



# U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

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## **MSPB Report Stresses the Need to Focus on Quality When Reforming the Federal Hiring Process**

Today, organizations face intense competition for skilled workers. To compete in this environment, employers need a hiring system that: (1) responds to managers' needs and the needs of their applicants, (2) produces high-quality applicants, (3) supports timely decisions, and (4) results in competitive job offers. The Federal hiring system is not meeting these goals according to the Merit Systems Protection Board's (MSPB) most recent report, *Reforming Federal Hiring: Beyond Faster and Cheaper*.

MSPB Chairman, Neil A.G. McPhie notes that the hiring process often serves as a barrier to attracting and hiring high-quality candidates because it appears to take too long and is too complex. Furthermore, hiring decisions are frequently based on inadequate assessment practices and hiring procedures are often driven by factors other than who is most qualified for the job.

The Federal staffing process has gone through extensive change since it was established by the Pendleton Act over 120 years ago. Some would argue that the most significant changes have occurred during the past 10 years, with the decentralization of staffing authorities, the granting of new flexibilities and agency-specific legislation, and the use of automated hiring processes.

However, these changes have largely resulted in short-term remedies that focus on making the hiring process faster and cheaper. While these are worthy goals, faster and cheaper are not always better. Hiring a poor performer faster and at a lower cost will not benefit the employer, the employee, or the public. To achieve significant reform, the

Federal Government must not only attempt to meet the objectives of “faster” and “cheaper,” but must also balance those objectives with “better.”

- ***Better recruitment*** that targets and attracts applicants with the needed skills.
- ***Better assessment practices*** that distinguish high potential candidates from the rest.
- ***Better management of the hiring process*** to ensure agencies have the resources needed to carry out quality hiring practices.
- ***Better merit-based decisions*** that ensure hiring practices do not impede fair and open competition or advancement based solely on relative ability.

These changes require longer-term, strategic reform with an emphasis on quality rather than just efficiency. MSPB has found that many valuable hiring reforms can be made that do not require changes to law or regulation. But they will require that agencies look at hiring differently—with a greater emphasis on quality.

Over the past 25 years, the Merit Systems Protection Board has conducted numerous in-depth studies that address discrete aspects of the Federal hiring system. The purpose of this perspectives report is to bring together the key findings and recommendations from MSPB’s 25 years of research on hiring issues to help inform reform efforts.

The MSPB is an independent, quasi-judicial agency with responsibility for deciding Federal employee appeals from personnel actions taken against them, protecting the integrity of the civil service and other Federal merit systems, and conducting studies of the civil service and other merit systems in the Executive Branch. To request a printed copy of the report, e-mail [STUDIES@mspb.gov](mailto:STUDIES@mspb.gov); call (202) 653-6772, extension 1350; or write: Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 1615 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20419. The report may be downloaded from the Board’s Website at [http://mspb.gov/studies/rpt\\_09-06\\_reforming/reformingfederalhiring.htm](http://mspb.gov/studies/rpt_09-06_reforming/reformingfederalhiring.htm).

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