


20 January 2006

TO: All NOAA Line Office and Staff Office Directors

FROM: Eduardo J. Ribas   
Director for Workforce Management

SUBJECT: Merit Assignment Plan

I am pleased to announce that the Workforce Management Office has finalized a new Merit Assignment Plan (<http://www.wfm.noaa.gov/policies/MAPFinal120105.pdf>). This plan has been revised to provide management the greatest flexibility in filling your vacancies. Please be advised that implementation of the Merit Assignment Plan will be consistent with existing collective bargaining agreements, Memoranda of Understanding within specific line offices, and the Federal Labor Management Relations statute. If you have any questions concerning this document please contact your Client Services Division Director ([http://www.wfm.noaa.gov/contact\\_lists.html](http://www.wfm.noaa.gov/contact_lists.html)).

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC**  
**ADMINISTRATION**

**MERIT**  
**ASSIGNMENT**  
**PLAN**

**January 2006**

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## **SECTION 01. PURPOSE.**

This issuance is the Merit Assignment Plan (MAP) for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). It sets forth policies, procedures and requirements, which assure that qualified candidates are considered for assignment to positions in the competitive service, based solely on job-related evaluation procedures. Application of this Plan must be supported by all other legal/regulatory/contractual references.

## **SECTION 02. POLICY.**

- 2.01 In conformance with the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, this Plan provides **guidance in obtaining** qualified external or internal candidates to compete equitably for assignment opportunities either concurrently or separately in accordance with Federal merit promotion policy.
- 2.02 All vacancies subject to competition by this Plan will be filled from among the **best-qualified** candidates on the basis of merit, fitness for duty, and qualifications. ([See Appendix A](#))
- 2.03 The provisions of this Plan will be applied without regard to political, religious, or labor organization affiliation or non-affiliation, marital status, race, color, sex, national origin, non disqualifying physical handicap, or age, and shall be based solely on job-related criteria. (Ref 5 CFR 335.103(b) and [Appendix A](#)).

## **SECTION 03. AUTHORITY.**

This Plan is issued to meet the requirements of Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 335, Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 and Department Administrative Order (DAO) 202-335.

## **SECTION 04. DEFINITIONS.**

- 4.01 **Accretion.** A non-competitive promotion of an employee whose position is reclassified at a higher grade/band/pay level because of additional duties and responsibilities. An accretion promotion may be made if: the duties of the former position have been absorbed into the new position, the employee continues to perform the same basic functions, and the duties represent an outgrowth of the former position; or where a program change requires the immediate performance of new duties that only one employee is capable of performing.
- 4.02 **Appraisal.** Evaluation of an individual's demonstrated performance and/or potential to perform in a position.
- 4.03 **Area of Consideration.** The area(s) (i.e., geographic and/or organization) in which a search is made for eligible candidates for consideration for a specific vacancy.

- 4.04 Best-Qualified. The certification given to qualified candidates considered most capable of performing the duties of a position or requirements/standards of the job to be filled.
- 4.05 Career Ladder Position. The grade/band/pay in an occupational series or specialization that represents the level to which all employees within an organization may be promoted noncompetitively. (See [Appendix B](#) for a list of approved NOAA career ladder positions.)
- 4.06 Career Promotion. A promotion without competition when an employee was selected previously from an Applicant Referral Certificate under competitive procedures for a position with known promotion potential. Employees in a career ladder position may be promoted as they demonstrate the ability and readiness to perform at the next higher level and when legal requirements are met, e.g., time-in-grade/band/pay.
- 4.07 Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) Eligible. A well qualified MAP candidate who is a permanent, current Department of Commerce (DOC) status employee in receipt of a specific reduction-in-force notice, notice of proposed removal for declining a directed reassignment, or transfer of function outside of the local commuting area or surplus notice and has been determined to be well-qualified by meeting or exceeding the fully satisfactory level (or equivalent) for critical quality ranking factors or critical experience questions.
- 4.08 Change to Lower Grade. The change of an employee from one grade/band/pay to a lower grade/band/pay under the same pay plan/career path to a position with a lower rate of pay.
- 4.09 Crediting Plan. The document identifying specific criteria for making consistent and job-related determinations about the relative qualifications of applicants for a position.
- 4.10 Detail. The temporary assignment of an employee to a different position for a specified period of time with the employee returning to his/her former position at the end of the assignment. During the detail, the employee's permanent position is considered the position of record.
- 4.11 Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP) Eligible. A qualified candidate or former permanent Federal status employee, who has received a specific reduction-in-force notice and has been determined to be well-qualified by meeting or exceeding the fully satisfactory level (or equivalent) for the critical quality ranking factors or critical experience questions.

