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Policies and Procedures

Title: Career Enhancement Program

Number: 413.6

Date: January 25, 2002

Originating Office: Human Resources Division, REE Policy Branch, AFM/ARS

This Replaces: Bulletin 98-403 dated October 28, 1998

Distribution: All REE Employees

This Policy and Procedures (P&P) describes the REE Mission Area's Career Enhancement Program (CEP) (formerly the Upward Mobility Program). CEP provides training, experience, and job opportunities for employees whose career prospects are limited, enabling the agency to more fully utilize their talents and abilities.

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1. Purpose

The REE agencies' Career Enhancement Program (CEP) (formerly referred to as Upward Mobility) offers training, experience, and improved job opportunities to employees whose career prospects are limited. For these employees, CEP provides an avenue for advancement to positions of greater responsibility and a means of realizing their full potential. CEP benefits management officials as well by enabling them to more fully utilize the capabilities of their employees. The program also supports diversity by broadening the pool of candidates eligible for selection into these positions.

2. Authorities

- Public Law 86-507, "The Government Employees' Training Act" dated July 7, 1958 (5 U.S.C. 41)
- Public Law 92-261, "The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972" dated March 24, 1972
- Public Law 95-454, "The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978" dated October 13, 1978
- Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 335, 410, and 536
- Department Personnel Manual (DPM) Chapters 335 and 536

3. Employees Covered

Employees in **single grade interval series GS-1 through GS-10 or wage grade equivalent** (i.e., pay rate equal to or less than GS-10, Step 10) with at least **90 calendar days of continuous service** with one of the REE agencies are eligible for CEP. Employees must be serving in one of the following types of appointments:

- Career or career-conditional.
- Excepted appointment of physically and mentally challenged individuals under Schedule A authorities.
- Veterans Readjustment Appointment.

4. Identifying CEP Positions

As a standard operating procedure before recruitment, REE agency managers should review vacant positions to determine if they might be restructured for possible use in CEP. Factors to be considered would include:

- Turnover rate in a particular position.
- Adaptability of position duties for training purposes.
- Number of positions the manager oversees.
- Number of positions in the same general field as the vacancy.
- Possible impact of redistributing duties if the position is restructured.
- Anticipated additional vacancies in the same line of work.

A target position (i.e., the position to which the CEP trainee is aspiring in order to gain permanent entry into the series) may be in most one-grade or two-grade interval occupational series or in any craft/trade or labor occupation properly grouped as semiskilled or skilled.

Positions with a positive education requirement should not be considered for the CEP since the main purpose of this program is to provide an opportunity to those with limited opportunities. If the position requires a degree or course work, this requirement cannot be waived.

Position Descriptions

Position descriptions (PD's) are required for target positions. For an entry level position, the target PD may be used along with a statement of difference. As long as the employee is participating in CEP and receiving training, "(trainee)" will be added to the PD title. Once CEP training is completed, "(trainee)" will be removed from the title.

5. Advertising CEP Vacancies

Vacancy announcements under CEP are similar to regular Merit Promotion/Alternative Merit Promotion announcements. In addition to the basic Merit Promotion requirements (e.g., KSA's, promotion potential, accommodation statement, equal opportunity employer statement, etc.), CEP announcements must include the following:

- Statement that the position is being filled through CEP.

- Identification of both the entry level and the target positions.
- Eligibility requirements, including the provision that employees will be considered who do not meet the full qualification requirements of the target position. (Possible wording: “This position provides training and experience for employees who do not currently meet the qualification requirements for target position. The candidates’ background and potential for success in this program will be assessed in terms of their possession of the following knowledge, skills, and abilities.”)
- Authorization of salary retention for CEP selectees who require a grade or salary change for developmental purposes (in accordance with 5 CFR 536).
- Statement that an individual training plan will be developed, monitored, and must be successfully completed in order for the selectee to be considered for promotion to the target position.

CEP positions are open to all eligible employees.

