. The employee must not have lost the previous position because of performance or conduct reasons.

E. Area of Consideration

1. Standard

The area of consideration is the location where the organization actively searches to find candidates. Areas of consideration are defined through organizational boundaries and geographic locations. An area of consideration is established based on the servicing HRMR's judgement in consultation with the requesting official. The area of consideration decision should be based on organizational characteristics, recruitment history, availability of high quality candidates, and the nature and level of the position to be filled. Standard CDC/ATSDR areas of consideration are listed below:

CDC/ATSDR Merit Promotion Plan - Areas of Consideration	
<i>Categories of Position:</i>	<i>CDC/ATSDR Employees with Permanent Federal Career/Career-conditional Status within:</i>
All Wage Grade Positions	CDC/ATSDR Local Commuting Area
All GS-12 and below Positions	CDC/ATSDR Local Commuting Area
All GS-13-15 Positions	CDC/ATSDR-wide

2. Limited

The area of consideration may be limited to a smaller geographic area and/or organizational unit. Specifically, consideration may be limited to a CDC/ATSDR local commuting area; a specific Center, Institute, or Office (CIO); or a smaller officially designated organizational unit (e.g., division, branch, etc.) in situations where:

- a. A new position is established at a higher grade in an organizational unit following a higher level directed reorganization and all of the current positions in the unit are filled.
- b. Factors such as ceiling control or hiring freeze prevent the employing office from adding to its staff.
- c. A higher grade position is established because of a realignment of duties within

an organizational unit and no provision is made for an increase in the number of employees in the unit.

- d. Details to higher grade positions or temporary promotions are made under circumstances where consideration of employees outside the smaller area is impractical.
- e. Other similar situations where the normal area of consideration is not appropriate and would not provide fair competition.

When the HRMR and requesting official decide to restrict the area of consideration, the basis for this decision must be fully justified, approved and documented. In addition, when they decide to limit the area of consideration, the HRMR must include a statement summarizing the basis for this decision on the vacancy announcement.

3. Expanded

The normal area of consideration may be expanded to a larger area when the HRMR and/or requesting official believe(s) the normal area of consideration will not produce enough high quality candidates. This expanded area of consideration will be: CDC/ATSDR local commuting area; CDC/ATSDR-wide; DHHS-wide; and Government-wide.

4. Voluntary Applications

Voluntary applications are applications received from candidates who are not within the published area of consideration. Voluntary applications will normally be accepted and be given full consideration unless the vacancy announcement contains a statement that specifically limits consideration to candidates from within the area of consideration.

F. Announcement of Vacancies

1. Notice

Vacancy announcements will be made available through electronic media such as local area computer networks and CDC's telephone Job Line², and posted on designated bulletin boards. In addition, hard to fill and senior level vacancies and external announcements³ will be listed on CDC Homepage on the Internet⁴. The external announcements may, if appropriate, parallel merit promotion announcements.

2. Open Periods

The following are anticipated *minimum*⁵ open periods:

- a. **5 work days**⁶ - for positions advertised within the local commuting area.
- b. **10 work days** - for positions advertised with an area of consideration of CDC-wide.
- c. **15 work days** - for positions advertised with an area of consideration of HHS-wide.
- d. **20 work days** - for positions advertised with an area of consideration of Government-wide.

²For the current telephone number of the "Job Line" see appropriate listing under "Hotlines" in the CDC/ATSDR Communications Directory.

³External announcements are announcements open to individuals who do not have civil service competitive status.

⁴CDC Homepage at: <http://www.cdc.gov>

⁵The minimum open period may be extended or reduced when local recruiting conditions warrant. Whenever the open period is reduced, the reason for the reduction must be approved by the Human Resources Management Representative and documented in the merit promotion case file and recruitment record.

⁶The open period may not be less than 5 workdays.

As a rule, vacancy announcements open Wednesday and close on a successive Tuesday depending on the length of the open period.