- 4.12 Job Analysis. The process of assessing the duties and responsibilities of a position to determine the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential to the position or to enhance performance in the position.
- 4.13 Merit Assignment Panel. A permanent or ad hoc committee of subject matter experts convened to evaluate and rank candidates. NOTE: No panel is required when using the electronic vacancy announcement system.
- 4.14 Applicant Referral Certificate. The form (electronic or paper) used to submit the names of the candidates for consideration by a selecting official and to document selection decisions.
- 4.15 Merit Assignment Plan Vacancy Announcement. The method used to publicize the grade/band/pay, location, and qualifications required for a position.
- 4.16 Panel Interview. A structured interview of candidates, conducted by more than one interviewer (i.e., a panel of individuals) to assess the qualifications of candidates as they relate to the qualifications and/or the performance requirements of the position to be filled.
- 4.17 Promotion. The upgrade of an employee to a higher grade/band/pay position.
- 4.18 Qualified. Those applicants who meet established qualification and legal requirements, which may include selective factor(s) for particular positions.
- 4.19 Quality Ranking Factors. Knowledge, skills, and abilities that could be expected to significantly enhance performance in a position, but unlike selective factors, are not essential for satisfactory performance.
- 4.20 Reassignment. The change of an employee from one position to another without a promotion or change to lower grade/band/pay.
- 4.21 Selecting Official. A management official who has authority to select a candidate for assignment to a position, subject to the final approval of a servicing workforce management office official with appointing authority.
- 4.22 Selective Factor. A specific knowledge, skill, or ability that is absolutely required or essential for satisfactory job performance. Failure to meet a selective factor will result in an applicant's ineligibility for consideration.
- 4.23 Status Applicant. An individual's basic eligibility for noncompetitive assignment to a competitive position (e.g., by transfer, promotion, reassignment, demotion or reinstatement) in the competitive service without having to compete with members of the general public in an open competitive examination. A person on a career or career-conditional appointment acquires competitive status upon satisfactory completion of a probationary period under a career-conditional or career

appointment to a position in the competitive service. Status can also be granted by statute, Executive Order, or the civil service rules without competitive examination.

- 4.24 Subject Matter Expert(s) (SME). An individual or group of individuals knowledgeable about the duties and responsibilities of the position.
- 4.25 Time-limited Promotion. The promotion of an employee for a period having a specific time limitation after which the employee returns to his/her former position or an equivalent.
- 4.26 Well Qualified. The rating given to qualified candidates who have been determined to meet or exceed the fully satisfactory level (or equivalent) for the critical quality ranking factors or critical experience questions. This rating criteria is used for applications received from one or more qualified eligibles under the provisions of the Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) or the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP).

## **SECTION 05. COVERAGE.**

- 5.01 **Organizations Covered**. This Plan applies to all NOAA organizations nationwide.
- 5.02 **Positions/Employees Covered**. This Plan covers career service, GS-1 through GS-15 or equivalent positions in the competitive service. It also covers selections made under merit assignment procedures to positions in the competitive service under the Veterans Employment Opportunity Authority (VEOA) and employees in an excepted service merit system that has an OPM interchange agreement with other merit systems, (i.e., Defense Civilian Intelligence Personnel System and the Federal Aviation Administration Personnel System).
  - 1. Servicing workforce management offices may apply the procedures of this Plan when filling positions in the excepted service such as;
    - a. Positions filled by Schedule A appointments, (individuals with disabilities), as cited in 5 CFR 213.3102(t) or 213.3102(u).
    - b. Positions filled by Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA) as cited in 5 CFR 307.103.
  - 2. Servicing workforce management offices will refer in separate categories qualified Schedule A and VRA appointees on Applicant Referral Certificates consistent with Section 9 of this Plan.
  - 3. The servicing workforce management office may include positions not specifically covered by this Plan under the merit procedures described to allow for increased publicity or competition.



5.03 **Positions Excluded.** This Plan does not apply to the following types of positions:

1. Senior Executive Service (SES) positions;
2. Senior-level positions classified pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 5108 and scientific or professional (ST) positions established under 5 U.S.C. 3104;
3. Positions excluded from competitive procedures such as those in the excepted service, except as provided in 5.02 1. a & b.

5.04 **Actions Covered.** This Plan covers the following competitive actions.