6. Evaluation, Selection, and Placement

Applicants will be evaluated based primarily on their potential. Candidates selected for participation in CEP must possess an overall background which suggests they will profit from the developmental experience and will perform well in the target position. Selections will be made competitively in accordance with Merit Promotion guidelines without regard to race, color, religion, gender, age, disability, marital status, political affiliation, national origin, family status, or sexual orientation.

Placement into the entry level CEP position will require training as outlined in paragraph 7 below. Assignment of employees into the position may be made through reassignment, change-to-lower grade to include pay retention, or repromotion to a grade not higher than previously held.

7. Training Program

Purpose and Length of Training

The purpose of the CEP is to waive the OPM experience requirements of a target position and place the employee in a trainee entry level position. All CEP trainees must make up the difference between the qualifications they bring to the program and the qualifications outlined in the Office of Personnel Management’s qualification standards for the target position. There is no minimum amount of training prescribed

under CEP; the length of training will vary and depend upon the type of position and prior experience of the trainee. The amount and kind of training experiences required are identified by the supervisor, the employee development specialist (EDS), and the human resources specialist (HRS). This accelerated training program allows one month of training to equal two months of experience. Upon successful completion of the individual training plan, the employee can progress to the target position.

Training Plans

Within 30 days following an employee's appointment to a CEP position, an Individual Training Plan (ITP) must be developed. Development of the ITP is a cooperative effort by the supervisor, trainee, EDS, and HRS.

The ITP includes one or more of the following:

Formal Training. Trainees may participate in government or non-government sponsored training and/or academic courses offered at local schools, colleges, and universities. All training will be related to the duties and responsibilities of the target position. Training may be taken during duty or non-duty hours at the approval of the supervisor. All costs associated with the training to include registration, tuition, books, laboratory fees, etc. will be paid by the gaining office. Overtime pay for time spent in training is not authorized.

On-the-Job Training (OJT). Trainees will be given hands on experience in performing the duties of the target position. This training will be structured and require close supervision by the supervisor or his/her designee.

Developmental Assignments. Assignments should be chosen to help prepare the trainee for the nature and scope of the target position. Assignments should also provide a broad perspective of the occupational field and help the trainee develop technical skills.

Assignment of a Mentor. The supervisor may consider the assignment of a mentor for the trainee. The mentor must be someone other than the supervisor, who is working in the field/series of the trainee's target position and has the experience to serve as a counselor.

At least 50 percent of the trainee's assignments must be devoted to training and gaining experience in the target series.

A sample ITP, reflecting the types of information typically included in such a plan, can be found in Appendix A.

Evaluation of Trainee's Progress

A performance plan must be developed for the trainee no later than 30 days following placement in a CEP position. The plan should be closely linked to the requirements of the ITP. The supervisor will evaluate the trainee's performance and provide feedback on a continuing basis. The quality of the trainee's performance will be formally documented during normal periodic performance reviews (i.e., progress reviews, annual performance appraisals). All training evaluations, both formal and informal, must be discussed with the trainee.

Within 30 days of completion of the ITP, the supervisor will prepare a final narrative evaluation of the trainee's performance and ability to perform the duties of the target position. This evaluation will be forwarded to the EDS for review. Upon concurrence of training completion, the EDS will forward the evaluation to the HRS for final evaluation and approval that all qualification requirements have been met for the target position.

Failure to Complete Training

A CEP trainee who fails to complete the training program—either through voluntary withdrawal or through termination for failure to achieve—will be returned to the position previously held or to a position with similar duties, title, and grade. Any promotions received after entering the program will be forfeited.

If the employee entered the program through voluntary change to lower grade, the employee will be reassigned to an appropriate position at the lower grade. Pay retention for reassigned employees will continue in accordance with laws and regulations. In such cases, repromotion to the employee's former grade will be in accordance with the agency's Merit Promotion plan.

Employees who voluntarily withdraw from training will receive credit for training time on a month-for-month basis and not at an accelerated rate. Agencies may request repayment of training costs for failed or uncompleted course work.

