

## FAQs – NOAA’s 80-Day Hiring Model

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### General:

1. What are the basic requirements of the Hiring Reform?
  - a. The following are the basic requirements of the Hiring Reform, as outlined in the Presidential Memorandum of May 11, 2010:
    - Conduct workforce planning.
    - Improve the quality and speed of hiring.
    - Allow individuals to apply with resume and cover letters.
    - Use occupational questionnaires, which include true/false and multiple choice questions. Written essay-style questions will not be used for the initial application.
    - Use Category Rating.
    - Notify applicants about their status.
    - Ensure manager responsibility and accountability for hiring by using a mandatory critical performance element.
2. Why were essay questions eliminated?
  - a. To make it easier for people to apply for Federal positions by streamlining the process for applicants.
3. What is the difference between "DE" and "MAP"?
  - a. Delegated Examining (DE) refers to the process of hiring applicants new to Federal service, otherwise known as "non-status" candidates. Merit Assignment Procedures (MAP) refers to the process of selecting candidates who are already Federal employees or those applicants who have reinstatement eligibility based upon previous Federal service. Additionally, Veterans whose latest discharge were issued under honorable conditions, and who are either a 'preference eligible' or have completed three or more year of active service, are also eligible to apply for "MAP" positions.
4. During the hiring process, at what points will the candidates be notified of the status of their applications?
  - a. There are four points of notification:
    - 1) Application received.
    - 2) Application assessed for qualifications.
    - 3) Application referred or not referred to selecting official.
    - 4) Applicant selected or not selected.
5. How does the hiring reform affect lateral transfers from within NOAA?
  - a. For non-competitive lateral transfers, there is no change from the current procedures.
6. Are there templates that can be used to assist with preparing a hiring package? If so, where are they located?
  - a. A sample hiring package template is currently under development. Vacancy Announcement Templates are located in DOC HR Bulletin #126, "Creating a Vacancy Announcement". This bulletin is located on the Workforce Management web site at [www.wfm.noaa.gov](http://www.wfm.noaa.gov). You may also contact your servicing HR Specialist for additional guidance.

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## Workforce Planning:

1. What exactly should we do for "workforce planning"?
  - a. You should assess your staffing needs for the future to strategically plan recruitment options and recruitment sources. If you anticipate the need for a surge in hiring during a specific timeframe, alert the Workforce Management Office (WFMO) in advance so they can provide timely support to process all your hiring actions.
2. Who can help facilitate our workforce planning?
  - a. Contact WFMO's Workforce Planning and Development Division:  
[Christine.Carpino@noaa.gov](mailto:Christine.Carpino@noaa.gov)

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## NOAA's 80-Day Hiring Model:

1. Does the "80-Day" Hiring Model refer to business days or calendar days?
  - a. 80 calendar days.
2. Having only 14 calendar days to review applicants, schedule and conduct interviews, check references, select, and determine salary is not enough time. What can I do to have more time for these important steps?
  - a. It is very important to plan ahead for the dates scheduled for this process. When submitting the recruitment package to the Workforce Management Office, use the 80-day model to calculate when the certificate will be issued. Schedule the interview panel ahead of time. Also, posting the vacancy for 7 days (rather than 14 days) would allow for an additional 7 days to complete the selection steps described above.
3. Vacancies in remote locations (e.g., Alaska, Hawaii) and certain specialized scientific positions are more difficult to fill. Can I post a vacancy for more than 14 calendar days in such cases? How will that affect the 80-day timeline?
  - a. Yes, the vacancy can be posted for more than 14-calendar days, if required. The goal to meet the 80-day model does not change, so the time should be made up by compressing other stages of the hiring process wherever possible.
4. Is the 80-day target "set in stone" for every hiring action, or are we aiming for an average of 80 days? Will we be held accountable for hiring within 80 calendar days in every case?
  - a. The intent is for all recruitment actions to be processed within 80 calendar days. NOAA must report to DOC the average and total time to complete prescribed hiring steps.
5. Is there a penalty if deadlines in the 80-day model are violated at various points? How do we ensure these guidelines are adhered to? How do we document exceptions?
  - a. The intent is to meet the overall 80-day goal. Times associated with the individual steps of the model may vary. All hiring actions subject to the 80-day model are documented in Recruitment Analysis Data System (RADS), including authorized exceptions.

