

# In Search of Highly Skilled Workers

## A Study on the Hiring of Upper Level Employees From Outside the Federal Government

Department of Veterans Affairs  
Research & Development Office

A Report to the President and the Congress  
of the United States by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board



THE CHAIRMAN



U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD  
1615 M Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20419-0001

February 2008

The President  
President of the Senate  
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Dear Sirs and Madam:

In accordance with the requirements of 5 U.S.C. 1204(a)(3), it is my honor to submit this U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) report, "In Search of Highly Skilled Workers: A Study on the Hiring of Upper Level Employees from Outside the Federal Government." This report presents the findings of a study the MSPB conducted on the hiring of new employees at the upper level grades 12, 13, 14 and 15 in the General Schedule (GS) or similar pay plans in fiscal year 2005.

Each year, the Government hires tens of thousands of new employees. Traditionally, the vast majority of these new employees were appointed at grades GS-11 and below. However, the number of new hires at grades GS-12 and above has been increasing, especially since FY 2000. This trend is likely to continue as more employees retire, many of whom must be replaced to ensure that the Government has the expertise it needs to achieve its missions. In addition, as the needs of the American people become more complex, new programs often require the influx of new expertise at higher levels in the organization.

As the senior or journeyman-level specialists, analysts, supervisors and managers, these new upper level employees have critical roles in the effective and efficient operation of the Government. MSPB studied this group of new employees to determine whether the Government is hiring the best applicants for these jobs in accord with the merit system principles and to find ways to improve the hiring of these highly skilled and experienced personnel.

I believe that you will find this report useful as you consider issues regarding the future of the Federal civil service.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Neil A. G. McPhie".

Neil A. G. McPhie

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Upper Level Employees From  
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**A Report to the President and the Congress  
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# **U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board**

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# Attracting and Hiring New Employees in the Federal Government: A Series

This report is part of a three-study series that explores how the Federal Government attracts and hires new employees. The purpose of the series is to identify potential improvements to recruiting and selecting applicants from all segments of society based on relative ability after fair and open competition, as prescribed by the merit system principles. Specifically, the series addresses the following topics:

**Attracting entry-level employees.** Many fear that the Federal Government is facing a “brain drain” as the result of an aging workforce and high retirement eligibility rates. Using input from new entry-level employees about why they chose to work for the Federal Government and what obstacles they faced in the job search, this study assesses how agencies can better attract and select qualified applicants for entry-level opportunities to build a sufficient pipeline for journey-level positions.

**Attracting upper level employees.** Employees at the upper level grades in Government are critical to the efficient and effective operation of Government programs. They are the senior level specialists, analysts, and managers who develop, implement, and carry out Government- or agency-wide policies and programs. This study explores how agencies hire highly skilled or experienced workers from outside the Government and how agencies can improve these hiring practices.

**Agencies’ use of hiring authorities.** As more hiring authorities become available to agencies, the use of competitive examining through the U.S. Office of Personnel Management or a Delegated Examining Unit is decreasing. In response to this trend, this study examines the extent to which certain hiring authorities are being used, how they are used, and how well supervisors understand the responsibilities and consequences that come with their decision to use a particular authority.





# Executive Summary

**T***his report presents the findings of a study on the hiring of new employees from outside the Federal Government at the upper level grades 12, 13, 14 and 15 in the General Schedule (GS) or similar pay plans in fiscal year 2005. As the senior or journeyman-level specialists, analysts, supervisors and managers, these new upper level employees have critical roles in the effective and efficient operation of the Government. The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) studied this group of new employees to determine whether the Government is hiring the best applicants for these jobs in accordance with the merit system principles. MSPB also conducted this study to identify how best to attract highly skilled workers in a competitive labor market and to determine whether there were barriers to bringing in external applicants at the upper level grades.*

Each year, the Government hires tens of thousands of new employees. Traditionally, these new employees were appointed at grades GS-11 and below. However, the number of new hires at the upper level grades has trended upward since fiscal year (FY) 1990 and especially since FY 2000. This trend is likely to continue as more employees retire, many of whom must be replaced to ensure that the Government has the expertise it needs to achieve its missions. In addition, as the needs of the American people become more complex, new programs have to be staffed and/or expertise in a new field or specialty must be acquired.