3. Content of Vacancy Announcement

- a. As a minimum, each vacancy announcement must include the following information:
 - (1) Announcement Number.
 - (2) Opening and closing dates.
 - (3) Title, series, grade, organizational location, and duty station of the position⁷.
 - (4) Known promotion potential.
 - (5) Area of consideration, including statements why consideration is limited to employees within the stated area and that consideration will not be given to applicants from outside this area.
 - (6) Summary of the duties of the position.
 - (7) Qualification requirements for the position (including selective placement factors) used to identify minimally qualified applicants. Qualifications must be stated in clear, generic terminology.
 - (8) Identification of any positive education requirements and the necessity to furnish transcripts and/or medical license as appropriate.
 - (9) Specific knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) used to rate applicants for the position and, when appropriate, indication that a particular KSA is considered a selective placement factor.

⁷If it is known at the time of announcement that multiple vacancies are to be filled, to the extent possible, specific information regarding the individual vacancies shall be included in the vacancy announcement.

- (10) Application material required. (Applicants may submit one of the following completed forms: Application for Position Vacancy Under CDC Merit Promotion Announcement, CDC 0.996; Application for Federal Employment, SF-171; or Optional Application for Federal Employment, OF-612.)
 - (11) Application procedure for Commissioned Corps personnel.
 - (12) Evaluation methods to be used or a statement that evaluation will be accomplished following the procedures outlined in the MPP.
 - (13) Equal employment opportunity statement.
 - (14) Veterans and disabled individuals eligible for appointment under special authorities may apply. (This is a mandatory statement when applications are accepted from outside the Department.)
 - (15) Deadline for application.
 - (16) Deadline for meeting all qualifications requirements.
 - (17) Statement that applications will be accepted by facsimile and the appropriate fax telephone number.
- b. Vacancy announcements may, if appropriate, include the following information:
- (1) For temporary positions, a statement regarding the anticipated duration of the position and, if appropriate, an indication that the position might become permanent.
 - (2) For other than full time positions, a statement that the position is either intermittent or part time and the approximate number of hours to be worked.
 - (3) A statement on any required supervisory/managerial probationary period.
 - (4) A statement on payment of relocation expenses.

- (5) Identification of the vacancy as a Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) target occupation. (See Appendix C)
- (6) Requirement for background investigation, a financial disclosure statement, drug testing, physical examination, travel requirements, immunizations, etc.

4. Open Continuous Vacancy Announcements

Open Continuous vacancy announcements may be used to advertise recurring vacancies. Vacancies announced through this process must be reissued at least annually. Candidates who apply under open continuous announcements are eligible for consideration for all covered vacancies for a period of up to one (1) year. Candidates may have their consideration extended by updating their application on an annual basis.

G. Method of Applying

To apply for a merit promotion vacancy, candidates must submit all of the application material requested in the vacancy announcement. Failure to provide required information may result in either disqualification from consideration or a lower rating than would otherwise be possible. In addition, candidates with federal competitive status (i.e., employees who have career or career conditional status) who are not currently CDC employees, are required to provide a copy of their most recent SF-50, Notification of Personnel Action. Excepted service candidates (i.e., Veterans Readjustment Act eligibles, persons with disabilities) are not required to submit an SF-50.

Applications must be received in HRMO by the closing date of the vacancy announcement or postmarked by the closing date. Applications submitted by facsimile will be accepted if received in HRMO by the closing date.

Employees who will be away from their regular assignment due to military leave, extended overseas assignment, intergovernmental personnel assignment, inter-agency detail, etc., may request to receive systematic consideration for specific merit promotion opportunities. Employees should notify their servicing HRMR regarding specific career interests and provide a current application for potential referral. To be considered for most positions⁸, employees must meet the associated minimum

⁸Positions announced under the Career Mobility Program, Career Opportunities Training Agreement, or other circumstances may permit modification or waiving of some portion of the official qualification requirements.

qualifications requirements.

Commissioned Corps Officers interested in consideration for a particular position should notify HRMO of their interest by sending the HRMR a current copy of their resume/curriculum vitae for initial qualifications review and referral for noncompetitive selection consideration. The selecting official may specifically request the referral of Commissioned Officers through HRMO's Commissioned Corps Section; however, referral is not necessary for the Officer to receive full consideration. In matters relating to the assignment of Commissioned Corps personnel, the final qualifications evaluation and actual availability for assignment of the Officer must be approved by the PHS Division of Commissioned Personnel (DCP).