6. New hires seldom report within one pay period of the job offer — especially if they are relocating. Meeting the 80-day goal is more realistic if the process is measured from the start of the recruitment action to the job offer (rather than EOD). How can we be held accountable for a 14 calendar day EOD when that time frame is atypical and out of our control?
  - a. The model allows for an "exception" category to be entered in the tracking system (RADS) when the EOD is more than 14 days out.
7. How does NOAA's 80-Day Hiring Model affect Union agreements?
  - a. A Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) supersedes any policies or procedures outlined in NOAA's 80-Day Hiring Model.
8. Are tasks in the 80-day model adjusted to account for days that fall on weekends and holidays? Will employees be expected to work on weekends to use all 80 calendar days?
  - a. Although weekends (and other non-working days) occur during the 80 calendar days of the hiring model, employees are not expected to work on weekends and holidays. Adjustments should be made in other areas of the model to accommodate holidays and weekend dates.

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## Roles and Responsibilities

1. The role of the Line Office/Staff Office (LO/SO) Point of Contact (POC) as the single point of contact raises a concern. Any one person in this role could be overwhelmed at times and Hiring Officials need direct access to WFMO staff for questions and to collaborate. Can you describe the role of the POC?
  - a. The LO/SO POC is the single point of contact to ensure consistency in package submission. The POCs have backup employees who provide coverage when they are not available. The servicing HR Specialist is also available to Hiring Officials for questions and collaboration on a continuous basis.

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## Recruitment Package

1. What is included in a complete recruitment package?
  - a. The WFMO Intake Checklist identifies the required documents for a recruitment package. Briefly, it includes:
    - RADS SF-52, Request for Personnel Action (RPA)
    - Job Analysis\*
    - Draft Occupational Questionnaire
    - Specialized Experience Statement\*
    - CD-516, Position Description (PD) Cover Sheet\*
    - Classified Position Description\*
    - Performance Plan, if required\*
    - Justification of non-payment of relocation expenses, if applicable
    - Major Duties Statement (optional) for the Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA)
- \* For multi-grade recruitments, include for each grade/band.
2. What happens if a partial hiring package is submitted?
  - a. If the package is incomplete, WFMO will return it to the LO/SO POC with explanation.

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## Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA)

1. Can I let people know publicly that a vacancy is about to come open, before it is officially announced?
  - a. Yes, you are encouraged to promote anticipated vacancy announcements. Keep in mind that potential applicants must be treated equitably and fairly.
2. Do we have to advertise all jobs through all sources?
  - a. Yes, in most cases.
3. I have a position that requires writing ability. Without the essay questions, how can I assess the candidate's writing ability?
  - a. During the interview process, you may ask candidates to provide a writing sample, as long as all candidates are treated equitably and fairly. You need to work closely with your HR Specialist.
4. Does the resume for Federal jobs have to be in a particular format?
  - a. No. However, candidates should focus on preparing a resume that best describes their background and abilities.
5. Is there a maximum length for the resume?
  - a. No. However, candidates should focus on preparing a resume that best describes their background and abilities.
6. How important is the cover letter? When should the applicant include one?
  - a. The cover letter is an additional tool for candidates to further describe their qualifications for the position. It is the applicant's decision whether to include one.
7. Is there a limit on the length of the cover letter?
  - a. No.
8. If you ask to open an announcement for 14 calendar days and don't get a good list of acceptable candidates, can you choose to leave it open another 14 days? If so, how does this affect the 80-day model?
  - a. As long as the announcement hasn't closed, you can request that the announcement be extended for an additional time period. However, those additional days will need to be made up in another place. You may want to initially advertise for 7 days and then see if additional time is needed.
9. Can you still state on the job announcement "no relocation expenses"?
  - a. Yes, with justification. This hasn't changed.

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## Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