1. **Promotions**

- (a) A personnel action that changes an employee (1) to a position at a higher grade level within the same job classification system and pay schedule or (2) to position with a higher rate of basic pay in a different job classification system and pay schedule. (Exception: Promotion actions listed in Section 5.05.)
- (b) A time-limited promotion over 120 calendar days. (Prior service during the preceding 12 months under all details to higher graded/pay positions or time-limited promotions whether competitive or non-competitive is included in determining the 120-day restriction.)
- (c) Promotion by transfer from another Federal agency or by change of appointing office.

2. **Assignments**

- (a) Selection for a detail of more than 120 calendar days to (1) a higher graded position or (2) a position with greater known promotion potential.
- (b) Selection for training which is part of an authorized training agreement, part of a promotion/pay program (such as upward mobility programs, internships, mobility programs, apprenticeships, and other short or long-term programs leading to promotion), or required before an employee may be considered for a promotion—unless the training is associated with a promotion not covered by the agency's merit promotion procedures.
- (c) Transfer from another Federal agency, reassignment or change to lower grade/band/pay to a position with greater promotion/pay potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service (except as permitted by reduction-in-force regulations).

- (d) Reinstatement to a permanent or temporary position with greater promotion/pay potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service.

5.05 **Actions Excluded**. This Plan does not apply to the following non-competitive actions.

1. **Career Promotions**

- (a) A promotion without current competition when at an earlier stage the employee was selected from an Applicant Referral Certificate under competitive procedures for a position with known promotion potential through competitive examining, or through merit promotion/assignment procedures for an assignment intended to prepare the employee for the full performance level of the position being filled. The intent must be made a matter of record and the maximum grade/band/pay of the career ladder must be documented in the merit promotion file. The employee must demonstrate the ability and readiness to perform at the next higher level. Although advancement to the full performance level is the intent and expectation of the career ladder system, promotions within career ladders are neither automatic nor mandatory. There is no guarantee that an employee in a career ladder will be promoted, nor a commitment that a promotion will be made at a set time.
- (b) A promotion to a target or full performance level position from an apprentice, trainee, or understudy position.
- (c) A promotion to a position filled below its full performance level for such reasons as the application of average grade controls or for recruitment.
- (d) A promotion of an employee who satisfactorily completes training under a formal training agreement.

2. **Other Promotions Based On:**

- (a) **Accretion of Duties:** A promotion of an employee whose position is reclassified at a higher grade because of additional duties and responsibilities. Such a non-competitive promotion may be made if: (1) the former position has been absorbed into the new position; and (2) the employee continues to perform the same basic functions and the duties represent an outgrowth of the former position over a significant period of time; or (3) where a program change requires the immediate performance of new duties that only one employee is capable of performing. An accretion of duties cannot be used for promotions from a non-supervisory position to a supervisory or lead position. Noncompetitive promotions are strongly discouraged across career paths or from one-grade interval to two-grade interval positions, and are subject to close review and validation by the servicing workforce management office. Written

documentation is required for each promotion taken under this paragraph. Repeated accretion of duty promotions are highly unlikely and considered a very rare circumstance.

(b) Implementation of New Classification Standards or Correction of a Classification Error: A promotion of an employee resulting from the upgrading of a position without significant change in the duties and responsibilities due to the issuance of a new classification standard or the correction of an initial classification error.

(c) Time-Limited Promotions:

(1) A time-limited promotion made permanent (without further competition) provided it was originally made under competitive procedures and the fact that it might lead to a permanent promotion was made known to all potential candidates.

(2) A time-limited promotion of 120 calendar days or less. (Prior service during the preceding 12 months under all details to higher graded positions or time-limited promotions whether competitive or non-competitive is included in determining the 120-day restriction.)

(d) Previously Held Position with No Promotion Potential: A promotion of an employee to a position having no more promotion potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service provided the employee was not separated or demoted for performance or conduct reasons.

(e) Settlement of an Equal Employment Opportunity Complaint or Other Negotiated Settlements. A promotion granted as a result of a negotiated settlement of a formal or informal Equal Employment Opportunity complaint under Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations.

### 3. Other Actions

(a) Position change (includes reassignment, change to lower grade/band/pay, and conversion to reinstatement actions) of a NOAA employee, or transfer of a status employee from another Federal agency, from a position having known promotion/pay potential to a position having no more promotion/pay potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service (or in an other merit system that has an OPM Interchange Agreement). (See 5 CFR 335.103(c)(2)(iv) or (v)).

(b) Non-competitive conversion actions of employees in the Student Career Experience Program, Veterans' Recruitment Appointment, veterans who are 30% or more disabled, Presidential Management Fellow, Federal Career Intern and other authorized programs, and their subsequent promotions in career ladder positions.

- (c) Selection of an employee from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Priority Placement Program.
- (d) Selection of a candidate from the Department's Reemployment Priority List (RPL).
- (e) Selection of a former Action, Vista or Peace Corps employee or a present or former Foreign Service employee who meets the requirements for non-competitive appointment.
- (f) Selection of a candidate eligible for a non-competitive appointment based on White House Service, legislative or judicial service under 5 U.S.C. 3304 (c).
- (g) Position change permitted by reduction-in-force regulations.
- (h) Selection of a candidate from an OPM certificate or a certificate prepared under delegated examining authority.
- (i) Selection for detail to a higher graded position or to a position with known promotion potential for 120 days or less.
- (j) Reinstatement to a position having no more promotion potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service.
- (k) Reassignment from a non-supervisory position to a supervisory position.

## **SECTION 06. AREAS OF CONSIDERATION AND LOCATING CANDIDATES.**

6.01 The area of consideration for a vacancy should be broad enough to ensure the availability of a sufficient number of high quality candidates. The area should also consider the provisions and requirements of the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program, the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, and other relevant directives.

Factors to be considered in establishing an area of consideration include, but are not limited to, the representation of women and minorities in the occupation and grade/band/pay and the nature and level of the position. Specific circumstances may indicate:

- (1) The organization where the vacancy exists is the logical area, or
- (2) A broader area is warranted, or
- (3) In rare cases, such as a "freeze" or budget restrictions, a narrower area of consideration. (See Section 6.03 for Upward Mobility positions.)

When the servicing workforce management office determines it is necessary or desirable to locate additional candidates, this may be accomplished by expanding the area of consideration, re-advertising the vacancy, or considering candidates through other sources. Applications should, when determined necessary, be accepted from non-status and status candidates to ensure that a large portion of the available labor market is considered.

6.02 The minimum area of consideration for a vacancy is the area considered appropriate to provide the manager/selecting official with a sufficient number of high quality candidates. Current recognized negotiated labor union contracts may have exceptions already granted to the minimum area of consideration for those members, and should be reviewed prior to issuance of a vacancy announcement.

6.03 Upward Mobility Program trainees will be selected on a competitive basis in accordance with merit procedure guidelines. The area of consideration must be set to promote fair and open competition and to enhance the development of a diverse work force. The area of consideration for these positions will be no greater than the DOC (nation-wide). Any area of consideration smaller than the Line Office will be documented by the servicing workforce management office and included in the vacancy announcement file. Line Offices must ensure groups under-represented in the advertised occupation are within the particular advertised area. If not, it is strongly recommended that the area of consideration be expanded. The term under-represented is being used as defined in 5 CFR 720.202 (a) meaning "a situation in which the number of women or members of a minority group within a category of civil service employment constitutes a lower percentage of the total number of employees within the employment category than the percentage of women or the minority constitutes within the civilian labor force of the United States."

6.04 **Vacancy Announcements.**

1. The minimum open period for vacancy announcements is five calendar days. The servicing workforce management office may approve exceptions to the minimum open period. The servicing workforce management office will post vacancy announcements under this Plan on the electronic system in use by the Department of Commerce and USAJOBS system administered by OPM.

2. A vacancy announcement, at a minimum, will provide the following information:

- Vacancy announcement number
- Title, pay plan, series, grade/band/pay and location (organizational and geographic) of the position
- Salary range
- Known promotion potential
- Area of consideration (who may apply)
- Opening and closing dates of the announcement

- Source from which applications will be accepted, e.g., status, non-status, etc.
- Applicable minimum qualifications requirements as prescribed by the OPM.
- Selective factors, if applicable
- Basis for evaluating candidates
- Special conditions of employment (e.g. shift work, travel, drug testing, etc.)
- Application procedures
- Description of major duties
- Type of appointment
- Equal Employment Opportunity and reasonable accommodations statements
- Indicate instructions on how to receive vacancy announcement information and apply for vacancies advertised in the electronic application system to applicants who do not have access to a computer.

3. Managers are responsible for ensuring a method is in place to inform employees who are temporarily absent from duty (i.e. leave, training, furlough, etc.)