Since most of the upper level new hires were appointed to professional and administrative positions—positions that require the exercise of a high degree of discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility—this study is limited to these categories of employees. To complete the study, MSPB examined aggregate, Governmentwide personnel data for upper level new hires over the 16-year period, fiscal years 1990-2005. We also surveyed a random sample of new upper level employees hired in FY 2005 and their supervisors to learn more about their views and experiences with the Government's hiring process.

This study of the hiring process for upper level new employees focused on the following issues:

- Why did selecting supervisors choose to hire from outside the Government at upper level grades instead of selecting from within? And, why did they hire at the upper level instead of at entry-level grades?



- Who were the upper level new hires? What factors influenced their hiring?
- What attracted these new hires to Federal service? Can the Government compete for highly skilled workers in a competitive labor market? If so, how?
- What were the barriers, if any, to hiring external applicants (i.e., persons outside the Government) at upper levels?

Another purpose of this study was to determine whether the hiring of new upper level employees was in accordance with the first merit system principle, which requires that (a) competition for Federal jobs be fair and open, (b) selection be based solely on merit, and (c) the Federal workforce be reflective of the public it serves. The report discusses the study findings and where appropriate, suggests steps to improve the hiring process and help ensure that the Government hires the right people for the right job.

The study's main findings include the following:

***Since FY 1990, the number of new upper level employees hired has steadily increased.***

In FY 2005, the Government hired more than 12,000 new upper level employees. This number is 39 percent more than the 8,600 new upper level employees hired in FY 1990—the year preceding the downsizing and restructuring that occurred in the 1990s.

***The Government's hiring pattern largely follows its overall priorities.***

Homeland security, national defense, and the need to deliver services to the American public through the use of technology were three of the many Government priorities in FY 2005. These priorities were mirrored in who was hired in the Government, the types of upper level positions filled, and the agencies that did most of the hiring.

- Eighty percent of the new upper level employees were hired by 10 agencies, with the Department of Defense (DoD) and its major components (i.e., Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines) accounting for about half (47 percent) of the new hires. However, the hiring of new upper level employees did not occur equally across a department or agency. Rather, this hiring was concentrated in a few subordinate agencies of a department, or in a certain office or division of an agency, with responsibility to carry out priority programs.
- Although the new hires were appointed in 219 occupations, more than half (53 percent) were appointed in only 10 occupations. Many of the occupations support homeland security and national defense. Nevertheless, the number one occupation filled was information technology management, which is common to virtually all agencies.

- Many of the new hires had Government-related experience, which was gained either as employees of Federal contractors or members of the military service. Former employees of Federal contractors and former military members comprised almost half (48 percent) of FY 2005's upper level new hires.

### ***The hiring processes agencies used influenced who was hired.***

- Although agencies relied on USAJOBS to advertise job vacancies, this was not the survey respondents' primary source of job information. More new hires relied on their network of friends, their relatives, and their new Federal supervisors and co-workers to learn about job opportunities. Word of mouth is effective not only for some applicants, but also for agencies trying to find high-quality applicants. However, this approach has a limited reach and cannot be relied upon to ensure a diverse applicant pool.
- Assessment methods were sometimes used that unnecessarily limited who can qualify for vacant jobs. To ensure they get the person they believe is right for the job, agencies sometimes restrict competition through the use of selective factors. Although selective factors can ensure that only those with the right qualifications are hired for the job, they can also limit the pool of applicants who can qualify and, ultimately, the number of applicants referred for selection. Furthermore, agencies sometimes use selective factors inappropriately. Selective factors that are too restrictive can act as artificial barriers to open competition, eliminating qualified applicants from further consideration.
- The use of competitive examining—the traditional method of filling competitive service jobs—decreased from 64 percent in FY 1999 to 39 percent in FY 2005 for hiring new upper level employees. This decrease corresponded with the implementation of the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act of 1998. Since its implementation in FY 2000, hiring of new upper level employees under the Act increased from 6 percent of all the Government's new upper level employees to 26 percent in FY 2005. The proportion of former military members hired under the Act has had considerable influence on the composition of the upper level new hires.

### ***The upper level new hires tended to be nonminority males.***

Overall, the percentage of women and minorities in upper level professional and administrative occupations increased over fiscal years 1990-2005. However, a vast majority of the upper level new hires were nonminority males. Various factors have affected the composition of upper level new hires. These include the types of upper level positions the Government has filled, as dictated by the Government's priorities and missions. Many of these positions are typically male-dominated. Another factor is the hiring authorities agencies used to appoint new employees. For example, there has been a significant increase in the hiring of former military members through the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act. An overwhelming

majority of upper level new hires hired under the Act were nonminority males. This is not an indictment of this special program meant to hire veterans because it serves an important purpose, but a significant factor that agencies need to address in their strategic recruitment plans.

***The upper level new hires were highly educated.***

Seventy-five percent of the upper level new hires had at least a bachelor's degree. The higher the grade the larger the proportion of new hires with at least a bachelor's degree—93 percent of the GS-15s held at least a bachelor's degree compared with 83 percent of the GS-14s, 76 percent of the GS-13s, and 66 percent of the GS-12s.

***Job security was the most common reason upper level new hires applied for their Federal jobs.***

Of a list of 16 possible reasons respondents were offered, by far the most common reason new hires applied for their upper level jobs was job security, selected by about half of them. The mission of the agency and the opportunity to serve the public were also popular reasons. Other frequently cited reasons included the desire to fully utilize their talents and find a better job.

***Generally, upper level new hires hold favorable views of their agencies.***

When asked to compare their agency to their last employer in 17 discrete areas, the new hires rated their new agency better, not worse, in almost all areas except in dealing effectively with poor performers. For example, they viewed their agency's workplace flexibilities, such as telework and alternative work schedule, as better. They also perceived their agency as a place where people can find more challenging work and better opportunities for training and development. Agencies were also viewed as having better ethical practices and as being better at providing opportunities to make a difference.

***The Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) television campaign has had some positive impact.***

OPM ran a television recruitment campaign in its attempt to make more people aware of USAJOBS, the Government's central repository of vacancy announcements, and of the many exciting and rewarding careers available in the Federal Government. The ads have appeared in various strategic areas across the country. The campaign appears to be a move in the right direction. OPM has noted an increase in the number of visits to its USAJOBS Web site from people in the areas where the ad appeared. However, we note that agencies must also do their part to make this campaign truly successful. In particular, agencies need to issue vacancy announcements that are engaging, concise, and clear. Potential applicants can be turned off when vacancy announcements are too lengthy or poorly written, problems that occur all too often.

### ***Selecting supervisors and new hires experienced challenges and barriers during the hiring process.***

- Supervisors and upper level new employees believed that the hiring process was too complex and took too long.
- About a third of the new hires did not apply for other Federal jobs they were interested in because they would have had to write new essays or revise their existing essays describing their knowledge, skills and abilities; while about a fourth did not apply because they would have needed to rewrite or reformat their résumé.
- Finding someone with the right technical experience was the number one challenge supervisors faced when hiring at the upper level grades. Even so, some human resources specialists apparently employed a passive approach to recruiting for upper level jobs, given that more than half of the upper level new hires said they were not informed of the status of their applications until being called for interviews or offered their jobs.

To improve the hiring of upper level new employees and ensure that the civil service maintains a highly qualified diverse workforce, we offer the following recommendations.

