



# **NOAA Merit Assignment Plan Guide**

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*April 2021*



**Office of  
Human Capital Services**

*People focused. Mission driven.*

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## **SECTION 1.0: PURPOSE**

This issuance is the Merit Assignment Plan (MAP) Guide for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The purpose of this MAP Guide is to set forth policies, procedures, and requirements to ensure that qualified candidates are considered for promotion and assignment to positions in the competitive service, based solely on job-related evaluation criteria and Merit System Principles. The NOAA Office of Human Capital Services (OHCS), also referred to as the Servicing Human Resources Office (SHRO) are to make available the MAP Guide, in writing, to candidates, employees, hiring managers, and the general public upon request.

## **SECTION 2.0: APPLICABILITY**

This MAP establishes the requirements for competitive and noncompetitive promotions, and assignments to competitive service positions in NOAA. It applies to positions filled at General Schedule (GS-1 through GS-15), Federal Wage System (FW), and Commerce Alternative Personnel System (CAPS) equivalent positions in the competitive service and covered by 5 CFR 335. It will be used to ensure that all applicants receive fair, equitable, and appropriate consideration for promotion and assignment. When provisions of this Plan differ from changes in law, regulation, or Department of Commerce (DOC) Policy, the changes in law, regulation, or DOC Policy will apply.

## **SECTION 3.0: AUTHORITY**

- 5 CFR Part 335, Promotion and Internal Placement
- Department Administrative Order (DAO) 202-335, Merit Assignment Program

## **SECTION 4.0: DEFINITIONS**

**4.01 Accretion of Duties.** A non-competitive promotion beyond the career ladder/KPP to a higher grade, pay band in the same career path, occupational series, and supervisory status, or higher FWS grade because higher level duties and responsibilities have been absorbed into the original position. An accretion promotion may be made if: the duties of the original position have been absorbed into a new position, and the employee continues to perform the same duties as the original position, representing an outgrowth of the original position; or where a program change requires the immediate performance of new duties that only one employee within that office is capable of performing. [[5 CFR 335.103](#)]

**4.02 All Sources.** A job opportunity announcement (JOA) in which there are no restrictions on who is eligible to apply and be considered. Anyone may apply and be considered; however, in most cases, U.S. citizenship is required.

**4.03 Applicant Referral Certificate.** The form (electronic or paper) used to submit the names of candidates eligible for consideration by a selecting official and used to document selection decisions.

- MAP certificate – A list of best-qualified applicants in alphabetical order provided to the Selecting Official, and in which the Selecting Official documents selection and non-selection of each applicant.
- Non-Competitive Certificate – A list of qualified applicants who were exempt from the rating and ranking process, usually based upon current or prior Federal service, in alphabetical order provided to the Selecting Official, and in which the Selecting Official documents selection and non-selection of each applicant.
- Special Appointing Authority Certificate – A list of qualified applicants who are eligible for appointment under a noncompetitive special hiring authority (i.e., Schedule A, VRA, 30-percent Disabled Veteran, etc.) and in which the Selecting Official documents selection and non-selection of each applicant.

**4.04 Area of Consideration.** Defines the scope or source from which applications will be accepted. The area of consideration is set forth in the JOA in the section titled “Who May Apply”. Sources include: status applicants, applicants eligible for special appointing authorities, career transition assistance plan (CTAP) and/or Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP), and can also include a geographic area and/or an organizational unit.

**4.05 Best-Qualified.** The certification given to qualified candidates who have been determined superior to other applicants through the rating and ranking process and are referred to the Selecting Official for further consideration.

**4.06 Career Ladder Position.** A position which is filled at a lower grade/band than the highest grade/band to which the position is classified; therefore, the employee can be promoted up to the highest grade/band without further competition.

**4.07 Career Ladder Promotion.** A noncompetitive promotion (without competition) up to the highest classified grade/band of the position when the employee previously competed for and was selected from an Applicant Referral Certificate for the position in which there was known promotion potential (KPP). Employees in a career ladder position may be promoted as they demonstrate the ability and readiness to perform at the next higher grade/band and meet all legal requirements, (e.g., time-in-grade/band/pay). [[5 CFR 335.104](#)]

**4.08 Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) Eligible.** A DOC surplus or displaced employee (in accordance with [5 CFR 330.603](#)), who has a current performance rating of record of at least fully successful or equivalent, applies for a JOA under CTAP consideration, and meets the DOC definition of well-qualified, which is obtaining a score of 85 (having knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or competencies clearly exceeding the minimum qualification requirements of the JOA). CTAP eligibles have **selection priority** for positions within DOC. A displaced employee is usually a permanent employee who has received a reduction-in-force separation notice or received a notice of proposed removal for declining a directed geographic relocation outside of the local commuting area; a surplus

employee is usually a permanent employee who has received a Certification of Expected Separation (for example, position abolishment). [[5 CFR 330.602](#)]