H. Evaluation of Candidates

1. Basic Eligibility

As a rule, candidates must meet the qualification standards established by the United States Office of Personnel Management (USOPM) for the position to be filled⁹. Also, to be considered eligible for competitive merit promotion consideration, candidates must meet time-in-grade requirements within 30 calendar days of the closing date of the announced vacancy. Of special note for new employees, candidates who have recently been appointed to the Federal service (i.e., career conditional appointment in the competitive service) must have served in the position for 90 days before they are eligible for a promotion or reassignment to another type of work.

2. Selective Placement Factors

The selecting official may request special job-related qualification requirements above the qualification standards established by USOPM, which candidates must meet to be considered qualified for the particular position. These requirements are known as selective placement factors. Selective placement factors, expressed as **mandatory KSAs**, are determined to be essential for successful performance in the position. The ability to speak fluent French or the ability to translate technical scientific articles from French to English are examples of selective placement factors. Selective placement factors must be approved in advance by the HRMR as conforming to USOPM and HHS criteria for selective placement factors. Selective placement factors must not include requirements that would eliminate

⁹As stated in footnote above.

otherwise qualified candidates who need only a brief period (approximately 90 days) of orientation and training to successfully perform the duties.

3. Competitive Rating and Ranking of Candidates

Candidates determined to meet basic eligibility requirements will be further evaluated in relation to specific KSAs. Eligible candidates will be evaluated based on possession of these specific KSAs and determined to be: **qualified, well qualified, or best qualified**. This evaluation will consider experience, training, awards, outside activities, and other job related information that may be appropriate to the evaluation of the particular KSA. Following standardized methodologies, competitive rating and ranking of candidates is determined by either the HRMR Rating method or the Merit Promotion Panel Rating method depending on the circumstances.

a. HRMR Rating

- (1) In situations where there are 10 or fewer candidates who meet basic eligibility requirements for a position, the designated HRMR may, at the option of the selecting official, evaluate the candidates to determine those who possess, at a minimum, the acceptable level for each of the identified KSAs. Candidates who meet this criteria will be certified as **well qualified** to the selecting official for selection consideration. Candidates who meet basic eligibility requirements, but who do not possess one or more of the identified KSAs at the acceptable level are considered **qualified** but are not normally¹⁰ certified for selection consideration.
- (2) In situations where there are more than 10 qualified candidates, the designated HRMR may, at the option of the selecting official, conduct an initial rating of candidates to determine those who are **well qualified**. The HRMR will subsequently refer the **well qualified** candidates to the merit promotion rating panel for final rating and the determination of the **best qualified**. Candidates who meet basic eligibility requirements, but who do not possess one or more of the identified KSAs at the acceptable level are considered **qualified**, but are not referred for further evaluation by the merit promotion rating panel.

¹⁰Qualified candidates can be referred through merit promotion procedures if reasonable recruitment efforts have not produced three or more well/best qualified candidates.

b. Merit Promotion Panel Rating

There are two situations in which use of a Merit Promotion Panel Rating is appropriate.

- (1) In situations where there are more than 10 candidates who meet basic eligibility requirements for a position.
- (2) In situations with fewer basically eligible candidates (10 or less), but a panel rating is deemed appropriate by the selecting official and/or HRMR due to the professional or technical nature of the position being evaluated. Merit promotion panels evaluate candidates for relative possession of particular KSAs. Based on the results of this evaluation, the merit promotion rating panel assigns numerical ratings and candidates are determined to be **qualified, well qualified, or best qualified**. The **best qualified** candidates rank at or above the cut-off score when compared with other candidates eligible for the position. A **well qualified** candidate is rated at least at the acceptable level for each of the rating KSAs. Candidates who are rated **qualified** meet the basic qualification requirements for the position, but do not rate at the acceptable level for one or more of the identified rating KSAs.

4. Composition of Merit Promotion Rating Panel

When a merit promotion rating panel is used, the panel will be composed of at least three voting members selected from the same or closely related fields as the vacancy. These voting panel members are **subject matter experts (SMEs)** recommended by management officials and approved by the HRMR. The panel will be conducted by the designated HRMR who will serve in a nonvoting, advisory capacity. In addition, the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (OEEO) may elect to have a representative present at the rating panel proceedings to serve as a nonvoting panel observer. For bargaining unit positions, the representing union may also elect to have a representative present to observe rating panel operation. Generally, all voting panel members will be at least one grade higher than the **full performance level of the vacancy**. If this is not feasible, no more than one third of the rating panel members may be at the same grade level as the full performance level of the vacancy. It should be clearly shown that these rating panel members are not presently, nor will they ultimately be, in competition for the position being filled. The selecting official may not serve as a rating panel member and may not participate in any way in rating panel deliberations.