#### ***Agencies should:***

1. Develop a hiring strategy to fill upper level jobs that uses a comprehensive recruiting plan that—
  - Does not limit public notice to USAJOBS. Recruitment efforts should include other announcement and publicity tools to attract a diverse pool of qualified applicants with the skills and expertise agencies need.
  - Does more to highlight their missions in vacancy announcements and ads to appeal to potential applicants who have the passion and personal commitment to their agencies' missions.
  - Includes job marketing programs that emphasize positives that are important to people whom they want to attract. For example, many of the new hires indicated that they would have accepted their job offers even with a reduction in pay because of the Government's workplace flexibilities and benefits package, so these should be stressed.
  - Includes well written vacancy announcements.
2. Improve their assessment methods by—
  - Avoiding the use of restrictive selective factors that do not enhance minimum qualification requirements to screen applicants.

- Ensuring that automated questionnaires are not so long that they become burdensome, defeating the purpose of “automation.” Agencies should also ensure the accuracy of online assessment ratings by at least verifying the lack of qualifications of those who were rated unqualified and/or verifying the quality of the experience of those candidates who may be referred for selection before giving a certified list of candidates to the selecting supervisor.
3. Involve the supervisor (or other selecting officials) in the pre-selection phases of the hiring process—determining the hiring authorities or methods to be used, recruiting, developing assessment tools, and assessing qualifications.
  4. Continuously review their application process and eliminate steps that do not add value. Agencies should endeavor to review applications and assess qualifications in a timely manner to minimize the time applicants have to wait for hiring decisions.
  5. Ensure that the human resources staffs responsible for recruiting applicants for upper level positions provide meaningful feedback to job applicants. Feedback, which puts some personal touch to an impersonal process, can help maintain applicants’ interest throughout a hiring process that can be lengthy at times.

# Introduction

This report examines Federal agencies' hiring of highly skilled and experienced workers from outside the Federal Government.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, this report focuses on the hiring of new employees at the upper level grades 12, 13, 14 and 15 in the General Schedule (GS) and GS-equivalent pay plans.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board studied the hiring of these new employees because they are the senior or journeyman-level specialists, analysts, supervisors and managers who develop, implement and manage Government- or agency-wide policies and programs.<sup>3</sup> As such, they are critical to the efficient and effective operation of the Government.

## Purpose and Focus of the Study

MSPB conducted this study as part of its statutory mandate to report to the President and Congress on whether Federal agencies are protecting the public interest in a merit-based Federal civil service.<sup>4</sup> This study is designed to find ways to improve the hiring of highly skilled and experienced personnel for upper level jobs. Our examination of the hiring of upper level new employees focused on the following issues:

- Why did selecting supervisors choose to hire from outside the Government at upper level grades instead of selecting from within?
- Why did selecting supervisors choose to hire at upper level grades instead of at lower level grades?
- Who were the upper level new hires? What factors influenced their hiring?

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<sup>1</sup> Applicants from outside the Federal Government are commonly referred to as “external” applicants.

<sup>2</sup> In the early 1970s, nearly all white-collar Federal employees were governed by the GS pay plan, which is divided into 15 grades. Since then, many new pay plans have been created, some of which are similar to the GS in structure. In FY 2005, 74 percent of all full-time permanent new hires were in the GS or in GS-equivalent pay plans. For this study, “upper level” collectively denotes grades 12, 13, 14 and 15 in the GS or GS-equivalent pay plans.

<sup>3</sup> In this report, the terms “new employees” and “new hires” are used interchangeably to denote employees who joined the civil service for the first time.

<sup>4</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 1204(a)(3).

- What attracted these new hires to Federal service? Can the Government compete for highly skilled workers in a competitive labor market? If so, how?
- What were the barriers, if any, to hiring external applicants at upper level grades?

Another purpose of this study was to determine whether the hiring of new upper level employees was in accord with the first merit system principle, which requires that (a) competition for Federal jobs be fair and open, (b) selection be based solely on merit, and (c) the Federal workforce be reflective of the public it serves.