- 4.09 Change to Lower Grade/Band.** The change of an employee from one grade/band to a lower grade/band.
- 4.10 Crediting Plan.** Also known as a rating schedule, is a systematic method (i.e., occupational questionnaire) used to assess and evaluate applicants' job-related experiences. The assessment factors are based on critical job requirements and competencies identified through a job analysis.
- 4.11 Detail/Assignment.** The temporary movement from an employee's position of record to another position, or in some cases to unclassified duties, with no change in grade/band, for a specified period of time whereupon the employee is expected to return to his/her position of record at the end of the specified period. The difference between a detail and an assignment is: A detail is when an employee performs duties other than their position of record duties, when there is a legal authority for such detail. An assignment is when an employee performs one or more of their position of record duties.
- 4.12 Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP) Eligible.** A displaced Federal employee (not from DOC), who has a current performance rating of record of at least fully successful or equivalent, applies for a JOA under ICTAP consideration, and meets the DOC definition of well-qualified, which is obtaining a score of 85 (having knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or competencies clearly exceeding the minimum qualification requirements of the JOA). ICTAP eligibles have **selection priority** for positions within DOC when DOC is accepting applications from individuals outside of its workforce. A displaced employee is usually a permanent employee who has received a reduction-in-force (RIF) separation notice or received a notice of proposed removal for declining a directed geographic relocation outside of the local commuting area.
- 4.13 Job Analysis.** Describes the major functions of the position and the competencies/KSAs directly related to performance of the job. It's the systematic process of gathering, documenting, and analyzing information about the duties and responsibilities of a position. It demonstrates that there is a clear relationship between the tasks performed on the job and the competencies/KSAs that are essential to perform the job, resulting in a valid crediting plan.
- 4.14 Job Elements.** KSAs or other characteristics essential for performance in a FWS position.
- 4.15 Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA).** The document used to notify the public of a position being filled, and contains information about the position such as duties, location, qualification requirements, information required to be submitted, procedures to follow to receive consideration, as well as other required information in title 5, CFR 330.104.

**4.16 Noncompetitive Action.** A promotion, demotion, reassignment, transfer, reinstatement, or an appointment usually based upon current or prior Federal service; however, there are also noncompetitive hiring authorities that are not based on Federal service.

**4.17 Panel Interview.** A structured interview of candidates, conducted by more than one interviewer (i.e., a panel of individuals) that is an assessment method designed to measure job-related competencies of candidates, as well as ensure candidates have equal opportunity to provide information and are assessed consistently. All candidates are asked the same predetermined questions in the same order and all questions are evaluated using the same rating scale and standards.

**4.18 Promotion.**

- Promotion for CAPS Employees Only – The change of an employee to: (a) a higher pay band in the same career path, or (b) a pay band in another career path in combination with an increase in pay.
- Promotion for GS Employees – The change of an employee, while continuously employed, to a higher-grade level.
- Promotion for Federal Wage System (FWS) Employees – The change of an employee, while continuously employed, to a higher FWS grade in the same type of prevailing wage schedule.

**4.19 Promotion Potential.** Identifies the highest grade/band to which the position is classified; therefore, an employee can be promoted up to the highest grade/band without further competition.

**4.20 Qualified.** The rating given to an applicant who meets the established minimum qualifications (based upon OPM Qualification Standards) which may include selective placement factor(s), as well as any eligibility requirements, for the position.

**4.21 Quality Ranking Factors.** Knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) that could be expected to significantly enhance performance in a position, but unlike selective placement factors, are not essential for satisfactory performance.

**4.22 Rating.** A numerical score resulting from the assessment (crediting plan) of the applicant's job-related KSAs, outlined by job elements of the position.

**4.23 Rating of Record.** The performance rating prepared at the end of an appraisal period for performance of agency-assigned duties over the entire period. [[5 CFR 430.203](#)]

#### 4.24 Reassignment.

- **Competitive** – The change of an employee, while serving continuously within DOC, from one position to another position within the DOC at the same grade/band (with no increase in pay for CAPS employees), but with greater promotion potential.
- **Noncompetitive** – The change of an employee, while serving continuously within DOC, from one position to another position within DOC at the same grade/band (with no increase in pay for CAPS employees), and no greater promotion potential or demotion.

**4.25 Reinstatement.** Noncompetitive reemployment in the competitive service as a career or career-conditional employee of a person formerly employed in the competitive service who has competitive status or was serving probation when separated.  
(<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/reinstatement/>)

**4.26 Screen-Out Element.** A critical element that established the minimum qualifications required for a FWS position. Applicants who do not meet the lowest acceptable requirement in the screen-out element are deemed unqualified for the position.

**4.27 Selecting Official.** A management official who has authority to select a candidate for assignment to a position. Only designated human resources officials have authority to extend job offers and actually appoint an individual.

**4.28 Selective Placement Factor.** A specific job-related knowledge, skill, and/or ability that is absolutely required or essential for satisfactory performance in a position. A selective placement factor is in addition to the basic OPM qualification standard for a position and is, therefore, part of the minimum qualification requirements that applicants for the position must meet to be minimally qualified. Failure to meet a selective placement factor will result in an applicant being deemed not qualified for the position.