5. Certification of Candidates

A certificate listing the names of the **best qualified** or **well qualified** candidates is provided to the selecting official for selection consideration. The names of the candidates are listed in alphabetical order on the certificate. Merit promotion selection certificates are issued for 30 days and may be extended in 30 day increments for up to 60 additional days based on documented need and approval of the designated HRMR. Subsequent selections may be made from a properly issued promotion certificate within 90 days from the date the certificate was originally issued provided the positions to be filled have the same title, series, and grade; the same promotion potential; are in the same geographic location as the position announced; are subject to the same area of consideration restrictions; and require the same qualifications. If a certificate is not used within 90 days, the position must be reannounced and another certificate issued before a selection can be made.

6. Interviewing Candidates

Selecting officials must treat all candidates equally and in accordance with merit principles. The selection interview should focus on job-related criteria (e.g., familiarity with particular computer equipment/programs, laboratory procedures, relevant training courses, past performance record as related to relevant KSAs, knowledge of current scientific/medical protocols, etc.). Any special requirements of the position (e.g., immunizations, drug testing, travel, security clearance, financial disclosure, etc.) should be reviewed during the interview.

The servicing HRMR is available to consult on the development of interview questions and related candidate selection concerns. Additionally, at the request of the selecting official, the OEEO is available to assist in the development and/or review of interview questions as well as observation of the selection interview. However, in recognition of the wide variety of positions filled through the merit promotion process, some variation in approach to the selection interview process is permitted. The selecting official may, at his/her option, choose any one of the following procedures:

a. Interview all candidates

The selecting official may, with no further rating or screening, interview each candidate certified. All candidates must be interviewed either in person or by telephone. (Note: A good faith effort to conduct interviews must be made and

documented.)

b. Appoint a Preliminary Interview Panel

The selecting official may appoint a preliminary interview panel of peers or SMEs to conduct preliminary interviews of all certified candidates. The HRMR will serve as technical advisor to the preliminary interview panel and will insure that all interview questions/criteria are based on merit principles. Based on bona fide job-related criteria, the interview panel will identify those candidates considered **highly recommended** and will forward these candidates to the selecting official for the final selection interview. The selecting official may either (1) interview the **highly recommended** candidates or (2) interview all of the candidates initially certified for selection consideration as outlined in "6a" above.

c. Appoint a Preliminary Screening Panel

The selecting official may elect to have an advisory panel of SMEs screen all of the applications certified. The HRMR will serve as technical advisor to the preliminary screening panel and will insure that all screening criteria are based on bona fide job-related criteria. The panel will identify those candidates who are considered to be **highly recommended** and will forward these candidates to the selecting official for final selection interview. The selecting official may either: (1) interview just the **highly recommended** candidates or (2) interview all of the candidates certified for selection consideration as outlined in "6a" above.

7. Interview of Referral Candidates

Candidates who are referred for noncompetitive selection consideration may or may not be interviewed. Insofar as time and resources permit, selecting officials are encouraged to consider referral candidates in the same manner as those who are competitively certified. However, when the number of referral candidates is large or time and/or resource constraints preclude the interview of all referral candidates, the selecting official may elect to:

- a. Not conduct interviews of referral candidates and just review their respective application packages, or
- b. Screen down the list of referral candidates and just interview those who meet

some job related criteria.

8. Documenting the Interview Process

When either preliminary interview or screening panels are used (see "6b" and "6c" above), the HRMR will insure that interview and/or screening criteria is documented and included in the merit promotion file. In addition, the basis for identifying the **highly recommended** and referred for final selection consideration will be made a part of the record.

Selecting officials are not normally required to provide documentation of the final selection interview and/or selection process. However, all selection decisions are documented in the Merit Promotion file. Selecting officials may elect to keep records of their selection decisions; however, all such records are subject to disclosure and review in third party proceedings.