## Scope and Methodology

This study covers the hiring of new upper level employees into permanent full-time positions in the competitive and excepted service.<sup>5</sup> For this study, “new hires” do not include employees who transferred between agencies or converted from one service to another (for example, from excepted to competitive service and vice versa). **Table 1** shows that most employees at the upper level grades are in either the professional or the administrative occupations.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, this study is limited to these categories of employees.

Grade	Occupational Category		
	Professional	Administrative	All other
GS 12	35	62	3
GS 13	37	59	4
GS 14	43	57	—
GS 15	71	29	—

Source: OPM, Central Personnel Data File.

<sup>5</sup> The executive branch of Government is composed of the competitive service, the excepted service and the Senior Executive Service. Most positions in the executive branch are in the competitive civil service, where positions are typically filled through competitive examining procedures controlled by OPM. Some positions—and even all positions in some agencies—are specifically excepted from the competitive service by statute, the President, or OPM. The competitive examining procedures are not used to fill excepted service jobs. The Senior Executive Service is not included in this study.

<sup>6</sup> Federal jobs are classified into six broad occupational categories, five of which are in white-collar occupations; i.e., professional (P), administrative (A), technical (T), clerical (C) and other white-collar (O) positions. The sixth category captures all blue-collar (B) occupations. These occupational categories are commonly known as PATCOB. See the appendix for brief definitions of the PATCOB categories.

This study relied heavily on the following sources of information:

- 1. Office of Personnel Management's Central Personnel Data File (CPDF).<sup>7</sup>** The CPDF is a database that contains personnel information on Federal nonpostal civilian employees in the executive branch of the Government. We used the CPDF to examine aggregate, Government-wide data about the upper level employees over a period of 16 years (fiscal years 1990-2005), with special focus on FY 2005. Data gathered were the number of new employees hired, their demographics, the agencies that hired them, and the appointment authorities used.
- 2. Surveys of new hires and their supervisors.<sup>8</sup>** The first survey was sent to a random sample of 1,815 upper level new hires across the Government who started working for the civil service in FY 2005. The sample was composed of 1,000 nonsupervisory and 815 supervisory new hires and included only nonseasonal, full-time permanent employees. The second survey was sent to the supervisors of these new hires. Fifty percent of the new hires and 47 percent of the supervisors that we contacted returned their surveys. The surveys were paper-based and were conducted during February and June 2006. Participation in the surveys was voluntary and responses were confidential. To ensure confidentiality, we report only aggregate data.

The new employees' views and experiences discussed in this report are those of individuals hired in FY 2005. Because who gets hired in any given year is influenced by a variety of factors (such as the Government's program priorities and the hiring process used), it is possible that individuals hired in one year will have different experiences and views from those of individuals hired in another year.

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<sup>7</sup>The CPDF includes data on employees in the executive branch except in agencies exempt from personnel reporting requirements; e.g., the Postal Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>8</sup>To obtain a copy of the surveys, call (202) 653-6772, ext. 1350; send an e-mail to [studies@mspb.gov](mailto:studies@mspb.gov); or send a letter to the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, Washington, DC, 20419.











## Why Supervisors Hire From Outside

- The Government's increasing reliance on technology to deliver services to the American people. This reliance coupled with fast-changing technology necessitated the hiring of new employees with expertise in this field.
- The public's increasing and changing needs for Government services that necessitated the hiring of more employees with expertise in specific areas gained only through extensive education and training, such as expertise in medicine or law.

With 95 percent of supervisors having hired the candidate they believed to be the best qualified, it is not surprising that a majority of these supervisors (67 percent) indicated that the overall quality of the external applicant they hired was better than that of other Federal employees they knew in similar positions. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of supervisors (95 percent) indicated that the individual they hired had the talent they needed to accomplish their mission.









## Who Were the Upper Level New Hires

Government careers. New upper level employees who are 55 or older become retirement eligible with 7 years or less of Federal service.

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>FY 1990</b>	<b>FY 2005</b>
24 and younger	—	—
25-34	34	18
35-44	39	35
45-54	20	35
55 and older	7	12

Source: OPM, Central Personnel Data File.