6.05 The servicing workforce management office may use vacancy announcements without specific closing dates to advertise recurring vacancies or where recruitment is expected to be difficult. These are identified as open continuous announcements. When a sufficient number of candidates apply for consideration, the servicing human resources office may establish a register for a period no greater than six months, from which they may consider candidates for applicable vacancies.

## **SECTION 07. QUALIFICATION STANDARDS.**

- 7.01 Applicants must meet all the eligibility requirements (e.g., time-in-grade/band/pay and qualification requirements) by the closing date specified in the vacancy announcement. Applicants who apply under open continuous announcements must meet all eligibility requirements by the date the certificate is issued.
- 7.02 The minimum qualification standards prescribed by NOAA, DOC and OPM, including provisions for authorized written tests and appropriate selective factors, will be used to determine basic eligibility of candidates for merit assignment consideration. Candidates may review the standards contained in the Qualification Standards Operating Manual and the Job Qualification System for Trades and Labor Occupations and any other official references. Selective factors representing qualifications essential for successful performance in a position are a part of the minimum qualification standards. The selective factors must be documented in and made a part of the vacancy announcement file.

## **SECTION 08. EVALUATION AND RANKING.**

8.01 The MAP requires that consideration for vacancies, subject to competition through this Plan, are made from among the best-qualified candidates. Job related criteria will be used to determine the meaningful ranking of eligible candidates. Such

criteria are determined by a job analysis that demonstrates the relationship of the duties to the position.

The servicing workforce management office will complete a quality review of each best-qualified applicant's work experience, narrative statements, education and/or answers to the experience questions. When reviewing experience questions in the automated system, the servicing workforce management office will verify that answers provided support the specific work experience in the application. In situations where supporting work experience cannot be identified, the servicing workforce management office will select the appropriate code and disqualify the applicant from further consideration. When this occurs, the Human Resources Specialist will denote the reason/rationale on the appropriate screen that can be viewed by the applicant.

8.02 Eligible candidates are evaluated on such factors as experience, education and training, self-development, outside activities, performance, panel interviews, written tests (when authorized), and special recognition (e.g., commendations, awards, publications, and significant suggestions). The following individual or group of individuals will evaluate candidates:

1. If an automated application system is used, scores are based on established evaluation criteria. The servicing workforce management office will review self-supporting evidence when evaluating the best-qualified candidates' experience/education and/or training. In situations where work experience, education and/or training cannot be identified to support the candidate's responses to the experience questions, the servicing workforce management office has the authority to annotate this on the applicants' application and disqualify the candidate from consideration. The best qualified will be determined by establishing a meaningful break in scores.
2. If an automated application system is not used, the servicing workforce management office will review applications to determine if applicants meet basic eligibility requirements, meet OPM qualification requirements, and determine which candidates are best qualified for the position. At the discretion of the servicing workforce management office, a panel may be convened to determine the best qualified candidates. If a panel is convened, all candidates determined to be basically qualified will be forwarded to the panel. The panel will, based on a crediting plan, assign specific numerical scores to the evaluation of candidates' experience, education, training, and awards. The panelists will determine a meaningful break in the scores and make certification cutoff at that point. A panel should consist of three or more members considered experts in the subject matter of the vacant position, with the servicing workforce management office representative serving as technical advisor (See Section 11.04 for panel member criteria). The servicing workforce management office representative must be present or readily available throughout the rating process. The selecting official cannot serve as a panel member or be present during the panel's deliberations.

3. The servicing workforce management office will evaluate all candidates applying under the selection priority provisions of CTAP and ICTAP to determine whether or not they are well qualified for a given position vacancy. The servicing workforce management office will annotate the Applicant Referral Certificate to reflect the referred candidates are well qualified for the position.
- 8.03 All promotion candidates in MAP cases subject to competitive assignment procedures of the Plan will be evaluated on the factors applied to a particular vacancy announcement. The candidates rated best qualified are referred to the selecting official.
- 8.04 Candidates not subject to merit assignment competitive procedures, e.g., through reassignment or transfer to a position with no greater promotion potential than the candidate's current position and those eligible for other non-competitive appointing authorities, need not be rated and ranked before selecting official consideration. The names of all of these qualified candidates can be referred on the certificate with a remark indicating candidates can be given selection consideration outside competitive merit assignment procedures.