**4.29 Special Priority Consideration.** The referral of an individual to a Selecting Official in advance of other applicants based on the individual's failure to receive proper consideration in a MAP competitive action when reconstruction of the action shows that the individual would have appeared on the best qualified list of eligibles. Selecting Officials are not required to select the employee. The position must be similar to the lost consideration position, same grade/band, and within the same geographic location.

**4.30 Specialized Experience.** Experience that has equipped the applicant with the particular knowledge, skills and abilities to perform successfully the duties of the position and where the skills are typical for or related to the work of the position to be filled.

**4.31 Status Applicant.** Acquired by completion of a probationary period under a career-conditional following open competitive examination, or by statute, Executive Order, or the Civil Service rules, without open competitive examination. An individual with status may be – without open competitive examination, reinstated, transferred, promoted, reassigned, or demoted – subject to conditions prescribed by the Civil Service rules and regulations.



- 4.32 Subject Matter Expert (SME).** An individual who has full knowledge of the duties of the position and the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform the work of the position. The SME must be at the same grade level or higher than the full performance level of the position to be filled. The SME cannot be the Selecting Official, must not be an applicant for the position, and must not be an applicant’s relative or member of an applicant’s household. The SME must be a Federal employee, not a contractor.
- 4.33 SME Panel.** A permanent or ad hoc committee of subject matter experts, meeting the definition and requirements of “SME above” convened to evaluate and rank candidates.
- 4.34 Time-Limited Promotion.** Also referred to as temporary promotion, is the promotion of an employee for a period having a specific time limitation after which the employee returns to his/her former or an equivalent position. Temporary promotions of 120 days or less can be noncompetitive, promotions more than 120 days have to be competed for.
- 4.35 Transfer.** The change of an employee as a result of a JOA from a position outside of DOC to a position within DOC, or vice versa, without a break in service of one full work day.
- 4.36 Veterans’ Employment Opportunities Act of 1998 (VEOA).** Requires that when an agency (meaning DOC) accepts applications from outside its own workforce, preference eligibles and certain veterans can compete for these vacancies under its MAP procedures. Veterans who are selected are given career-conditional or career appointments. Veterans are those who have been separated under honorable conditions from the armed forces with 3 or more years of continuous active service.
- 4.37 Well Qualified.** The rating in which a CTAP and ICTAP applicant must meet in order to be deemed eligible and referred to the selecting official. “Well qualified” is defined as having knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or competencies clearly exceeding the minimum qualification requirements of the position. Well qualified is not equivalent to best qualified. DOC has determined “well qualified” as receiving a score of 85 on the crediting plan. [[5 CFR 330.606](#) and [5 CFR 330.704](#)]

## **SECTION 5.0: POLICY**

It is the Policy of NOAA to select candidates for competitive service positions in accordance with Merit System Principles and DAO 202-335, Merit Assignment Program. Positions covered by this Plan will be filled solely on the basis of merit, fitness, and qualifications without regard to non-merit reasons and without favoritism or discrimination based on personal relationships or patronage; thus selections will be based solely on job-related criteria.

- **Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO):** Evaluation of eligibility, qualification, and selection will be made on a fair and equitable basis without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, age (as defined by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended), disability, genetic information (including family medical history), marital status, political

affiliation, sexual orientation, labor organization affiliation or non-affiliation, status as a parent, or any other non-merit based factor, or retaliation for exercising rights with respect to the categories above, where retaliation rights are available, or any other factor(s) stated in the Secretary's Policy Statement on Equal Employment Opportunity, or in [5 CFR 300.103 \(c\)](#).

- **Nepotism and Favoritism**: No management official may (in recommending or selecting candidates for promotion) show or give preference to any candidate based upon factors not pertinent to the candidate's qualifications for performing work of a higher level including personal friendship, kinship (by blood, marriage, adoption, or household member) or political connections/affiliation, or any non-merit factor as stated under EEO above. An authorized appointing official may not appoint, employ, promote or advance a relative (by blood, marriage, adoption, or household member) to a position in his/her bureau/line office, nor may he/she advocate a relative for appointment, employment, promotion, or advancement in DOC. An individual may not be appointed, employed, promoted, or advanced if the action was advocated by a management official who is serving in or exercising jurisdiction or control over DOC and who is a relative of the individual. These provisions apply to all individuals in the rating, ranking, evaluating, or selecting processes for actions under this MAP.

## **SECTION 6.0: COVERAGE**

### **6.01 Organizations Covered:**

This MAP applies to all NOAA organizations/Line Offices nationwide, with the exception of those below.

#### *Organizations Not Covered:*

- **The Office of Marine and Aviation Operations Wage Marine** – Positions and employees are covered under excepted service hiring authorities covered under Marine Operation Personnel Branch guidance.
- **NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps** – Positions and employees in the NOAA Corps are covered under NOAA Corps Directives.

