

Information on ARS Supergrade Panels

Background

This summary provides essential information about the ARS Supergrade Panel process.

Context

- Agencies are not delegated authority to classify positions above GS-15; therefore the ARS Supergrade Panel only makes a *recommendation* to USDA, which is the approval echelon
- ARS is currently allocated 20 ST slots, which revert to USDA control when vacated
- If no slot is available at the time a researcher is scored above GS-15 by the ARS Supergrade Panel, the incumbent goes to the end of a queue to wait for a slot

Supergrade Panel Philosophy/Criteria

- To ensure ARS submits only “world class” scientists for USDA approval, the Supergrade Panel takes an intentionally conservative approach in evaluating GS-15 referrals
 - Regular panels and AD’s are also instructed to take a conservative approach and not refer cases lightly (see February 2005 AA memo at www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/rpes/files/Referral-Policy.pdf)
- Supergrade Panel focuses almost exclusively on Factor 4/Level E vs Level F criteria
- Supergrade Panel will **not** recommend for ST with a score of 12+12+12+20 (“Factor 4 low”)
- All four of the Factor 4/Level F listed below must be met, or the case must be so strong in three as to offset weakness in a fourth criterion. The incumbent:
 - Has received honors/awards from major national organizations for accomplishments
 - Is sought as advisor and consultant on scientific and technological programs/problems well beyond his/her own field
 - Serves as a recruiting attraction for recent graduates (or visiting scientists)
 - Personal competence is a major consideration in agency sponsorship of programs in his/her field
- ☞ Illustrative examples of activities which do and do not satisfy intent of each Level F criterion are provided at Focusing on Factor 4, Level F Criteria (www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/rpes/files/Focusing%20on%20Factor%204.pdf)
- ☞ These criteria make it clear that scoring as ST is **not** based on “just more GS-15 stuff.”

- Scientists submitting cases to the Supergrade Panel must complete a special form (ARS-229) addressing Factor 4/Level F criteria (see www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/rpes/rpes_forms.htm)
- USDA policy values Level F at 12 points in Factors 1-3, and 24 points in Factor 4
 - The maximum credit a Supergrade Panel can assign is therefore 60 points

Supergrade Panel Composition

- Policy is set by P&P 431.3-ARS, Section 9
- The Chair is always an ST or Senior Scientific Research Service (SSRS, or RA) scientist
- Peer scientists are either ST or RA or—very rarely—grade GS-15 Chairs of regular panels
- At Supergrade Panel level, panelist peer group and scientific discipline are less significant than on regular panels
 - National Program affiliation is generally more important

(4/10)