## **SECTION 09. REFERRAL AND SELECTION.**

### 9.01 Referral

1. Well qualified CTAP candidates will be referred to the selecting official FIRST before any other candidates. In instances where there is more than one well qualified CTAP eligible, the entire complement of CTAP eligibles is certified to the selecting official. The servicing workforce management office must annotate the Applicant Referral Certificate to reflect that the referred candidates are well qualified for the position but have not been ranked. Servicing workforce management offices may refer all DOC applicants after CTAP applicants have received priority consideration. When considering candidates from outside the Department, well qualified ICTAP candidates must be referred to the selecting official before other non-Commerce employees.

No other candidates may be referred to the selecting official for consideration until all CTAP/ICTAP candidates either decline further consideration or are determined to be not well qualified for the position. If determined to be not well qualified, CTAP/ICTAP candidates must be notified in writing. Priority consideration and selection as established in the Department's Career Transition Assistance Program plan and further described in NOAA amendments to the Department Career Transition Assistance Plan, takes precedence over the lost considerations stated in paragraph 9.03.

2. When candidates to be considered by the selecting official have been evaluated in accordance with Section 8 of this Plan, the servicing workforce management office



will issue an automated Applicant Referral Certificate or equivalent hard copy documentation.

3. A certificate will list the names of the best-qualified competitive candidates for the vacancy to be filled. Best qualified is determined by using a meaningful break in the scores. Additional names can be added to the certificate, based on the next meaningful break, if applicants on the original certificate decline further consideration.
4. An Applicant Referral Certificate is valid for 60 calendar days from the date of issuance. The certificate may be extended an additional 30 calendar days with the approval of the servicing workforce management office. Extensions for an additional 90 calendar days will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and will be documented in the MAP case file. The servicing workforce management office may re-issue an Applicant Referral Certificate without re-advertising if another vacancy becomes available for a position with the same duties, qualifications, and duty location, as long as it is within 180 calendar days of the initial date of issuance of the certificate and CTAP and ICTAP requirements are met.

#### 9.02 Selection

1. Interviewing candidates is not mandatory. However, the selection of candidates to be interviewed must be based on valid job-related criteria. All applicants interviewed will be asked the same questions. Interviews may be conducted by telephone where necessary. An interview panel is typically comprised of current Federal employees at or above the grade level of the position to be filled. In some cases, lower-graded or non-Federal employees may be used on the interview panel when that expertise would provide valuable information to the selection determination. Note: Collective Bargaining Agreements should be considered as they may address specific requirements when interviewing their members.
2. The selecting official is not required to make a selection from the list of candidates provided on an Applicant Referral Certificate. Additional recruitment efforts or other personnel actions may be initiated to fill a vacancy, e.g., from OPM or Delegated Examining (DE) (non-status applicants) certificate, or by reinstatement or transfer eligible, etc.
3. The selecting official's decision to select a particular candidate is subject to review by the servicing workforce management office or designated representative to ensure legal and regulatory requirements are met. All selections are subject to the candidate satisfactorily completing any pre-employment requirements. (e.g., drug tests, security clearances, physicals, etc).
4. The servicing workforce management office will make offers of employment and will arrange for release of the selected candidate from the current employing organization. Normally, employees should be released within one full pay period of

receipt of the request for release. Supervisors may hold an employee for up to 30 days, particularly on a lateral grade/band/pay (non-promotion) release. This date may be extended if the selection involves relocation or other extenuating circumstances.

5. Verbal and/or written job offers may be revoked in emergency situations such as hiring freezes, when selected candidates have not yet begun work. Revocation of offers may only be made by the servicing workforce management office.

### 9.03 Lost Consideration

1. When a candidate was not referred to the selecting official, due to an administrative error, the following procedures will take place:
  - a) If a selection has not been made, the selecting official is notified immediately and the certificate is amended; or
  - b) If a selection has been made, the candidate will receive consideration on the next available certificate for the same grade/band/pay, title and series and location. This procedure is only required if the candidate was determined to be among the “best qualified” group of candidates originally certified to the selecting official. Candidates get this consideration concurrently with any other candidate with similar entitlement as an exception to the competitive procedures in the Plan before other action is taken to fill the vacancy with the exception of CTAP and ICTAP as referenced in Section 9.01. The selecting official is not required to select these candidates, but must consider them. A candidate is entitled to only one instance of priority consideration for each instance of lost consideration. Candidates who meet the criteria will receive consideration for the next appropriate vacancy in the same grade/band/pay, title and series, and location. The candidate’s eligibility for such referral will expire after one referral or after 1 year from the date in which he/she lost consideration, whichever comes first.