A statement acknowledging the above provisions must be signed by all participants prior to entering the program (a sample Statement of Understanding can be found in Appendix B).

8. Placement in the Target Position

The employee must meet all time-in-grade requirements before being placed in the target position. Satisfactory completion of the ITP will meet the OPM basic qualifications for the target position. Placement in the target position will offer the employee an opportunity for career advancement. Once the target grade has been reached, the employee has completed the CEP. Progression beyond the target position will follow normal merit promotion and career ladder procedures.

9. Records and Reports

A program file containing training records for each CEP participant will be maintained by the Employee Development Section for five years following the completion of training. This data will be utilized by HRD's REE Policy Branch in preparing an annual report of CEP activity to forward to the Department's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). A record of satisfactory completion of CEP training will also be made a permanent part of the employee's Official Personnel Folder.

10. Summary of Responsibilities

All Supervisors, REE Mission Area

- Examine vacant positions and, as appropriate, restructure positions for use in CEP.
- Develop ITP's for CEP trainees.
- Develop performance plan, monitor CEP trainees' progress and submit reports on performance.

CEP Trainees, REE Mission Area

- Participate in developing ITP and devote maximum effort toward completing the requirements.
- Cooperate with supervisors and/or mentors in counseling and evaluation activities.
- Complete all training activities.

CEP Mentors, REE Mission Area

- Work with trainee in developing necessary skills and knowledge.
- Provide advice and guidance as needed to solve problems and maintain morale.
- Provide feedback to supervisor.

Employee Development Specialists, HRD, AFM

- Provide guidance to the supervisor in developing an ITP for CEP positions.

- Review supervisory and employee course evaluations and the final evaluation following the completion of CEP training and verify ITP requirements have been met.
- Maintain individual employee records for five years after completion of the CEP.

Human Resources Specialists, HRD, AFM

- Advise management on vacant positions which may be suitable for restructuring for use in CEP.
- Upon identification of a CEP position, provide the EDS with the SF-52, position descriptions, and vacancy announcement.
- Advertise and process vacancies in accordance with appropriate laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.
- Provide input to the supervisor and EDS in developing an ITP.
- Review the final supervisory evaluation received from the EDS and verify qualification requirements to the target position have been met.

Mission Area Employment Officer, REE Policy Branch, HRD, AFM

- Recommend CEP policies and procedures.
- Provide guidance to supervisors, employees, and human resources specialists on issues related to CEP.
- Prepare annual report of CEP activity for OHRM.

W. G. HORNER
Deputy Administrator
Administrative and Financial Management

Appendix A

INDIVIDUAL TRAINING PLAN (SAMPLE)

- A. TRAINEE:** (CEP Trainee's Name)
- B. PREVIOUS POSITION:** Program Assistant, GS-303-7
- C. ENTRY POSITION:** Administrative Assistant, GS-341-7
- D. TARGET POSITION:** Administrative Officer, GS-341-9
(This position has promotion potential to GS-11 which will be achieved following normal career ladder procedures.)
- E. PURPOSE OF TRAINING:** In furtherance of the REE Career Enhancement Program (CEP), to provide skills and developmental experiences that will qualify the employee for career growth in the target position.
- F. TARGET POSITION QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:** Office of Personnel Management's Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions, Group Coverage Qualification Standard for Administrative and Management Positions, GS-341 Series.
1. General Experience: None
 2. Specialized Experience:
 - a. One year of specialized experience is required.
 - b. Specialized experience is experience which is typically in or related to the work of the position to be filled and which has equipped the applicant with the particular knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully perform the duties of the position.
 - c. To be creditable, specialized experience must have been equivalent to at least the next lower grade level in the normal line of progression for the occupation in the organization.
- G. EMPLOYEE QUALIFICATION EVALUATION:** (CEP trainee's name) has served for several years as a Program Assistant, ending at the GS-303-7 level. Under the provisions of the REE CEP, (trainee's name) was placed at the entry level of the Administrative Officer series, GS-341-7.