## Educational Attainment

The FY 2005 upper level new hires were highly educated. Seventy-five percent of the new hires had at least bachelor's degrees. The higher the grade, the more educated the new hires were: 93 percent of GS-15 new hires had at least a bachelor's degree, while 83 percent of GS-14s, 76 percent of GS-13s and 66 percent of GS-12s did so. As expected, more new hires in professional occupations had at least a bachelor's degree (94 percent) than new hires in administrative occupations (61 percent).

## Supervisory Level

About 13 percent of FY 2005's upper level new hires were appointed to managerial or supervisory positions. This is a small proportion of the more than 120,000 upper level supervisors and managers who were on board in FY 2005. Even so, how prepared these new supervisors are for their supervisory or managerial role may be an issue. An MSPB study on supervisory selection found that agencies more often select supervisors based on technical expertise than on supervisory potential.<sup>15</sup> Coming from the outside and not being familiar with Government processes mean that new supervisors and managers like those in our study may require more assistance than agencies usually expect to provide. An effective orientation program and comprehensive training in supervision and management may be particularly critical for new supervisors and managers who were hired from outside the Government.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Federal First-Line Supervisors: How Good Are They?*, Washington, DC, March 1992.

<sup>16</sup> To address the inconsistencies and inadequacies of training for new supervisors, Senator Daniel Akaka offered in the Senate the Federal Supervisor Training Act (S-967) in March 2007. The proposed bill requires agencies to train new supervisors within 1 year of being appointed and to retrain them every 3 years.







Did women and minorities encounter barriers during selection for upper level jobs? While a definitive answer to this question is beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that the hiring of women and minorities is influenced both by the grades of the positions and by the types of occupations being filled. It is also influenced by the methods of hiring used, which will be discussed in the next section of this report.

Generally, in FY 2005, there were fewer women and minorities at the upper level positions compared to their share in the overall Federal workforce. However, a review of a sampling of occupations shows that for some, but not all, occupations, the proportions of female and minority applicants hired exceeded Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF) figures.<sup>19</sup> Men have traditionally dominated the law enforcement, engineering, information technology, legal and medical professions. However, Table 7 shows that there were occupations in which the Government exceeded RCLF figures for women and minorities, such as in law and medicine. The Government also exceeded RCLF figures for Blacks in all other occupations (an equal share in engineering) except for detectives and criminal investigation and tax examining. Nonetheless, **Table 7** also shows that for other occupations, Government statistics for women and other minorities compare unfavorably with RCLF figures. Therefore, the Government has more work to do towards obtaining a workforce reflective of the public it serves.

Ideally, equally qualified women and men, minorities and nonminorities should have the same job opportunities and chances of being hired. Why were agencies more successful in hiring women and minorities in upper level grades in certain occupations and not others? It is unclear whether this resulted from agencies doing targeted recruiting, or from women and minorities exercising individual choice in applying for and accepting jobs. It is possible that women and minorities are attracted to certain occupations in the Federal Government because of the desire to serve the public.<sup>20</sup> Or, the Federal Government may hold special appeal to women and minorities in certain occupations because they perceive the Government as having more commitment to fairness and equal opportunity. It could also be that agencies have exerted more effort in attracting women and minorities in hard-to-fill occupations, such as medicine and law. MSPB has just begun a more detailed study on the hiring of women and minorities that we hope will shed more light on this issue. The report is projected to be released in 2008.

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<sup>19</sup> The Relevant Civilian Labor Force is the Civilian Labor Force data that are directly comparable (or relevant) to the occupational population being considered in the Federal workforce. To make the Federal workforce data comparable to the RCLF, we used earnings as the control variable. For this study, those whose earnings were \$35,000 or more were considered to be the likely applicant pool for upper level positions.

<sup>20</sup> Stella Perrott, *Gender, Professions and Management in the Public Sector*, Public Money & Management, January-March 2002, pp. 21-24.