## **SECTION 10. RELEASE OF INFORMATION.**

### 10.01 Information to Candidates

A candidate may check the outcome of the application to a specific vacancy announcement through the automated system. The servicing workforce management office (or selecting official if an arrangement is made) may notify all candidates who apply under a vacancy announcement of the outcome of their consideration, although notification is not required.

### 10.02 Information to Employees, Unions and Others

When a request for information on the outcome of a vacancy announcement is received, it must be independently reviewed by the responsible official per the

provisions of the Civil Service Reform Act (Section 7114), the appropriate negotiated agreement, regulation, and other appropriate law (i.e. Freedom of Information Act, Privacy Act, etc.). Requests for information should be made through the servicing workforce management office. The following information about specific selections for positions will be available to employees at their request:

- Whether the employee was found basically eligible for the position and what the minimum qualification requirements were;
- Whether the employee was best qualified; and
- Who was selected for the position.

## **SECTION 11. RESPONSIBILITIES.**

- 11.01 Director, Workforce Management Office. The Director, Workforce Management Office and all servicing workforce management offices are responsible for implementing and administering this Plan. Specific responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following actions.
1. Informing employees of the requirements and objectives of the Plan.
  2. Establishing and maintaining necessary files and records to permit reconstruction of actions at a later date and to answer inquiries.
  3. Providing information to employees and management concerning MAP actions.
  4. Reviewing requests for filling vacancies and assisting in the identification of qualification requirements, including selective factors and/or quality ranking factors, KSA's and/or experience questions.
  5. Issuing and publicizing vacancy announcements.
  6. Screening and evaluating qualifications of candidates against basic merit selection laws, regulations and policies.
  7. Establishing systems for rating and evaluating candidates.
  8. Advising merit assignment panel members, subject matter experts, and selecting officials of their duties and responsibilities and participating as a technical advisor to panels.
  9. Advising managers on merit system principles and prohibited personnel practices (5 U.S.C. 2302 (b)) and ensuring compliance with and enforcement of applicable merit selection laws, regulations and policies.
  10. Assisting management in establishing upward mobility opportunities.

11. Keeping employees informed periodically about the MAP and issuing reminders where copies of the Plan may be reviewed or obtained.

12. Providing information to employees on how to resolve complaints about the application of this Plan.

11.02 Supervisors. Supervisors are responsible for the following actions.

1. Anticipating staffing needs and initiating action to allow for timely recruitment or selection in accordance with this Plan.
2. Assisting the servicing workforce management office in performing job analyses and developing selective factors and/or quality ranking factors, KSA's and/or experience questions.
3. Observing the principles of the Plan.
4. Complying with applicable merit selection laws, regulations and policies.

11.03 Employees. Employees are responsible for the following actions.

1. Applying for a specific vacancy announcement as appropriate.
2. Taking advantage of self-development and job training opportunities.

11.04 Panel Members. Merit assignment rating and interview panel members are responsible for the following actions.

1. Assessing the degree to which qualified candidates possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will enhance successful performance in the position based on written documentation not personal knowledge or attribution.
2. Considering only relevant information provided by the candidates screened by the servicing workforce management office.
3. Maintaining confidentiality of all personal information learned in the course of evaluating candidates.
4. Disqualifying themselves from serving on a merit assignment panel if, for any reason, they cannot be completely objective. Under no circumstances may an employee serve on a panel when a relative or an individual sharing a domicile with a panel member is an applicant for the vacancy.

## **SECTION 12. DOCUMENTATION AND RECORDS.**

The servicing workforce management office will document each action (or group or actions from a merit program certificate) effected under this Plan. The records maintained must be sufficient to allow reconstruction of the case. The case file may be a hard copy or electronic. At a minimum, each case file will include the following documents:

- Vacancy announcement
- Resume and/or application of each applicant
- Documentation on how candidates were rated and ranked
- Certificate of Eligibles (merit)
- Request for Personnel Action (SF-52)
- Job/KSA Analysis
- Reemployed Priority List (RPL) clearance
- Position Description

A merit assignment program file will be retained for three years from the effective date of the selection, or until an OPM audit is completed, whichever comes first, but only if the time limit for filing a grievance or complaint has lapsed before the two-year anniversary date.

## **SECTION 13. COMPLAINTS AND CORRECTIVE ACTIONS.**

The grievance procedures prescribed in DAO 202-771 and any related internal instructions, negotiated labor union grievance procedures where applicable will apply to complaints arising out of the operation of this Plan. Non-selection from among a group of properly ranked and certified competitors is not a grievable matter. When there is a failure to adhere strictly to the provisions of 5 CFR Part 335, DAO 202-335 or this Plan, the servicing workforce management office will initiate the required corrective measures promptly.

