

Job Aid for Subject Matter Expert Involvement in the Hiring Process

Roles and Responsibilities

A Subject Matter Expert (SME) is a person with comprehensive knowledge of the duties and responsibilities necessary to perform a specific job. The overall role and responsibility of the SME is to provide a recommendation based upon their subject matter expertise to the Human Resources Advisor (HRA) in regards to relevant information needed to fill a vacant position. The SME must be a neutral party and not planning on applying for consideration for the position being advertised. A SME may serve individually or with other experts on an ad-hoc basis.

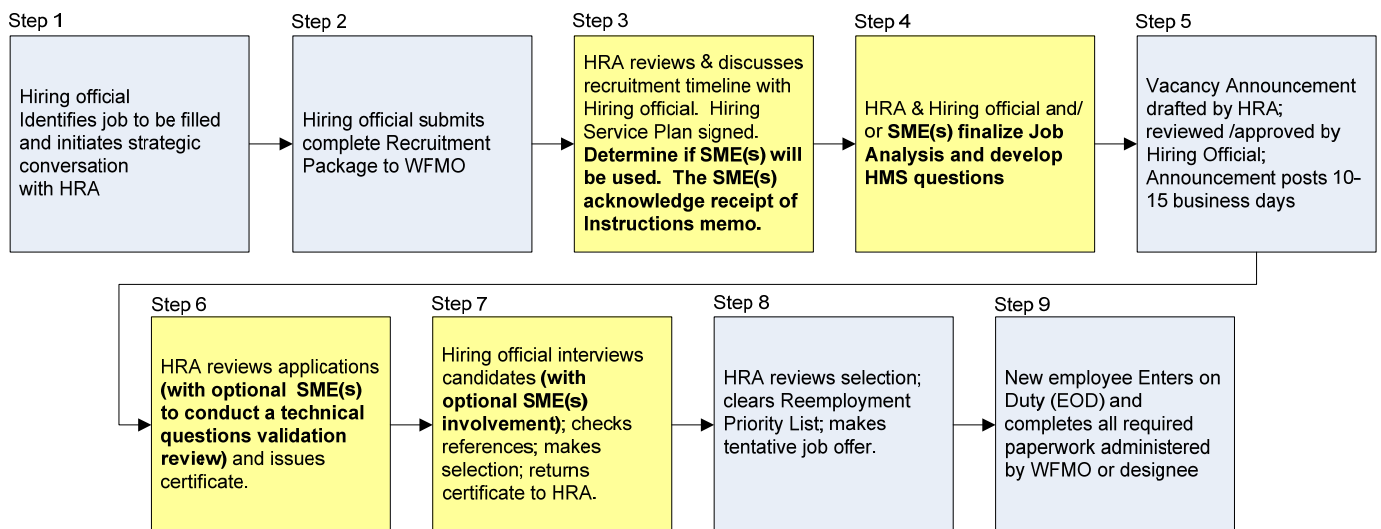
The Subject Matter Expert (SME) is involved in:

- Development of the [Job Analysis](#)
- Development of the Hiring Management System (HMS) Technical Questions
- Validating Applicants Responses to the HMS Technical Questions

Who are good SME candidates?

- A first-level supervisor of a like position.
- Superior incumbents at or above the grade level of the position in the same or very similar positions.
- Individuals with current and thorough knowledge of the job's requirements.

Below is a snapshot of the hiring process. The phases in which the SME is involved are highlighted:



Dos and Don'ts Checklist if a SME is used:

If requested, Do...

- Do make recommendations to the hiring official and the HRA concerning the job analysis based on expert knowledge
- Do recommend to the hiring official HMS technical questions based on expert knowledge.
- Do participate in interview panels.
- Do recommend to the HRA by validating and authenticating applicants' technical answers to HMS technical questions pre-certificate within 5 business days.
- Do treat certificates, resumes, and responses to questions as confidential, personally identifiable information.

Do Not...

- Do not participate in **both** a pre-certificate review and post-certificate review.
- Do not act as a SME if you are considering competing for the position being advertised.
- Do not act as a SME if you are a subordinate or direct report to the position in inquiry.
- Do not act as a SME in a pre-certificate review if you are the hiring official.

Note: An HRA who receives an application from a relative in response to one of their announcements should ask to be recused from further responsibility in handling that announcement. The SME should be instructed to do the same in the event that a relative is an applicant for a position for which the SME is involved. There may be other reasons supporting recusal beyond familial relationships. These should be addressed on a case by case basis.

Developing Hiring Management System (HMS) Technical Questions

Good, constructive questions give the hiring official and Human Resources Advisor (HRA) a better sense of the applicant's ability to fulfill the vacancy requirements. The hiring official may elect a SME to recommend selection or develop new questions that assess or measure the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) of the applicant to determine if they match those needed for a particular position. The hiring official or SME collaborates with the HRA in developing questions for the vacancy announcement. All questions must be specific to the position being advertised.

The HRA will provide the hiring official or SME with the Hiring Management System (HMS) technical questions library web address, user ID, and password. The types of questions are listed below:

- **Multiple Choice:** Ask the applicant to select one choice from a list of predetermined answers.
- **True/False:** Ask the applicant to indicate whether a statement is true or false.
- **Yes/No:** Ask the applicant to agree or disagree with a statement.
- **Short Answer:** The applicant gives a freeform response limited to 250 characters.
- **Applicant Assessment:** The applicants rate their own ability.
- **Number:** The applicant provides a numeric value.
- **Multiple Answer/Multiple Choice:** The applicant selects as many of the predetermined choices as apply.
- **Long Answer:** The applicant gives a freeform response limited to 8,000 characters.

Reviewing [Applicant Responses to HMS Technical Questions](#)

The hiring official may elect a SME to review the resumes and HMS technical question responses of the candidates under the Merit Assignment Plan (MAP) announcement prior to the HRA making a final determination and issuing a referral certificate, to ensure the applicant's answers to technical questions are accurately reflected in their work experience and qualifications. Such a request must be made during the strategic conversation to ensure appropriate timelines are incorporated in the Individual Hiring Service Plan. Note: **The hiring official cannot be the SME during this process.**

The responses to the HMS technical questions are used to evaluate work experiences. The following is a full explanation of the process used to determine how candidates are ranked and referred.

STEP 1: The HMS assigns a preliminary score to the applicant's responses to the experience, training, or awards questions included within the vacancy announcement.

STEP 2: The HRA reviews applicant's basic eligibility (i.e., U.S. citizenship, meets the "Who May Apply" description, and basic OPM qualification requirements).

STEP 3: If the hiring official elected not to assign a SME to validate HMS technical questions, proceed to STEP 5. If the hiring official elected to use a SME to validate HMS technical questions and review applicant resumes, the SME must be provided instructions and acknowledge receipt to the HRA before reviewing applications. The SME is responsible for reviewing **all** applicants' answers to the experience questions to ensure that responses are supported by narrative in the resume. If any technical questions arise regarding applicants' responses, proceed to STEP 4.

STEP 4: If the SME questions an applicant's technical response, such a recommendation must be submitted in writing to the HRA *within 5 business days* from the date the SME received the application packages. The HRA will review the recommendation, and if they concur based on hiring laws, regulations and policy guidance, the written recommendation will be maintained in the MAP file for 3 years from the date of selection, or until an OPM audit is completed, whichever comes first.

STEP 5: The HRA issues a referral certificate.

STEP 6: The hiring official interviews candidates, checks candidate references, makes a selection and returns the certificate to the HRA.

STEP 7: The HRA reviews the selection, clears the Reemployment Priority List, and makes a job offer.

MEMORANDUM FOR: [Name of SME]

Date: [XX/XX/XXXX]

FROM: [Name of HRA], Human Resources Advisor

SUBJECT: Instructions – Handling of Personal Information in the Hiring Process

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide you with instructions regarding the role of the Subject Matter Expert (SME) in the hiring process and to acknowledge your receipt of these instructions. As a SME involved in the reviewing of applicant resumes and/or responses to announcement questions or rating and ranking applicants in the interview process, it is important that you understand the importance of the merit system principles. The duties of the SME are performed as an extension of your official duties and responsibilities; therefore, you are entrusted with assuring that there is adherence to the merit system principles and that you maintain the confidentiality of personal information you review.

In performing your SME role in the recruitment process, you are reminded of the requirements/prohibitions described in Section 2301, Title 5, United States Code; specifically, Federal personnel management should be implemented consistent with the following merit system principles:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Equal pay should be provided for work of equal value, with appropriate consideration of both national and local rates paid by employers in the private sector, and appropriate incentives and recognition should be provided for excellence in performance.
4. All employees should maintain high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest.
5. The Federal work force should be used efficiently and effectively.
6. Employees should be retained on the basis of adequacy of their performance, inadequate performance should be corrected, and employees should be separated who cannot or will not improve their performance to meet required standards.
7. Employees should be provided effective education and training in cases in which such education and training would result in better organizational and individual performance.
8. Employees should be:
 - a. Protected against arbitrary action, personal favoritism, or coercion for partisan political purposes
 - b. Prohibited from using their official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or a nomination for election.
9. Employees should be protected against reprisal for the lawful disclosure of information which the employees reasonably believe evidences:
 - a. A violation of any law, rule, or regulation.
 - b. Mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an absence of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.

Further, the confidentiality of personal information reviewed by you is to be maintained. Individuals that participate in the pre and post certificate review of applicant information should not make prejudicial statements during or after activities. Individuals shall also be careful not to repeat any discussions which may have taken place during the evaluation process, nor reveal to anyone any personal information, individual qualifications, individual rankings or number of candidates who were certified. We suggest that you refer anyone with questions and/or if you have questions/concerns about the process, to the Workforce Management Office.

I acknowledge receipt and understand my obligations and responsibilities:

Printed Name

Signature

Date