NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT OFFICE (WFMO)

HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) GUIDANCE BULLETIN #FY13-002

SUBJECT: Use of Subject Matter Experts in the Recruitment Process

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon release of this HR Guidance Bulletin

EXPIRATION DATE: Effective until canceled or superseded

SUPERSEDES: N/A

BACKGROUND: The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) allows the use of a Subject Matter Expert (SME) in the recruitment process. A SME is an individual within a department or agency who is thoroughly familiar with a given topic and can provide expert input as to the appealing aspects of a job and the skills and other qualities required of a job applicant.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this HR Guidance Bulletin is to provide detailed and precise instructions on how to effectively use Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) for the development of job analysis, recommendation of occupational questions for evaluating applicants and verification of applicant's responses to the technical occupational questions based on the applicant's resumes when applying to vacant positions within NOAA.

Responsibilities

The Hiring Official and/or the first line supervisor of the position to be filled is responsible for identifying an appropriate SME and/or assisting in the development of the job analysis with or in the absence of a SME. Should the Hiring Official assist with the development of the job analysis, they will be responsible for reviewing and signing the job analysis to indicate approval/agreement.

A 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 Specialist (HRS) 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.
Note: The SME is not responsible for reviewing applications to determine qualifications as that role is delegated to the HRS. Additionally, SMEs cannot meet the following conditions:

- SMEs cannot participate in both a pre-certificate review and post-certificate review.
- SMEs cannot be involved if the SME is considering competing for the position being advertised.
- SMEs cannot be a subordinate or direct report to the position being filled.
- SMEs in a pre-certificate review process cannot be the hiring official.

Human Resources Specialists (HRS) within the WFMO Advisory Services Division (ASD) are responsible for working with either the Hiring Official or designated SME to develop job analysis and crediting plans

**Advisory Services role of the SME** – before the Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) is developed.

1. Assists with the development of the job analysis.


3. Assists with preparation of recruitment package.

**Pre-Certificate role of the SME** – before the Selection Certificate is issued to the Hiring Official by the Workforce Management Office:

1. For highly technical or scientific positions when requested by the Human Resources Specialist (HRS), confirms the candidate meets specialized experience. The final qualifications determination is made by the WFMO Human Resources Specialist.

2. Validates applicants’ responses to technical questions during the rating and ranking process. SMEs will be expected to document, sign and date recommended changes to the applicant’s response(s) using the SME Checklist.

3. The SME Checklist is reviewed by the HRS to determine that recommended changes to the applicant’s responses are supportable. Final determination to revise the applicant’s scores is the responsibility of the Human Resources Specialist.

4. Treats resumes, personally identifiable information and responses to questions as confidential.
Post-Certificate role of SME - after the Selection Certificate is issued to the Hiring Official by the Workforce Management Office:

(1) Participate in the formal interview process.

(2) Make selection recommendations to the hiring official or hiring panel.

(3) Treats certificates, resumes, and responses to questions as confidential, personally identifiable information.

Retention Period

In accordance with Title 5, CFR, Part 335, to allow for recordkeeping and the provision of necessary information to employees and the public, ensuring that individuals’ rights to privacy are protected, all signed documents will be maintained sufficiently to allow for reconstruction of the promotion action.

Such information will be retained for a period of 2 years or after WFMO has been formally evaluated by OPM (whichever comes first) if the time limit for grievance has lapsed before the anniversary date.

Attachments

(1) Subject Matter Expert Validation Instructions, Checklist
(2) SME Job Aid


FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Contact the Policy, Oversight and Accountability Division, (301) 713-6302.
Subject Matter Expert Validation Instructions and Checklist

Vacancy Announcement Number
Position Title, Series and Grade

You have been identified by the selecting official as the Subject Matter Expert (SME) for the above listed vacancy. As the subject matter expert you are responsible for the following:

- Reviewing/Validating the Gold Category applicant’s responses to the technical position related questions using only the information that’s contained in the applicant’s application material.
  - The servicing Human Resources Specialist will provide a copy of the vacancy questions and corresponding answer choices, Gold Category applicant’s resumes, responses to the Hiring Management System questions, and the spreadsheet that must be used to document any adjustments, if applicable.
- Documenting, in writing, any adjustments and the reason for such.
- Upon validation if no changes are required, you will state in the “Justification of Adjustments” section “Reviewed, no changes required.”
- Keeping applicant’s information and any knowledge of the recruitment action confidential.

