



# Merit Systems Protection Board

Contact: Arlin Winefordner  
(202) 653-7200, ext. 1162  
V/TDD 1-800-877-8339  
(Federal Relay Service)

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## **THE FEDERAL CAREER INTERN PROGRAM SHOWS GREAT PROMISE**

“The Federal Career Intern Program has had a good beginning,” said Board Chairman Neil A.G. McPhie. “The program has the potential to possibly supplant a competitive examining process that many find confusing and overly complex.” A new report of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB or the Board) titled, “Building a High-Quality Workforce: The Federal Career Intern Program,” was released today by Chairman McPhie.

The FCIP, established in July 2000, is a hiring tool that helps Federal agencies hire talent quickly. Under this program, agencies can hire entry-level employees at grade GS-5, 7, or 9, train them, and retain only those who prove to be assets to the Government. As an alternative to the competitive examining process, the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP) has relatively few eligibility and procedural requirements giving agencies flexibility in recruiting, assessing, and selecting career interns. This flexibility does not reduce requirements to operate within the merit principles.

The report states that Federal agencies are making use of the FCIP to hire entry-level employees especially in professional and administrative occupations. While the number of hires under other hiring methods either stayed flat or decreased, the total number of hires under the FCIP has dramatically increased to 28% since its inception 4 years ago. Competitive examining, which was the primary hiring method, has decreased from 48 percent to 26 percent in the same period.

Chairman McPhie cautioned that, “The FCIP gives agencies much needed flexibility in hiring over traditional competitive service methods. But with flexibility

comes responsibility. Agencies must be extremely mindful and observant of the merit system principles as well as the rules of equal opportunity, and veterans' preference when using the FCIP. If they are not, agencies can unwittingly violate these principles and rules, which can result in a weakened civil service."

The Board's report found that agencies often relied on limited tools to recruit applicants and used weak assessment tools. To build a high-quality workforce through the FCIP, agencies should recruit more broadly and strengthen their assessment process by using the internship as a trial period. The Board found, however, that OPM's FCIP regulations and agencies' FCIP plans do not address trial periods, which can have unintended consequences. For example, it can unwittingly provide career interns with employment rights sooner than agencies may have intended, thus making it much more difficult to terminate internships. In order to maximize the value of the FCIP, the Board recommends that agencies and OPM address this and other issues identified in the report.

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 [www.mspb.gov](http://www.mspb.gov).