### **6.02 Positions/Employees Covered:**

This MAP covers the filling of all competitive service positions listed below:

- General Schedule (GS);
- General Manager (GM);
- Federal Wage Schedule (FWS) – Wage Grade (WG), Wage Leader (WL), Wage Supervisor (WS); and
- Commerce Alternative Personnel System (CAPS) – Scientific and Engineering (ZP), Scientific and Engineering Technician (ZT), Administrative (ZA) and Support (ZS).

**6.03 Personnel Actions Covered:** The policies and procedures [[5 CFR 335.102](#)] of this MAP apply to the following:

1. All promotions not listed in the “Exceptions to Merit Promotion Procedures” outlined in this Plan.
2. Reassignment, transfer, or change to a lower graded position to a position that has greater promotion potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service (except as permitted by reduction-in-force regulations, if applicable).
3. Transfer to a position at a higher grade or with greater promotion potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service.
4. Reinstatement to a permanent or temporary position at a higher grade or with greater promotion potential than a position previously held on a permanent basis in the competitive service.
5. Details to a higher grade, a position with higher promotion potential, or statement of unclassified duties for more than 120 calendar days. Prior service during the preceding 12 months under a non-competitive detail to a higher graded position and non-competitive temporary promotions counts toward the 120 calendar day total.  
[[5 CFR 335.103\(c\) \(1\) \(ii\)](#)]
6. Temporary or time-limited promotions for more than 120 calendar days (prior service during the preceding 12 months under non-competitive time-limited promotions and non-competitive details to higher graded positions counts toward the 120 calendar day total).  
[[5 CFR 335.103\(f\)](#)]
7. Selection for training when training is required for promotion or part of an authorized training agreement or promotion plan (such as a formal upward mobility program or a formal internship).

**6.04 Exceptions to Merit Promotion Procedures:**

1. Non-competitive actions. The competitive procedures of this Policy do not apply to:
  - a. A promotion resulting from an upgrade of a position, without significant change in the duties and responsibilities, due to issuance and application of a new classification standard or the correction of an initial classification error;
  - b. A promotion resulting from an employee’s position being classified at a higher grade because of additional duties and responsibilities. This type of promotion is also known as an “accretion of duties” promotion and is only applicable if the reclassification is based on the successor position absorbing the major duties of the original position resulting in the series remaining the same and the promotion to the

next grade level is within the normal line of progression, see definition for “Accretion of Duties”;

- c. A position change permitted by Reduction-in-Force regulations. [[5 CFR Part 351](#)]
2. A career ladder promotion of an employee who was appointed in the competitive service from an OPM register, by direct hire, through delegated examining authority, by noncompetitive appointment or noncompetitive conversion, or under competitive promotion procedures for a position with known promotion potential, or through merit promotion/assignment procedures for an assignment intended to prepare the employee for the full performance level of the position being filled (also known as a career ladder position). 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.
3. Non-competitive conversion of a Pathways Program (Internship Program, Recent Graduates Program, Presidential Management Fellow Program) employee [[5 CFR Subpart A, 362.107](#)], Veterans Recruitment Appointee [[5 CFR Part 307 Section 307.104](#)], or other excepted appointing authorities in Schedule A, B, C, and D published [[5 CFR Part 213, Subpart A Section 213.103](#)] that allow for noncompetitive conversion.
4. A temporary promotion or detail to a higher grade/band or with known promotion potential for 120 calendar days or less; all details to higher grade positions and temporary promotions, to same position, held during the preceding 12 month period are counted in the calculation of the 120 calendar day total.
5. A temporary assignment under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) [[5 CFR Subchapter B, Part 334](#)].
6. A promotion, reassignment, demotion, transfer, reinstatement, or detail provided: (1) the position is at no higher grade/band than that previously held on a permanent basis under a career or career conditional appointment, (2) the position has no greater promotion potential beyond that of the employee’s current position or the potential is not more than the highest grade previously held on a permanent basis, and (3) the employee was not demoted or separated from that grade/band because of performance or conduct reasons.
7. A promotion of an applicant not given proper consideration in a competitive promotion related action.
8. Appointments of career Senior Executive Service (SES) appointees with competitive service reinstatement eligibility to any position for which they qualify in the competitive service at any grade /band or Senior-Level (SL)/ST positions established under [5 CFR Part 319](#).
9. Selection from the DOC reemployment priority list (RPL).

10. Voluntary change to a lower grade with no greater known promotion than a previously competitive position held on a permanent basis.
11. An increase in pay due to supervisory differential (CAPS positions only).
12. Selections under direct-hire authorities or competitive examining procedures.

## **SECTION 7.0: AREA OF CONSIDERATION**

### **7.01 Determining Area of Consideration:**

The area of consideration must be sufficiently broad to ensure the availability of a reasonably adequate number of best qualified and diverse applicants, taking into account the nature and level of the position. The area of consideration must also adhere to DOC policy and must not be changed while a JOA is open.

Employees within the area of consideration who are absent for legitimate reasons (e.g., on detail, on leave, at training courses, in the military service or serving in public international organizations, or on IPA assignments) must receive proper consideration for promotion if they notify the SHRO in advance and provide a resume, SF-50, etc., prior to the opening of a JOA. Employees are responsible for seeking information on positions of interest and applying for such positions by the required application deadline.

Prior to recruiting for position, the Selecting Official, in consultation with the SHRO, should determine the appropriate recruitment strategy and the appropriate area of consideration.

### **7.02 Minimum Area of Consideration:**

The area of consideration must be at least DOC-wide. Exceptions to the “area of consideration” must be approved by DOC Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). Written approval must be obtained and filed in the recruitment folder prior to posting the JOA.

## **SECTION 8.0: OPEN PERIOD**

The standard open period for a JOA is 7 calendar days (or current DOC policy); open continuous; or a designated number of applicants received, with 50 being the minimum. The SHRO may approve a longer than 7 calendar day open period, but not less than 7 calendar days.

The SHRO may use open and continuous JOAs for a period of 1 year to advertise recurring vacancies or where recruitment is expected to be difficult. However, the JOA must identify designated cut-off dates within the open period, or another method such as a designated number of applications received. The JOA must clearly state that applicants have to reapply after each designated cut-off date, or notification that a register was established.

## **SECTION 9.0: JOB OPPORTUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **9.01 Requirements:**

A job opportunity announcements, at a minimum, will provide the following information:

- Job opportunity 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 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; and
- Instructions on how to receive job opportunity announcement information and apply for vacancies advertised in the electronic application system to applicants who do not have access to a computer.

### **9.02 Special Priority Consideration:**

JOAs should clearly reflect the requirements for all applicable special consideration.

1. Selection Priority – Eligible surplus or displaced Federal employees are entitled to selection priority through the CTAP or ICTAP.
2. Placement Priority – Some current and former DOC employees may be eligible for placement priority through the RPL.
3. Special Priority Consideration – An applicant who fails to make a promotion certificate because of improper consideration (i.e., wrong qualification determination, failure to consider, improper rating, etc.) shall receive consideration for the next appropriate JOA for which he/she qualifies as long as a selection was made from the certificate in which the applicant did not receive proper consideration.
  - a. An appropriate JOA is a position at the same grade/band level, same line of work, same area of consideration, and comparable (no greater or less) promotion potential as the position for which the applicant received improper consideration.

- b. The applicant receives one instance of priority consideration for each instance of failure to receive proper consideration.
- c. Applicants remain on the priority consideration listing for 1 year from the date the error was identified, until their name is referred on a certificate for consideration, or when he/she declines a position through priority consideration; whichever is sooner.
- d. Priority consideration does not provide selection entitlement.
- e. Documentation of the consideration must be maintained with the JOA case file.
- f. The individual must be considered by the selecting official before other applicants are referred.

If improper consideration is identified and the promotion certificate is still active, the certificate is amended to include the qualified applicant's name and the Selecting Official is notified; therefore, special priority consideration is not warranted.

### **9.03 Waiting Period to Re-advertise a Vacancy:**

Requests to re-advertise cancelled JOAs must be reviewed and approved by the OHCS Consulting Services Division (CSD) Director or designee who is delegated such authority. If there are no significant changes to the previous JOA and the normal progression occurred (i.e., announcement closed, cert issued, and non-selection made) the selecting official must wait 90 days from the date the certificate of eligible was issued before the position can be re-advertised. If a position needs to be re-advertised for a staffing error or no fault of management, then the SHRO should work to re-advertise the JOA as soon as possible.

The JOA may be re-posted immediately if there are three or less qualified applicants to be referred on the original certificate or significant changes from the first JOA.

## **SECTION 10.0: QUALIFICATION AND EVALUATION**

### **10.01 Qualifications:**

Candidates must meet the minimum qualification standards prescribed by OPM and all eligibility requirements (e.g., time-in-grade/band) by the closing date specified in the JOA to be eligible for consideration. Applicants who apply under open continuous announcements must meet all eligibility requirements by the established cut-off dates or other defined mechanism to be eligible for consideration.

### **10.02 Evaluation and Ranking:**

If a candidate meets basic eligibility and minimum qualification requirements, SHRO has two options to rate and rank applicants to determine the best qualified candidates.

Due weight shall be given to performance appraisals and incentive awards.

- **Option 1:** The use of an SME or panel. The SME (panel) is used to verify applicants' responses to technical questions to ensure that responses are supported by information provided in the resume. All candidates determined to meet basic eligibility and minimum qualification requirements will be forwarded to the SME (panel). An OHCS employee will serve as an HR advisor for the process and must be present or readily available throughout the rating process. The selecting official cannot serve as a SME or be present during the SME deliberations.

**Note:** The SME cannot make minimum qualification determinations, these determinations must be made by human resources. When there are 10 or fewer candidates who meet minimum qualifications, simplified candidate evaluation procedures, such as Option 2, are recommended to yield a larger applicant pool.

- **Option 2:** The use of the automated hiring system: The automated hiring system uses the applicant's responses to technical questions and assigns a numeric score based on established evaluation criteria outlined in the job analysis and crediting plan.

Applicants who are deemed non-competitive based on a hiring authority (i.e., Schedule A, 30-percent disabled veteran, etc.), reinstatement eligibility, etc., are not rated and ranked; therefore, such applicants are placed on a separate non-competitive certificate of eligible. However, veterans' preference must be applied in accordance with title [5 CFR Chapter I, Subchapter B, Part 302](#) to excepted service non-competitive hiring authorities.

## **SECTION 11.0: RESPONSIBILITY**

### **11.01 Office of Human Capital Services:**

1. Oversee this Plan to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all applicants for all positions.
2. Consulting Services Division (CSD) – OHCS teams of highly skilled HR Business Partners and Advisors who work directly with Line and Staff Offices to design NOAA's future workforce and implement innovative recruitment and workforce strategies.
  - a. Provide technical guidance to management, supervisors, employees, and applicants on all merit promotion matters;
  - b. Advise management on pay setting criteria in the applicable pay system (i.e., CAPS and GS);
  - c. Assist management in determining the appropriate area of consideration sufficiently broad to ensure the availability of a diverse group of best qualified applicants taking into consideration the nature and level of the position covered;



- d. Advise management on the development and documentation of the job analysis process and assisting management in the development of the job-related crediting plan (evaluation criteria), including determining whether or not the use of a selective factor is appropriate;
- e. Advise management on [Merit System Principles](#) and [Prohibited Personnel Practices](#); and
- f. Advise management on established hiring metrics (i.e., 80-calendar day hiring metrics).

### **11.02 Contracted Staffing Provider:**

- 1. In partnership with CSD, they provide streamlined operational services to all NOAA customers. Together, the Contracted Staffing Provider and CSD make up the Servicing Human Resources Operation (SHRO).
  - a. Review the DOC Resume Bank (if applicable) and the RPL for the local commuting area of the position during the following points of the recruitment process: before JOA is posted; prior to issuing referral certificate; and before tentative job offer is issued.
  - b. Use the various hiring authorities available to appoint individuals to include Persons with Disabilities and authorized/approved Direct Hire Authority (DHA) for specified permanent or non-permanent positions that have a severe shortage of candidates or critical hiring need.
  - c. Develop JOAs; receive applications; determine applicant eligibility and minimum qualifications; oversee the evaluation of applicants; issue referral certificates or list of eligibles; make job offers; notify applicants of application status by changing applicants' status throughout the hiring process; update HR recruitment systems; and maintain and close recruitment folders.

### **11.03 Selecting Officials (Managers and Supervisors):**

- 1. Assist with recruitment outreach and recruitment options in locating qualified candidates;
- 2. Apply the Merit Systems Principles and requirements of this MAP when filling a position;
- 3. Initiate and submit requests for recruitment actions to the ESC team;
- 4. Adhere to the established hiring metrics;
- 5. Develop Workforce Plans;

6. Participate in the strategic conversations with CSD staff prior to creating recruitment packages;
7. Use standardize classified and/or classified and validated position descriptions and recruitment packages for similar NOAA positions;
8. Use shared hiring certificates when feasible;
9. Grant due process for performance appraisals and awards in accordance with [5 CFR 335.103\(b\)\(3\)](#) during the selection process;
10. Select or not select from among a group of best qualified candidates; and
11. Select from other appropriate sources, such as reemployment priority lists, reinstatement, transfer, Veteran Recruitment Act (VRA) eligible, 30-percent disabled veterans, Schedule A persons with disability, or competitive certificate.

#### **11.04 Employees/Applicants:**

1. Demonstrate possession of the KSAs, selective placement factor(s) (if applicable) and other characteristics or competencies necessary to qualify for positions in which desired for consideration.
2. Submit all required application materials (also known as supporting documentation) as specified in the JOA by the closing date of the announcement, or specific cut-off dates of an open continuous announcement.
3. Seek information on positions of interest and apply for such positions by the required application deadline, including those on extended approved absences (e.g., on leave, official travel, detail, at training courses, in the military service, or long-term training).
4. Maintain current and accurate resume. Periodically or at least whenever relevant or significant employment information changes review resume to validate the contents within the resume.

#### **11.05 Subject Matter Expert (SME)/SME Panel:**

1. Provide and make recommendations based on expertise to the SHRO, in regards to relevant information needed to fill a vacant position.
2. Sign the job analysis only if he or she assisted the Selecting Official in the development of such document.
3. Treats resumes, personally identifiable information, and responses to questions as confidential.

4. Provide due weight for performance appraisals and incentive awards to applicants in accordance with [5 CFR 335.103\(b\)\(3\)](#).

## **SECTION 12.0: REFERRAL AND ORDER OF SELECTION**

### **12.01 Referral Certificate:**

The MAP Certificate will list the names of the best-qualified competitive applicants in alphabetical order for the JOA to be filled. Best qualified is defined as those whose scores fall within the range of the corresponding competitive examining JOA “GOLD” category, or have scores that fall between 90 and 100 if there is no corresponding competitive examining JOA. There is no limit on the number of best qualified applicants that can be referred. Selecting Officials may adjust the range for the “Gold” category, as needed, prior to the opening date of the JOA, in accordance with DOC policy.

In addition to the best-qualified applicants referred on the MAP Certificate, qualified applicants may be referred without regard to the rating and ranking process on Non-competitive Certificates in alphabetical order. The following are examples of non-competitive eligibles.

Qualified Merit applicants that previously held a position on a permanent basis at or with known promotion potential to the highest grade/band level of the position being advertised may be referred on a Non-competitive Certificate. If selected, current Federal service employees will be reassigned or transferred into the position with no increase in pay.

Qualified applicants eligible for special appointment authorities may also be referred, without regard to rating and ranking, under a Special Appointing Authority Certificate. The most common special appointment authorities are: Schedule A (individuals with disability), VRA, and 30-percent Disabled Veterans.

When there are fewer than three candidates within the range of the corresponding competitive examining JOA “GOLD” category, upon concurrence by the hiring manager, all individuals within the range of the corresponding competitive examining JOA “SILVER” category – or have scores that fall between 80 and 89, if there is no corresponding competitive examining JOA – may be referred to the hiring manager.

Selecting Officials may request that additional names be added to a MAP Certificate if applicants on the original certificate decline or withdraw from further consideration, fail to reply, or are removed from consideration by the Selecting Official, provided the Selecting Official can justify in writing why the referred applicant is not suitable for selection. The number of additional names added to the Certificate should not exceed the number of applicants removed from the original Certificate.

Selecting Officials may request additional applications when applicants have been removed from consideration, and the Selecting Official can justify in writing why the referred applicants are not suitable for selection to the position. Applicants are referred based upon system applicant score in the hiring management system. Referral will be of those applicants with the next highest

score (outside of the Gold category). In the event of tied scores, all candidates with tied scores will be referred.

### **12.02 Expiration of Certificates:**

Merit Promotion Certificates are valid for 30 calendar days from the date issued and may be extended for 30 additional calendar days with approval of a Human Resources Business Partner. Approval will be granted on a case-by-case basis. Requests/justifications must be submitted prior to the initial expiration date of the certificate. Selecting Officials may receive one 30-day extension of a Merit Promotion Certificate. Extensions beyond the initial 30-day extension must be approved by the DOC OHRM Director.

### **12.03 Shared Certificates:**

In an effort to promote efficiency in the hiring process, every effort is to be made to share referral certificates. The SHRO is strongly encouraged to conduct internal pre-recruitment assessments prior to posting a JOA to see if an opportunity exists to share a referral certificate. In an effort to expedite hiring needs, Line and Staff Office Selecting Officials can use a referral certificate that was previously issued and is still valid for like positions in the same geographic location, if the JOA indicated that more than one position may be filled. To ensure that a valid opportunity exists, SHRO must review all aspects of the JOA to ensure that it is the same, prior to permitting the Selecting Official to use the same referral certificate including: the title, series, grade/band, promotion potential, general job responsibilities, location, Line/Staff Office, selective factors, KSAs documented in the job analysis, any testing requirements stated in the original JOA, and the payment of relocation expenses.

### **12.04 Interviews:**

Selecting Officials are not required to interview any candidates, including those listed on the competitive MAP certificate; they may choose to interview one, some, none, or all of the candidates on a certificate of eligibles.

To further ensure fairness and equity in the hiring process, managers are encouraged to develop standard questions for each vacancy. Follow-up questions may be asked. Notes made during the interview process must be maintained by the selecting official for 3 years. (See section 15.0: Documentation and Records Maintenance.)

Selecting Officials and/or SHRO staff may receive requests for reasonable accommodation during the interview process from applicants with disabilities. Requests for reasonable accommodation must be handled in accordance with applicable Department of Commerce and NOAA policy.

### **12.05 Order of Selection:**

Management reserves the right to select or not select from among a group of “best qualified” candidates to determine whether or not to fill a vacancy through merit promotion or from another

regulatory source (i.e., transfer, reemployment priority list, reinstatement, 30-percent disabled veteran, Schedule A, Peace Corps, VRA, or competitive certificates.

Selections must be made in the following order, as applicable:

1. NOAA CTAP – local commuting area;
2. DOC CTAP – Local commuting area;
3. DOC CTAP – Outside of the local commuting area;
4. Eligible DOC Employees/applicants (optional);
5. RPL Eligibles;
6. ICTAP – Local commuting area; and
7. Eligible employees/applicants from outside of DOC.

**Note:** If there are no RPL or ICTAP eligibles, then the Selecting Official may select either DOC employee/applicant or outside DOC employee/applicant.

Applicants have the right to review records used to evaluate them under this MAP in accordance with applicable Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) regulations. Records are maintained for 2 years or until after an OPM audit, whichever is sooner.