I. Selection of Candidates

1. Selection Controls

As a general rule, management has the right to select or not select from among candidates certified and/or referred for selection. However, there are circumstances where selection decisions are impacted by agency and other staffing and placement programs. For example, filling vacancies may be subject to the placement of individuals through the agency's Priority Placement Program (PPP) and the Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP). Also, filling vacancies from outside the agency may be subject to the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP).

2. Selection Principles and Options

Selection must be made without regard to any nonmerit factor such as race, color, sex, religion, national origin, political views, marital status, cultural identification, disability, age, membership or nonmembership in an employee organization (union), sexual orientation, or patronage. The selecting official may:

- a. Select a candidate referred through any priority or special placement program (e.g., Retained Grade/Pay Placement Program, Repromotion Priority Program, Priority Placement Program, Reemployment Priority List, etc.).

- b. Select a candidate from a merit promotion certificate. If he/she does not select any of the candidates but requests additional names, HRMO may reannounce the position, expand the area of consideration as needed, or may assist the selecting official in seeking candidates from other sources.
- c. Select a candidate who has indicated availability for reassignment, transfer or reinstatement when the action is not subject to competitive promotion procedures. The individual may be referred for noncompetitive consideration through the Voluntary Employee Referral Program (VERP). Noncompetitive candidates may also have been referred to the selecting official on a referral list of noncompetitive eligibles who responded to merit promotion vacancy announcements.
- d. Select a qualified Commissioned Officer.
- e. Select from candidates certified on a USOPM certificate of eligibles who are available and within reach for appointment (or from those candidates eligible for hire under a USOPM authorized Direct-Hire Authority).
- f. Select a candidate available through a special appointment authority (person with a disability, veteran, etc.).

3. Selection Review

Selection decisions are tentative pending final review and approval of the HRMR.

J. Notification and Release of Candidates

Notification of the selectee and official request for the release of an employee selected through merit promotion procedures will be made only by HRMO. Normally, employees selected will be released within 2 weeks or at the end of the first full pay period after a release date has been officially requested. However, under extenuating circumstances, managers may request to extend a release date for up to 30 days. If the selection involves an immediate promotion, the promotion should occur within 2 weeks or at the beginning of the first full pay period after the selection is made. Any decision regarding the establishment of a release date should take into consideration employee concerns, workload requirements, and agency mission objectives.

K. Feedback to Candidates

1. Normally, within 30 calendar days after a final selection is made for a specific vacancy, candidates who applied will receive written notification regarding:
 - a. Who was selected for the announced position.
 - b. Whether they met the minimum requirements for the position.
 - c. Whether they were among the best qualified or well qualified candidates certified for selection consideration.
 - d. Whether they were among the status candidates referred for noncompetitive selection consideration.
2. If a position vacancy is canceled, candidates will receive, normally within 30 days, a written notification that includes specific reasons for the announcement cancellation.
3. Upon request from the applicant, applicants will be advised of their individual rating/ranking. This includes an individual candidate's relative standing and summary numerical rating. Crediting/rating plans are considered to be merit system test materials and are not releasable to candidates.

L. Priority Consideration

An employee who was not considered or not given proper consideration in an original merit promotion action due to procedural error and/or regulatory or promotion program violation, and who has not been promoted in the interim, may be given "priority consideration" for the next appropriate vacancy. An "appropriate vacancy" means the next promotion opportunity for which the priority candidate meets or exceeds all qualification requirements and is at the same grade level (and with the same promotion potential), is the same type of position, and is in the same area of consideration as the position for which the employee was originally not given proper consideration. A person given priority consideration will be referred to the selecting official before any other effort is made to fill the vacancy. Priority consideration referral does not provide an employee with a selection entitlement and only one such consideration is authorized.

M. Maintenance of Records

1. Merit promotion files will be retained for 2 years and maintained in such a manner that the actions may be reconstructed.

2. Promotion records will be safeguarded within the HRMO (and field sites) and not released to unauthorized persons. Merit promotion records may be released to other HRMRs or other authorized persons (i.e., third party investigations) for authorized review, audit, and inspection.