My signature implies that I have been made aware of my role and responsibility in this process, that I have received all items necessary to complete the validation process from the servicing HR Specialist. I also understand that a copy of all information will be retained in the case file and may be released if requested under FOIA regulations.

Printed Name

Signature

Date
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<tr>
<th>Applicant’s Name</th>
<th>Questions # Being Reviewed</th>
<th>Adjustments Made</th>
<th>Justification of Adjustments</th>
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My signature implies that I have used only information contained in the applicant’s application material to review, validate, and adjust (where applicable) any score changes. If no changes have been made I have stated such above. I also understand that a copy of all information will be retained in the case file and may be released if requested under FOIA regulations.

__________________________
Signature

__________________________
Date
Job Aid for Subject Matter Experts

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 Specialist (HRS) 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. Important Note: The same SME cannot serve in both the Pre-certificate review tasks and the Post-certificate tasks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SME Pre-Certificate Review Tasks</strong></th>
<th><strong>SME Post-Certificate Tasks</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Assist with the development of the job analysis.</td>
<td>• Participate in the formal interview process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assist with the development of the Hiring Management System (HMS) Technical Questions.</td>
<td>• Make selection recommendations to the hiring official or hiring panel.</td>
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<td>• Verify candidate meets specialized experience. The final qualifications determination is made by the WFMO Human Resources Specialist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assist the HRS with validating and authenticating applicants’ technical responses to Hiring Manager System (HMS) technical questions during the rating and ranking process. Documenting recommended changes to the applicant’s response(s).</td>
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<td>• Assist with preparation of recruitment package.</td>
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Who are good SME candidates?
- A first-level supervisor of a like position.
- Bona Fide experts 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.
- Contractors are prohibited to serve as SMEs.

Dos and Don’ts Checklist if a SME is used:
If designated for Pre-Certificate SME tasks if requested, Do...
- Do make recommendations to the hiring official and the HRS concerning the job analysis based on expert knowledge.
- Do recommend to the hiring official HMS technical questions based on expert knowledge. Do recommend to the HRS by validating and authenticating applicants’ technical answers to HMS technical questions pre-certificate within 4 calendar days.
- Do treat certificates, resumes, and responses to questions as confidential, personally identifiable information.
- If designated for Post-Certificate SME tasks only, can participate in interview panels. 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 being filled.
- Do not act as a SME in a pre-certificate review if you are the hiring official.

Note: An HRS who receives an application from a relative in response to one of their announcements should ask to be excused 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.
Merit Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices

To carry out the Merit System Principles, you are required to:

- Recruit, select, and advance on the basis of merit.
- Treat employees and applicants fairly and equitably.
- Provide equal pay for equal work; reward excellent performance.
- Maintain high standards of integrity, conduct, and concern for the public interest.
- Use human resources efficiently and effectively.
- Retain or separate employees on the basis of their performance.
- Effectively train and educate employees.
- Protect employees from improper political influence.
- Protect employees from reprisal for their lawful actions.

The following are Prohibited Personnel Practices:

- Illegally discriminate for or against any employee/applicant.
- Seek or use improper recommendations.
- Coerce political activity.
- Obstruct a person’s right to compete for employment.
- Encourage a person to withdraw from competition.
- Grant an improper advantage.
- Engage in nepotism.
- Take reprisal for a lawful disclosure.
- Take reprisal for filing an appeal.
- Unlawfully discriminate for off duty conduct.
- Take/fail to take an action in violation of veteran’s preference and of the merit principles.

The full text of these principles and practices can be found at the websites below: