



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics
Agricultural Research Service

SUBJECT: Recruitment – Use of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
and Selective Factors

TO: Supervisors and Managers

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As a supervisor or manager in ARS, one of your most important assignments is to recruit and fill vacant positions in your organization. The steps you take at the beginning of this process to define the requirements of your position will be critical to receiving a pool of quality applicants to consider for your position.

The recruitment process actually begins when you identify the need to fill a position in your organization. After the Human Resources (HR) specialist receives your Request for Personnel Action (SF-52) and classifies the position, a vacancy announcement will be drafted by your HR specialist which outlines the major duties and responsibilities and the basic qualifications and specialized experience requirements of your position.

It is your responsibility as the supervisor to review the announcement and validate the information presented, including the specialized experience requirements proposed. It is also your responsibility to outline any proposed selective factors for your position. Enclosed is a brief document which addresses your role in the recruitment process and in defining the qualification requirements for your vacancies.

As you begin efforts to recruit for your organization, you should discuss issues with your HR specialist so that the process works well for you. You should begin to identify who and where your applicant pool is and make sure that your announcement reaches your applicant pool. Posting a vacancy announcement on the USAJOBS and the ARS web site is only the first step in publicizing the vacancy. You should also consider placing print and online ads in publications and on web sites which will reach your potential applicant pool; mailing copies of your announcements to colleges and universities and other organizations; contacting your local Vocational Rehabilitation Office; sharing the
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announcement with your current employees and encouraging them to help in your recruitment efforts; and sharing information on your vacancy with friends and colleagues who might know of potential candidates.

Your HR specialist, along with the staff of the ARS Recruitment Office, can help you in the recruitment process. Working together, we can ensure that everything possible is being done to publicize opportunities for employment in ARS.

If you have questions about the information provided in this memo or the enclosed document, please contact your servicing HR specialist.

Enclosure

cc:

Administrators Council

Administrative & Financial Management Council

Location Administrative Officers

HRD Branch Chiefs

HRD Servicing Specialists

Your Role in the Recruitment Process

The recruitment process is a collaborative effort between you and your servicing Human Resources (HR) specialist. You should discuss with your servicing HR specialist the requirements of your position to ensure that the vacancy announcement issued outlines appropriate information and qualification requirements. The qualification requirements identified under Specialized Experience need to reflect what is actually required to perform the major duties and responsibilities of your position. Together you will need to analyze the validity of the specialized experience requirements to decide if a selective factor is appropriate to include in the announcement.

Qualification Requirements

There are three parts to the qualifications process – (1) basic qualifications, (2) specialized experience, and (3) selective factors. Specialized experience and selective factors are addressed in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). KSAs are used exclusively to document the specialized experience and selective factor requirements for positions. KSAs must be evidenced by something tangible, i.e., work experience or education.

Basic Qualifications:

The qualification standards issued by the Office of Personnel Management outline the basic qualification requirements which identify the minimum education, training, and experience applicants need to possess in order to be basically qualified for an occupation.

Basic qualifications are those qualifications identified in the occupational series qualification standards used in the Federal recruitment process. Sometimes a basic qualification requirement will be a positive education requirement. For example, the qualification standard for Chemists in the 1320 occupational series indicates a requirement for a degree in physical sciences, life sciences, or engineering that included 30 semester hours in chemistry OR a combination of experience and education which includes at least 30 semester hours in chemistry.

Specialized Experience:

KSAs used as specialized experience requirements should reflect the basic required knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform the major duties and responsibilities of a position. They should be linked to the classification of the position, and the classification standard and position description should serve as an important resource for development of the specialized experience requirements. The KSAs under specialized experience should reflect the qualification requirements for a particular occupational series.

Selective Factors:

While the KSAs used under specialized experience should reflect the qualification requirements of a particular occupational series, the KSAs identified as selective factors should reflect specific, unique KSAs which are required for a particular position. Without possession of these KSAs, an incumbent could not perform a required, unique major duty. Selective factors are particular job requirements which:

- C Cannot be learned within approximately 90 days;
- C Reflect mandatory qualifications needed to perform major duties (absolute requirement versus a nice-to-have requirement).

Two good examples of selective factor KSAs are (1) ability to speak a foreign language and (2) ability to operate a specialized piece of equipment.

Selective factors should not be so narrowly defined that they exclude from consideration applicants who could perform the duties of the position.

The use of selective factors in vacancy announcements should be kept to a minimum. They should only be used when you have identified a unique job requirement that is mandatory for the applicant to possess in order to function in the job.

Difference Between Selective Factor and Specialized Experience KSAs

- C Selective factors are requirements which are position specific and are in addition to the basic qualifications and specialized experience requirements of the position.
- C When deciding on the use of selective factors you should ask yourself, “Is this KSA an absolute requirement or is it something that would be nice-to-have?”
- C Candidates only have to show evidence of a selective factor in terms of education and/or experience unlike a specialized experience KSA where the candidate must have one year at the next lower grade as evidence of specialized experience.
- C Including a selective factor such as “Ability to plan, conduct, and publish research,” requires only that a candidate show evidence that they have had experience or education to meet the selective factor. Using this same KSA as a specialized experience requirement would require the candidate to show that they have one year of experience and/or education at the next lower grade level to meet this requirement.

In order for the recruitment process to be effective, the KSAs used as selective factors should not be the same as those specified under basic qualifications or specialized experience. The specialized experience KSAs should build on the basic qualification requirements for the occupational series. The selective factors should build on the specialized experience KSAs that you have defined so that you get candidates who meet all the necessary qualification requirements for your position. For example, a basic

qualification requirement for a microbiologist is a degree in microbiology or at least 20 semester hours in microbiology. Using a specialized experience requirement KSA such as, “Skill in techniques, principles, and practices of microbiology,” would be redundant and does not add any value to the qualifications review process. The applicant will have already met the basic qualification requirement of at least 20 semester hours in microbiology which should have included education on the techniques, principles, and practices of microbiology.

Example of a Non-Effective KSA:

In some instances, KSAs are being used in vacancy announcements which cannot be evaluated in the qualification review process. A good example of a non-effective KSA is:

Ability to communicate orally and/or in writing.

This KSA cannot be evaluated from a written application because it is a qualitative judgment on how WELL or EFFECTIVE an applicant communicates. It is more appropriate to evaluate this type of job requirement in the interview and/or reference check process.

If communication is important to a position, it would be more appropriate to identify the KSA as:

Ability to develop and present formal presentations.

Using the KSA in this manner, the applicant can now outline their experience and training which documents their ability to develop and present formal presentations.