N. Employee Questions and Complaints

1. Employees should contact their supervisors and/or designated HRMR when questions or concerns arise regarding either the MPP in general or a particular position for which they have applied. These questions will normally be answered within ten working days. Generally most problems or concerns can be resolved through this exchange of information.
2. A formal complaint may be submitted through the appropriate grievance procedures (i.e., HHS Personnel Instruction 771-3 or procedures negotiated with an employee organization), or through the HHS equal employment opportunity complaint procedures (i.e., HHS Personnel Instruction 1613-3). Nonselection for a position, in itself, may not be regarded as cause for formal complaint.

Appendix A

Career Ladders

What is a career ladder?

The term career ladder refers to a formally recognized succession of positions that represent the anticipated career progression for most permanent employees assigned to a specific occupation. Career ladders are established for large groups of like positions that have established career progression and known promotion potential. Career ladders are established within single occupational series.

What is a career ladder promotion?

A career ladder promotion is a noncompetitive promotion when competition was held at an earlier stage to permit entry into an established career pattern (e.g.: U.S. OPM certificate, Merit Promotion competitive procedures, specifically delegated Direct Hire Authority). Promotion within an established career ladder to the identified full performance level may be effected without further competition. Promotion beyond the identified full performance level of any established career ladder requires further competition¹.

What if a position is not covered by a career ladder?

Promotion patterns for individual positions or small groups of identical positions may be identified as positions with "known promotion potential." If a position has known promotion potential, the potential must be identified when the position is established and documented on the position description and other personnel records (such as respective Vacancy Announcements). When an employee competes for a position with known promotion potential, he/she may be promoted to the full performance level or level of known promotion potential without further competition -- this is known as a "career promotion."

¹**In rare and highly controlled circumstances** higher graded duties may be added to a position with no known promotion potential. In these rare instances, noncompetitive promotion beyond the full performance level may be authorized; see Section IV.B.2., Definitions, Accretion of Duties.

Why are career ladders established?

Career ladders are established to facilitate the career development process for large groups² of employees assigned to positions with common occupational characteristics. Career ladders are established to provide opportunities for employee development and career progression.

How are career ladders established?

Career ladders are authorized and established through approval and publication by the CDC/ATSDR HRMO and documented on position descriptions, vacancy announcements and requests for certificates of eligibles from the USOPM. CIOs may request the establishment of career ladders at any time their mission and workload requirements support such action. Requests to establish career ladders must (1) be supported by accurate position classification, (2) reflect sound position management, and (3) be thoroughly documented (position descriptions, workload projections, and numbers of employees covered). The HRMO will maintain and publish on an annual basis the current list of all established career ladders.

When are career ladder promotions appropriate?

Career ladders establish a pathway for career advancement leading to the full performance level of the position. After initial competition to enter the career ladder, successive promotion is dependent upon (1) the employee meeting legal and regulatory requirements (time-in-grade restrictions), (2) the employee's performance, and (3) the need for and availability of higher level work within the organization. Employees are not guaranteed promotion once selected for a position within an established career ladder. However, managers are encouraged to foster a work environment that affords individuals assigned to career ladders an equal opportunity to demonstrate their ability to perform at the full performance level.

²For purposes of establishing career ladders, "large group" is defined as approximately 50 or more positions. The establishment of career ladders for smaller groups of positions may be authorized when there are (1) very strong occupational characteristics, (2) well defined career paths, and (3) firmly established organizational structure.

Established Career Ladders³

General Schedule

<u>Series</u>	<u>Position Title</u>	<u>Career Ladder Grade Progression</u>
318	Secretary	GS-4, 5
326	Office Automation Clerk/Assistant	GS-2, 3, 4, 5
334	Computer Specialist	GS-5, 7, 9, 11
343	Management and Program Analyst	GS-5, 7, 9, 11
401	Biologist (Note: nonresearch positions)	GS-5, 7, 9, 11
403	Microbiologist (Note: nonresearch positions)	GS-5, 7, 9, 11
404	Biological Science Laboratory Aid/Technician	GS-2, 3, 4, 5, 6
601	Health Scientist/Epidemiologist	GS-9, 11, 12
602	Medical Officer	GS-11, 12, 13
685	Public Health Advisor/Analyst ⁴	GS-9, 11, 12
690	Industrial Hygienist	GS-5, 7, 9, 11
800s	Professional Engineering Positions	GS-5, 7, 9, 11
1082	Writer Editor	GS-5, 7, 9, 11
1084	Visual Information Specialist	GS-5, 7, 9
1320	Chemist (Note: nonresearch positions)	GS-5, 7, 9, 11
1529	Mathematical Statistician	GS-5, 7, 9, 11, 12
1530	Statistician	GS-5, 7, 9, 11, 12
1701	Health Education Specialist	GS-5, 7, 9, 11, 12