### **SECTION 13.0: CAREER LADDER (FULL PERFORMANCE LEVEL)**

Career ladders are the successive grades/pay bands through which an employee may advance to the full performance level of a position. Incumbents may be promoted noncompetitively upon demonstration of their ability and readiness to perform at the next higher pay band or grade in the career ladder, and when legal requirements are met. No employee shall receive a career ladder promotion unless the employee's current rating of record is at least "Fully Successful" (level 3) for GS and FWS, or Eligible or higher for CAPS. In addition, no employee may receive a career ladder promotion if the employee has a rating below "Fully Successful" (level 3) for GS and FWS, on a critical element that is also crucial to successfully performing at the next higher grade of the career ladder.

### **SECTION 14.0: GRIEVANCES**

An employee who believes that governing procedures were not properly followed in filling a position under this Plan or who believes that his or her qualifications were not properly evaluated may grieve or complain under applicable grievance procedures or in accordance with a negotiated and/or Collective Bargaining Agreement, as applicable. Non-selection from among a group of properly ranked and certified candidates is not a grievable matter, unless it is based on prohibited discrimination by U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Management and OHCS staff will make every effort to resolve employee concerns regarding competitive placement procedures under this Plan. For non-bargaining unit employees, eligible

complaints related to the application of this Plan are to be processed under the administrative grievance procedures prescribed in [DAO 202-771](#). Employees in a bargaining unit for whom the negotiated grievance procedure (NGP) does not specifically exclude this matter, must use the NGP. If the NGP specifically excludes this matter, the bargaining unit employee must use DAO 202-771. Allegations of discrimination are considered under relevant provisions of the EEO program managed by the [NOAA Office of Inclusion & Civil Rights](#).

When there is a failure to adhere strictly to the provisions of 5 CFR, DOC Orders/policies or this Plan, corrective measures shall be applied promptly and in accordance with the corrective action guidance set forth in 5 CFR 335, or the NGP, as applicable.

#### **14.01 Reconsideration for Qualification Determination**

An applicant's request for a reconsideration of basic eligibility or qualification determination (to include minimum, "well-qualified" or "best-qualified" determinations) must be submitted via email to the SHRO team prior to the selection of an applicant by the Selecting Official. When a request for reconsideration is received from an applicant, the SHRO will review the request and provide a written response to the request with a full explanation of the reasons for the decision within 3 business days. A staff member other than the person who made the original decision must conduct the review. If the rating or score is modified, and the new score places the applicant on the referral certificate, the SHRO will notify the Selecting Official, and an amended certificate will be issued to the Selecting Official. The written request and response must be retained in the recruitment folder.

An applicant may request a second level review within 3 business days. The request, along with the decision documentation from the first review, must be forwarded to CSD for additional review and a final decision. The CSD Director or designee must notify the applicant of the decision via email within 3 business days.

### **SECTION 15.0: MODIFICATION TO THIS PLAN**

The OHCS Director has the authority to grant exceptions to or modify NOAA MAP policies that are not mandated by law, regulation, or Department policy, for the efficiency and good of the service.

#### **15.01 Documentation and Records Maintenance**

The SHRO will document each action or group of actions from a Merit Promotion Certificate affected under this MAP. The records maintained must be sufficient to allow reconstruction of the case. The case file may be a hard copy or electronic. Records and other applicable regulations used to document competitive recruitment actions will be maintained for a minimum of 3 years.

Recruitment case files must be retained indefinitely if the case is identified for auditing or litigation purposes. Once the audit or litigation is completed, case files will be retained 3 years from the effective date of the outcome.

## **SECTION 16.0: VIOLATIONS**

### **16.01 Program Review**

OHCS and higher authority entities are responsible for reviewing internal merit principles of this plan.

1. Quarterly OHCS reviews will be conducted on an ongoing basis.
2. OHCS shares accountability for merit system compliance with the Selecting Officials. This responsibility is accomplished through internal quality review processes and by providing OHCS customer service feedback by method of survey. The results of such services will be documented as necessary to provide data for assessment and follow-up during audits and reviews.
3. Review Reports: Reports should measure the controls in place and used to determine regulatory compliance.
4. Random quarterly reviews and audits of referral certificates. The Quarterly Review will be conducted in addition to the Quality Assurance and Accountability Division 20-percent monthly audit of referral certificates. Upon completion of the Quarterly Review/Monthly Audit, a report documenting the findings, any required corrective actions needed and date by which the Human Resources Business Partners must complete the corrective actions and return their response for review and closeout is issued.

### **16.02 Corrective Action**

Immediate action should be taken to correct a violation or program deficiency. Appropriate corrective action required as a result of a procedural, regulatory, or program violation of this Plan or regulations will be accomplished in accordance with relevant sections of titles 5 United States Code and Code of Federal Regulations.

In order to ensure that actions are processed in accordance with regulatory and/or procedural requirements, corrections of errors or oversight will be made within 30 days of discovery to include correcting any outstanding referral certificate lists. The competitive recruitment folder will be labeled as a “reconstructed” folder and revised documents will also be labeled as a “reconstructed” document.

## **SECTION 17.0: POLICY CONTACTS**

Questions regarding this MAP Guide should be directed to the NOAA Office of Human Capital Services, Human Capital Policy Division, at (301) 628-1800.