



Merit Systems Protection Board

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MSPB GIVES MIXED REVIEW TO FEDERAL MERIT PROMOTION PROCESS

The merit promotion procedures used to fill vacancies in Federal agencies generally result in decisions that conform with the merit principle that requires employee advancement decisions be made solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge, and skills, after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity. Nevertheless, there are problems associated with the Federal merit promotion process—among them, that it is resource intensive and time consuming. These are the principal findings of a report released today by the U.S Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB or the Board).

The report, titled “The Federal Merit Promotion Program: Process vs. Outcome,” estimates that the total yearly cost of the merit promotion process is in excess of \$238 million. More importantly, the MSPB found that, for many promotion actions, the merit promotion process added little or no value. Additionally, Federal supervisors, employees, and union representatives who were surveyed for the report all had major reservations about how well the process works, although for different reasons. Many supervisors felt that the process often took too long, cost too much, and—in some cases—actually hindered their ability to make the best selections. On the other hand, employees and union representatives often expressed the view that the process did not result

in the selection of the person who had the greatest potential for the job being filled. Instead, they thought that non-merit factors—such as loyalty to the supervisor or connections to other important people in the Government—were the most important factors in determining who is promoted.

The report also makes several recommendations to Federal agencies and the Office of Personnel Management for improving the merit promotion process. These include increasing the use of merit-based but non-competitive alternatives, such as making greater use of career ladder promotions and promotions by an accretion of duties, expanding the use of broadband pay systems, and allowing managers greater authority to promote employees in their organizations without using formal competitive procedures.

Order copies of the report from the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 1615 M Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20419; telephone (202) 653-6772, extension 1350; V/TDD 1-800-877-8339; or e-mail to studies@mspb.gov. The report may also be downloaded from the “Studies” area on the Board’s website, <http://www.mspb.gov>.

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.