Wage Grade

3511	Laboratory Worker	WG-3, 4
4749	Maintenance Worker/Mechanic	WG-5, 7, 8, 9, 10
5048	Animal Caretaker	WG-3, 4, 5
5306	A/C Equipment Mechanic	WG-5, 7, 8, 9, 10

³Additional positions may be included as approved by the Human Resources Management Office. A current approved list will be maintained in the Human Resources Management Office and published annually.

⁴Full performance level for field positions within the National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention is GS-9.

Appendix B

Merit Promotion Rating Plan

The Merit Promotion Rating Plan outlines the procedure followed by the Human Resources Management Representative (HRMR) to determine **well qualified** candidates and by the Merit Promotion Rating Panel to determine **best qualified** candidates. In determining both the **well qualified** and **best qualified** candidates, the same merit principles apply (i.e., candidates are evaluated regarding possession of job specific knowledge, skills, and abilities).

Merit Promotion File

Each merit promotion file shall contain the following information:

1. Position Description - A current and properly classified position description is required.
2. Job Analysis - A comprehensive, fully documented job analysis which (a) identifies the major tasks/duties of the position, (b) identifies/defines the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) essential to the performance of the position, (c) determines/documents the KSAs that are measurable and will distinguish superior candidates from those who are barely acceptable, and (d) notes and documents any other rating, ranking or weighting of KSAs and the basis of such determination. Job analysis will be conducted in conformance with methodologies approved by USOPM¹.
3. Crediting Plan - A fully developed crediting plan which clearly defines levels² of possession of identified KSAs. Crediting plans will provide for the assignment of points at four distinct value levels:

<u>Value Level</u>	<u>Points</u>
superior	4 points
good	3 points
acceptable	2 points
barely acceptable	1 point
no credit awarded	0 points

¹Methods conform to the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures.

²Crediting plans at a minimum must define the 2 point level (acceptable) and 4 point level (superior). Definitions of the 3 point level (good) and 1 point level (barely acceptable) are optional. Zero (0) points may be awarded for no credit.

Crediting plans will be documented using Subject Matter Experts and the designated HRMR. The crediting plan will be developed in conformance with methodologies approved by USOPM³.

Evaluation Criteria

1. Veterans' Preference - Veterans' preference is not applicable to the merit promotion process.
2. Evaluation of Training and Education - Training and education are not rated separately from the individual rating KSAs. Training and/or education that relates directly to a specific KSA may be credited in accordance with the established crediting plan. It is important to note that education that served as the basis for a candidate's basic eligibility may also be appropriately considered and credited if such education is reflected in the KSA crediting plan. For example, a bachelor's degree that was used to meet basic qualifications may also serve as the basis for additional KSA point credit. However, the possession of any level degree (BA, MA, MPH, PhD, MD, DO, DDS, JD, LLB, etc.) has no intrinsic point value in the rating process unless it is related to a specific KSA and has been referenced in the KSA crediting plan.

The same approach applies to training courses and nondegree supporting course work.

3. Evaluation of Awards and Outside Activities - Awards and outside activities that are specifically related to individual KSAs may be credited when such are identified by the KSA crediting plan. Recency and relevancy are important considerations and must be weighed in accordance with the guidance provided in the KSA crediting plan.
4. Evaluation of Performance - Performance appraisals will not be considered as an element of the merit promotion rating process, per se. However, performance appraisals will be referred to selecting officials for consideration in the final selection process.