1. What is a SME and what exactly does a SME do?
  - a. The SME is an individual who has full knowledge of the duties of the position being filled and of the skills and abilities necessary to perform that work. The SME may participate in the Job Analysis. They also can assist with developing questions for the Occupational Questionnaire and determine an applicant's qualifications by validating that answers to the questions are supported by the applicant's resume and cover letter. For additional information, please refer to the SME Job Aid at [http://www.wfm.noaa.gov/pdfs/SME\\_job\\_aid.pdf](http://www.wfm.noaa.gov/pdfs/SME_job_aid.pdf). All SMEs must adhere to the Merit Systems Principles (<http://www.opm.gov/ovrsight/mspidx.asp>) and Prohibited Personnel Practices (<http://www.opm.gov/ovrsight/proidx.asp>).
2. Do we need a SME for all hiring actions?
  - a. SMEs are encouraged, but not required.
3. What process should I use to select a SME?
  - a. Please refer to the reference in Question #1.
4. Can the SME be the Hiring Official?
  - a. The SME should not be the Hiring Official. Having a separate reviewer involved reduces the chances that an applicant will be able to claim that the process was biased to favor a particular candidate.
5. Can the SME be a person outside of NOAA?
  - a. Yes.
6. Can there be multiple SMEs?
  - a. Yes.
7. Can a SME be on the interview panel?
  - a. Yes, if the SME has not assisted in the review of applications for basic qualification determination prior to issuance of the certificate. If he/she has assisted in the qualification determination, it is recommended that a different SME should participate in the interview in an effort to avoid the perception of undue influence.
8. Does the SME require special training? If so, is there training or coaching available for SMEs?
  - a. There is no training specifically for SMEs. They are selected based on what they already know about the work. The servicing HR Specialist can provide procedural guidance for the SME, as needed.
9. Does the SME need to sign a contract?
  - a. Yes. The HR Specialist will provide it.
10. What if the SME knows a candidate personally?
  - a. The SME should participate in review of the candidate only if he/she can fairly evaluate the candidate and will be viewed as impartial.

11. Who makes the decision whether or not a SME should assist in qualifications review of the applicants?
  - a. The Hiring Official and/or the HR Specialist.
12. If we use yes/no, multiple choice, best answer questions, then score the applications electronically against these question, is a SME still required for review of the applications?
  - a. Yes. The SME's review will be to ensure the answers to the questions are supported by the information contained in the resume and cover letter.
13. Can the SME interview the applicant's previous supervisors and/or references before the certification is issued?
  - a. No.
14. What's the process for replacing a SME, if the one originally picked is no longer available?
  - a. The process is the same as selecting the first SME. See Question #1 for more details.
15. Will the SME see ALL the job applications? For example, will they have to read/review the potentially dozens or more of applications? What sort of time commitment is expected from the SME?
  - a. Yes, the SME will see all job applications. The time commitment will vary depending on the number of applications.
16. Is it true that SMEs can only assist in qualifications review BEFORE the certificate is issued and not after?
  - a. Yes.
17. Can a retiring employee serve as either the SME or on the hiring panel prior to his or her retirement? Is this a conflict?
  - a. Yes, employees approaching retirement may serve in both capacities. This is not a conflict.

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## RADS

1. What is RADS?
  - a. The Recruitment Analysis Data System (RADS) is a Web-based system designed to begin and track all recruitment actions. It was designed to streamline NOAA's recruitment process by providing an automated submission for the SF-52 and other documents needed for processing hiring requests. RADS:
    - 1) Eliminates manual paper logs now kept by HR Specialists.
    - 2) Centralizes SF-52s and all required documents in one case.
    - 3) Facilitates routing and accountability between user roles.
    - 4) Improves case status communications with Hiring Officials and Line Offices.
    - 5) Creates an audit trail of every action any user takes on a case.
    - 6) Permits the automatic development of hiring plans, in compliance with the 80-day hiring model, once RADS is successfully paired with Monster Government Solutions.
    - 7) Customizes automated reports, as requested.
2. What can I do in RADS?
  - a. That depends on your role and your permissions. Designated Line Office Points of Contact (LO POC) can submit cases to WFMO. Line Office Assistants (LOAs) can build these cases by creating SF-52s and uploading documents. Line Office Hiring Officials and Subject Matter Experts can review these cases for accuracy and follow their progress in the system. If you have further questions, please send them to [RADS.Support@noaa.gov](mailto:RADS.Support@noaa.gov).
3. Who is the person that enters data into the RADS system?
  - a. The SF-52, case description, and appropriate supporting documentation can be entered either by the LO POC, or by a LOA. Hiring Officials cannot enter data. They have read-only access to their cases.
4. Why can't the Hiring Official input information into an electronic system that is then reviewed by the LO POC, and when complete, approve it for submission and then submit? Is there a reason why hiring officials cannot load the job analysis into RADS themselves? Wouldn't this reduce the burden on the LO POC?
  - a. Hiring Officials hire on an ad hoc basis; some may not hire for a long time, others hire more frequently. In order to maintain consistency, WFMO determined that it is best to limit the number of individuals who input into RADS. This accomplishes several things: the LO POC becomes the expert adviser to the Hiring Official and it eliminates the need for Hiring Officials who hire infrequently to periodically relearn the system. Another benefit of restricting access is that a limited number of people are held accountable for the submission of hiring actions to WFMO. Many of us have experienced miscommunication in the hiring process. RADS offers a more efficient process in that people on both sides of the transaction are held accountable for timely action. The system holds the most recent case status information and all pertinent documents are located in one place.

5. Who has 'read' access to RADS to check on status?
  - a. Your role defines the extent of the access you have. This is defined in the Roles and Responsibilities slide in the Hiring Reform training. For the LO/SOs, the Hiring Official has read-only access to his or her own cases, whereas the LO POC and the Assistant(s) have access to read all cases. The POC is the only person with system permissions to submit a case. Typically, the POC adds the Hiring Official and occasionally a Subject Matter Expert (SME) to the case to enable them to follow progress and review applicable documentation.
  
6. What does a RADS case number signify?
  - a. In RADS, a number is automatically assigned to every "case". A "case" is a request for some type of hiring action. As soon as a case is created in RADS, an automatic 8-character number (beginning with an R) is assigned to it. This is the number WFMO will use to refer to your case. One case can include a single hire, multiple hires, or an inter-disciplinary hire that is generally pulled off of one certificate. Multiple hiring actions must be related; otherwise a separate case entry (and thus a separate RADS case number) is required for each unrelated hiring action. All tracking of cases by WFMO is done by the RADS case number. RADS also provides a way for the LO/SO to record any existing Line Office numbering systems.
  
7. Can I submit a paper SF-52, like I've always done?
  - a. No, you must submit your SF-52 in RADS.
  
8. What format is required for documents submitted to RADS?
  - a. RADS will accept both Adobe PDF (.pdf) and Word documents (.doc or .docx). No other file format is allowed. However, we request Word documents to allow for editing.
  
9. Is there a time expectation for entering data into the RADS to ensure the package moves forward?
  - a. This is a pre-submission activity, and therefore is not tracked in RADS. The time expectation for entering the initial data will be set by your Line Office/Staff Office. Once the case is submitted to WFMO, all cases follow the timeline shown in the 80-Day Hiring Model. NOAA is held accountable to this standard by the Office of Personnel Management.
  
10. How do I get access to RADS?
  - a. If you are a Hiring Official, send an email to [RADS.Support@noaa.gov](mailto:RADS.Support@noaa.gov). If you want to request the ability to upload documents and create your own SF-52s, contact the designated RADS Point of Contact for your office. If you're not sure who this is, email [RADS.Support@noaa.gov](mailto:RADS.Support@noaa.gov) and we can let you know.



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## Occupational Questionnaires

1. What is an "Occupational Questionnaire" and how is it used in the hiring process?
  - a. It is a tool used to assess applicants' qualifications for the position advertised. It can include Multiple Choice, True/False or Yes/No questions. The questionnaire cannot include open-ended questions that require long answers or essay responses.
2. How many questions should we ask on an Occupational Questionnaire?
  - a. Questions should be limited to assessing the competencies and skills that will best differentiate candidates. Effective February 1, 2011, WFMO is limiting the number of questions per job to 10.
3. Should each question be weighted and add up to 100?
  - a. Yes.
4. Is there a "library" of questions that we can use for the Occupational Questionnaire? Or can we create our own questions?
  - a. Yes. There is a library of questions to which managers have access. Contact your HR Specialist. In addition, you can request that questions be added before the package is submitted.

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## Category Rating/Issuing the Certificate of Eligibles