## **Abbreviations**

CFR – Code of Federal Regulations  
CTAP – Career Transition Assistance Program  
DAO – Department Administrative Order  
DOC – Department of Commerce  
ICTAP – Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program  
MAP – Merit Assignment Plan  
NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
OPM – Office of Personnel Management  
PPP – Priority Placement Program  
RPL – Reemployment Priority List  
SES – Senior Executive Service  
SME – Subject Matter Expert  
VEOA – Veteran Employment Opportunity Authority  
VRA – Veteran’s Recruitment Appointment  
WFMO – Workforce Management Office

**Appendix A**

**Merit Principles and Law**

Merit Principle or Law	Expected Results
<p>"Recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve a work force from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity." <a href="#">5 U.S.C. § 2301(b)(1)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selectees are qualified.</li> <li>• Recruitment activities yield a balanced pool of quality applicants.</li> <li>• Issues of diversity manifest imbalance in the work force or (past) applicant pools are considered in planning recruitment.</li> <li>• Valid selection criteria are documented and applied to each recruitment action.</li> <li>• Competition is open: the application process complies with Merit System Principles and other related legal requirements.</li> <li>• Qualification requirements used are job-related and are applied equitably.</li> <li>• Applicants with comparable qualifications receive comparable treatment; the examining process does not introduce or reinforce inappropriate biases in rating, referral, selection, placement, or compensation.</li> <li>• Application acceptance, candidate referral, and interview and placement practices are "neutral" they do not arbitrarily favor or disfavor specific candidates or type of applicants.</li> </ul>
<p>Veterans' Preference Act of 1944 (as amended)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals with Veterans preference are afforded their legal rights in recruitment, referral, consideration, and selection.</li> </ul>
<p>"All employees and applicants for employment should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management without regard to political affiliation, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, age, or handicapping condition, and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights." <a href="#">5 U.S.C. § 2301(b)(2)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information is released under the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts in a way that does not violate the privacy of any employee or applicant.</li> <li>• Information is maintained in a way that does not violate the privacy of any employee or applicant.</li> <li>• The process is monitored to ensure applicants who are entitled to lost consideration benefits, due to erroneous certification or out-of-order selection, receive the priority considerations to which they are entitled.</li> </ul>
<p>"The Federal work force should be used efficiently and effectively." <a href="#">5 U.S.C. § 2301(b)(5)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process produces quality candidates in a timely manner at a reasonable cost.</li> <li>• Activities support public policy on placement of surplus and displaced employees.</li> </ul>

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Established NOAA CAREER LADDERS**

#### **1. PURPOSE**

Career ladders consist of the range of grade levels within a given occupational series through which employees can progress during the normal course of their careers from initial hire through journey level. Placement into the career ladder may take place at any grade level. Within a given ladder, a small number of positions may be established with a lower full performance level. Likewise, a small number of positions may be established with an entry level, which coincides with that of one of the career ladder grade levels but with a full performance level above the career ladder. The establishment of career ladders assists employees in career planning and mobility and it provides flexibility to management in the assignment of work.

#### **2. REFERENCES**

In accordance with Section 5.05(1)(a) of the MAP, promotions within a career ladder are not subject to the requirement for competition because the competition occurred upon initial entry into the career ladder. Although every employee occupying a position within an established career ladder is expected to advance to the top of that ladder, promotions within career ladders are neither automatic nor mandatory. Employees must demonstrate ability and readiness to perform at the next higher-grade level and there must be sufficient work and funds available to warrant promotion. There is no guarantee that an employee in a career ladder will be promoted, nor a commitment that a promotion will be made at a set time.

4. Listed below are the approved career ladders within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Ocean Service.

<b>SERIES</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>CAREER LADDER</b>	<b>ORGANIZATION</b>
GS-2210	Information Technology Specialist	GS-5 thru 12	NOS
GS-0802	Engineering Technician	GS-4 thru 9	NOS
GS-0817	Surveying Technician	GS-4 thru 9	NOS-NGS
GS-1360	Oceanographer	GS-5 thru 12	NOS
GS-1370	Cartographer	GS-5 thru 11	NOS
GS-1371	Cartographic Technician	GS-4 thru 9	NOS
GS-2005	Supply Clerk/technician	GS-4 thru 6	NOS