Rating by Human Resources Management Representative

The Human Resources Management Representative may rate candidates beyond determining basic eligibility/qualifications when either of the following two situation occur:

1. Very Low Numbers of Qualified Candidates - In situations where there are 10 or fewer

³Methods conform to the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures.

candidates that meet basic eligibility requirements for a position (regardless of grade level/s announced), the designated HRMR, at the option of the selecting official, may conduct an abbreviated competitive rating of candidates. That is, the HRMR will evaluate the basically qualified candidates to determine those candidates that possess an acceptable level of each identified rating KSA and those that do not. The HRMR will certify those candidates that meet the acceptable level of each identified rating KSA in alphabetical order to the selecting official as **well qualified** for selection consideration. Candidates who meet basic eligibility requirements, but who do not possess one or more of the identified rating KSAs at an acceptable level are considered **qualified** but are not normally⁴ certified for selection consideration.

2. Very High Numbers of Qualified Candidates - In situations where there are a high number (more than 20) of candidates that meet basic eligibility requirements for a position (regardless of grade level/s announced), the HRMR, at the option of the selecting official, may conduct an initial rating of candidates to determine those that are **well qualified**. That is, the HRMR will evaluate the basically qualified candidates to determine those candidates that possess an acceptable level of each identified rating KSA and those that do not. The HRMR will refer these **well qualified** candidates to the merit promotion rating panel for final rating and ranking. Candidates who meet basic eligibility requirements, but who do not possess one or more of the identified rating KSAs at an acceptable level are considered **qualified** but are not referred for further evaluation.

Rating by Merit Promotion Panel

When a Merit Promotion Rating Panel is convened, the following rating procedures are followed:

1. Evaluation and Rating of KSAs - The KSA crediting plan will take into consideration a candidate's experience, training, education, awards, and other pertinent information as it is specifically related to the individual KSAs. A candidate's total raw score will then be converted to a transmuted score⁵ using the Transmutation Table (see Page 5) which reflects a score range from 70 to 100 maximum points.

⁴In circumstances where there are less than three candidates determined to be well qualified/best qualified, the selecting official may elect to have the position reannounced under an expanded area of consideration or may request certification of basically qualified candidates.

⁵A transmuted score is only generated when candidates are rated by the merit promotion rating panel. The transmuted score is used to determine the cut off score and, thus, those candidates that are considered to be **best qualified**.

Example: A candidate is rated against 4 individual KSAs as follows:

<u>KSA</u>	<u>Rating Level</u>
1	2 points (acceptable)
2	3 points (good)
3	4 points (superior)
4	<u>3</u> points (good)
	12 points (Total raw score)

Transmutation of Raw Score

Using the Transmutation Table, a raw score of 12 points and a total of 4 KSAs results in a final rating of 93 points.

2. Determining **Best Qualified** - There are two methods to determine **best qualified** candidates:
 - a. In situations where transmuted scores are equally distributed over a range with no clear groupings (see Example 1 below), the top 10 scores are certified as **best qualified**⁶.
 - b. In situations where there is a clear grouping of transmuted scores (see Example 2 below), only those scores above a natural break are certified as **best qualified**.

Example 1

<u>Transmuted Scores</u>
100
98
98
96
96
94
92
92
92
92
90 <u>"cut off score"</u>
88
88

Example 2

<u>Transmuted Scores</u>
100
98
98
96
96 <u>"cut off score"</u>
87
87
87
86
86
85
83

⁶When there is a tie in score, more than 10 candidates may be certified at **best qualified** at the discretion of the merit promotion rating panel. This decision must be documented and included in the merit promotion file.

Appendix C

CDC/ATSDR Affirmative Employment Program Target Groups¹

<u>Series</u>	<u>Position Title</u>	<u>Grade Levels</u>	<u>Target Groups</u>
334	Computer Specialist	GS-5 and above	Hispanics NativeAmericans
343	Management and Program Analyst	GS-9 thru 15	Asians Hispanics NativeAmericans
401	Biologist	GS-5 and above	Asians NativeAmericans
403	Microbiologist	GS-5 and above	Black males Asian males Hispanics NativeAmericans
601	Health Science ²	GS-5 and above	Asian males Hispanics NativeAmericans
602	Medical Officer	GS-11 and above	Asians Black females Hispanics NativeAmericans
685	Public Health Advisor	GS-5 and above	NativeAmericans
1320	Chemist	GS-5 and above	Black females Hispanics NativeAmericans

¹Groups based on FY96 Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Plan.

²Includes a variety of position titles.