1. Who reviews the applications initially?
  - a. The HR Specialist and possibly the SME.
2. What is "category rating"? How are the candidates scored to assign them to the "Gold", "Silver", or "Bronze" category? Will an applicant's score be based only on how specific questions are answered, or will the resume, cover letter and SME input be used also?
  - a. Category rating puts qualified candidates into one of three categories: Gold (highest), Silver, or Bronze, based on the candidate's self-scored occupational questionnaire answers. Those answers are cross-referenced with the resume and cover letter information to determine whether they support their questionnaire responses. Although scores are used to place candidates into the categories, the scores will not appear on the certification.
3. Will we use category rating on all vacancies?
  - a. Yes, if the announcement is open to non-status candidates.
4. If candidates are self-scoring, at what point do we verify that they have not inflated their scores? What if the candidate's resume and cover letter do not support their answers in the occupational questionnaire?
  - a. The HR Specialist and SME review the answers to the questionnaire to determine if the resume and cover letter support the score. Scores can be changed prior to the certificate being issued, but not after. Although scores are used to place candidates into the categories, the scores will not appear on the certification. WFMO strongly encourages the use of a SME to assist in this process.
5. Are all the names on the "Gold" list referred to the hiring official or just those with Veterans' Preference?
  - a. Generally all Gold candidates are referred. However, HR Specialists have the flexibility to refer only preference eligibles in the Gold category when it appears likely that non-preference eligibles will not be within reach for consideration because the number of preference eligibles. (HR Bulletin 133, [http://hr.commerce.gov/s/groups/public/@doc/@cfoasa/@ohrm/documents/content/prod01\\_009474.pdf](http://hr.commerce.gov/s/groups/public/@doc/@cfoasa/@ohrm/documents/content/prod01_009474.pdf) )
6. Would any names on the Silver or Bronze list ever be referred?
  - a. Yes, if the HR Specialist in conjunction with the Hiring Official decide to merge the Silver and Bronze categories into the Gold category. This would generally occur if there were insufficient numbers of candidates in the Gold category.
7. If the Gold category has only a few candidates, can the Hiring Official receive the Silver category?
  - a. Yes. The categories may be merged, as described in Question #6.
8. What if no candidates are in the Gold category?
  - a. Candidates in the Silver category will be referred.

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## Veterans' Preference

1. Did the regulations for receiving Veterans' preference change under the Hiring Reform? What are the categories of Veterans and what do they mean?
  - a. Veterans' preference regulations have NOT changed. The following categories are still used:

Identifier	Description
CPS	Service-connected disability of 30% or greater.
CP	Service-connected disability of greater than 10% and less than 30%.
TP	Former active duty military.
XP	Eligible family members, based on complete disabled or deceased veteran preference, or Purple Heart veteran.

2. Who is responsible for determining the eligibility of the Veteran?
  - a. WFMO verifies preference eligibility.
3. If there are multiple Veterans on the Gold list, can any of them be selected?
  - a. Yes. Any Veteran on the list can be selected.
4. How do the Veterans' preference points work in category rating?
  - b. There are no preference eligibility points assigned with category rating. The preference eligibles are placed in a category (i.e., Gold, Silver, or Bronze). Within that category, the preference eligibles are placed ahead of non-preference eligibles.

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## Interviews:

1. If I have 10 candidates to choose from, do I have to interview them all? I'm concerned that I won't have time in the allotted 14 calendar days to get that many interviews completed and make a selection.
  - a. No, the Hiring Official can determine which candidates to interview. However the selection of which candidates to interview must be based on valid job-related criteria.
2. What if everybody is not available to interview in-person and I have limited travel funds? Can I bring in some candidates in person and others interview by phone?
  - a. Interviews can be conducted either in person or by phone. If travel funds are extended to one non-local candidate, it is best to make funds available to all non-local candidates. Keep in mind that all applicants must be treated equitably and fairly.
3. If I uncover discrepancies during the interview process, can the category rating be revised?
  - a. If discrepancies are uncovered, contact your servicing HR Specialist for guidance.

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## Selection Process

1. Are reference checks required?
  - a. No, but they are highly recommended.
2. As the Hiring Official, can I send letters to people they interviewed but did not select?
  - a. Yes. You should coordinate this with your HR Specialist.

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## Offer

1. What if the position is offered but the candidate doesn't respond for weeks or even a month? How will that affect the 80 calendar days? Can candidates be given a deadline by which they must respond to the offer?
  - a. Hiring Officials should coordinate a deadline for response with their HR specialist.
2. The 80-day model assumes that everything goes as planned. What if a candidate turns the offer down and it becomes necessary to offer the position to a different candidate? How can I stay within the 80-day model when that happens?
  - a. This would qualify as an "exception" for the final 14 calendar days to EOD.

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## Security Clearance

1. In Step 12 in NOAA's 80-Day Hiring Model, what if there are issues with the security clearance? Is the security step in the process (e.g., number of days) also being monitored for timeliness?
  - a. Yes, the security step is being monitored. Every effort will be made to keep the security clearance time to a minimum.
2. When can a security clearance transfer?
  - a. Basic security clearance requirements transfer with Federal employees from agency to agency. There may be exceptions for higher level clearances. Please coordinate with your servicing HR Specialist.
3. When are fingerprints needed?
  - a. Fingerprints are required for selectees new to the Federal government or those without appropriate clearance for a particular position.