INDIVIDUAL TRAINING PLAN

Target Position: Administrative Officer, GS-341-9

Trainee: (Trainee's name)

- H. EXPERIENCE NEEDED TO MEET QUALIFICATIONS:** To qualify for the target position, (trainee's name) will need 1 year of specialized experience in the GS-341 occupation.
- I. GOAL:** To prepare (trainee's name) to become a fully qualified Administrative Officer at the GS-341-9 level. (Trainee's name) may be promoted to GS-9 upon successful completion of the training program and upon meeting time-in-grade requirements.
- J. TRAINING OBJECTIVE:** Under the provisions of the REE CEP, training time to make up the difference in qualifications between what the trainee brings to the CEP and the qualifications required in the published standards may be credited at the rate of 1 month training for 2 months experience. Consequently, it will be possible for (trainee's name) to acquire the 1 year of specialized experience within 6 months.

Therefore, the training objective of this plan is to provide a minimum of 6 months of intensive, accelerated training which will provide the necessary specialized experience to enable the employee to perform as a fully qualified Administrative Officer, GS-341-9. Having served at the GS-7 level for more than a year, (trainee's name) already meets time-in-grade requirements.

- K. TRAINING PLAN:** The Employee Development Section of the Human Resources Division has assisted the trainee's supervisor, (supervisor's name and title), and the trainee, with recommendations from (name and title) and the trainee's mentor, (mentor's name), in the development of the ITP and training schedule.

The training schedule, which is flexible, contains 164 hours (20.5 days) or 148 hours (18.5 days) of formal training activities. The supervisor or designee will identify and assign at least 876 hours (109.5 days) or 892 hours (111.5 days) of substantive, focused administrative officer work assignments for (trainee's name) to perform during the training period.

- L. RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRAINING PLAN:** The trainee's supervisor, (supervisor's name), is responsible for identifying and levying relevant assignments, ensuring that the training plan is carried out, and providing direction and guidance. (Trainee's name) is responsible for completing the identified formal training contained in this plan and work assignments as made by the supervisor.

INDIVIDUAL TRAINING PLAN

Target Position: Administrative Officer, GS-341-9

Trainee: (Trainee’s name)

- M. EVALUATION OF TRAINEE’S PROGRESS:** The supervisor will evaluate the trainee’s performance during normal periodic performance reviews, provide appropriate feedback, and certify that formal training has been satisfactorily completed by filling out Section D, Supervisory Comments, of form SF-182, Request, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training (a copy of this form is available on HRD’s homepage: www.ars.usda.gov/afm/hrd/ [click “Topical Index,” then “WordPerfect Forms”]). Evaluations should include work samples which reflect the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired. Both strengths and weaknesses will be discussed and where necessary corrective action taken which could include additional counseling or training.
- N. DURATION OF TRAINING:** The training period under this ITP will be for 6 months, beginning the effective date of assignment into the entry level position. The program may be extended for up to an additional 6 months should extended sick or annual leave be necessary, or if additional experience is needed to meet the training objective.
- O. TRAINEE’S RESPONSIBILITY:** The trainee is responsible for the successful completion of all training and projects assigned. (Trainee’s name) is also responsible for completing and returning all training evaluations to the Employee Development Section to certify completion of training.

P. CONCURRENCES:

- 1. _____ Date _____
Supervisor
- 2. _____ Date _____
Human Resources Specialist
- 3. _____ Date _____
Employee Development Specialist
- 4. _____ Date _____
CEP Trainee

Appendix B

STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING REE CAREER ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM (SAMPLE)

I, _____, acknowledge the fact that I do not meet the qualification requirements as outlined by the Office of Personnel Management for the career enhancement position of _____. I agree to meet to the best of my ability all performance requirements and complete all necessary training required under the Career Enhancement Program (CEP) in order to reach the target position of GS/WG_____.

I understand the consequences involved if I fail to meet the performance requirements of the CEP training program. (Note: Preparer should specify consequences for each individual, e.g., loss of promotions earned while in the program.)

Trainee's Signature

Date