**Table 7. Percent Employed in the Relevant Civilian Labor Force Earning \$35,000 or More and Upper Level New Hires by Occupations, Race and Hispanic Origin**

Occupation	Relevant Civilian Labor Force*					Upper Level New Hires#				
	Women	Native American	Asian <sup>&amp;</sup>	Black	Hispanic	Women	Native American	Asian <sup>&amp;</sup>	Black	Hispanic
Accountants and Auditors	45.3	0.3	7.6	6.5	3.9	<b>45.5</b>	—	7.3	<b>16.4</b>	<b>4.8</b>
Computer Scientists and Systems Analysts	31.1	0.3	10.7	6.8	3.9	23.7	<b>1.8</b>	9.4	<b>14.0</b>	3.4
Detectives and Criminal Investigators	16.7	0.5	1.5	10.1	9.5	14.0	<b>1.1</b>	<b>2.2</b>	6.5	5.4
Electrical and Electronics Engineers	7.5	0.2	12.0	4.0	3.8	<b>9.9</b>	<b>0.6</b>	5.5	<b>4.4</b>	2.0
Lawyers	26.3	0.2	2.1	3.5	3.1	<b>46.7</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>4.4</b>
Logisticians	27.0	0.3	3.4	8.9	5.7	7.0	—	1.0	<b>11.0</b>	4.3
Management Analysts	34.2	0.2	5.6	5.2	3.2	27.4	0.7	3.2	<b>9.8</b>	2.9
Physicians and Surgeons	24.3	0.1	14.4	4.2	4.9	<b>32.0</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>5.1</b>
Tax Examiners, Collectors and Revenue Agents	47.3	0.3	4.8	15.3	7.5	<b>49.0</b>	—	<b>12.0</b>	7.0	3.0

Note: Numbers in bold indicate where the Government hired an equal or a higher percentage than is reflected in the RCLF.

\* From U.S. Census Bureau, "Census 2000 EEO Data Tool," at <http://www.census.gov/eo2000/index.html>.

# From OPM, Central Personnel Data File, FY 2005.

<sup>&</sup> Includes Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander.

Beyond these occupational differences, there is additional room for improvement in the hiring of women and minorities in the upper level grades. (Although MSPB has no basis to say definitively that there have been no discriminatory practices involved in the hiring of upper level personnel, neither can we say that none has occurred.) The first merit system principle calls for a Government that *reflects all segments of society*. Given the findings of this study, agencies must be especially mindful of this principle when filling their upper level jobs. Increasing the overall representation of women and minorities at these levels may be challenging because women and/or minorities are underrepresented in many of the occupations covered by the upper level Government positions. However, success is not impossible. The authorities or programs agencies use to appoint new hires have an important impact on who they hire since these authorities or programs help determine the recruiting strategies and assessment methods that can be used, as well as the population that is eligible for consideration. Ensuring that all involved have full knowledge of the hiring authorities and making improvements in recruiting and assessing applicants can address some of the issues in the hiring of women and minorities. These topics are discussed in more detail later in this report.











**Figure 5** shows that the use of direct hire has declined from its peak of 3,676 in FY 1991. In 2005, the Federal Government hired 837 new upper level employees using direct hire authority, which is less than one-quarter of those hired in FY 1991. Twenty-three agencies used direct hire authority in FY 2005, but the overwhelming majority of the new employees (83 percent) were hired by five agencies (the Departments of Health and Human Services, the Army, the Navy and Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration). In keeping with the intent of the authority, and as reflective of the top users of the authority, 73 percent of the 837 new hires were appointed in 4 types of occupations: information technology management, medicine, nursing and health insurance administration.<sup>25</sup>

### Veterans Hiring

In FY 2005, 42 percent of all upper level new hires were former military members, a 12-percent increase in hiring since FY 2001.<sup>26</sup> Although former military members were hired in both the excepted and the competitive service, the overwhelming majority (77 percent) were appointed in the competitive service. Of those appointed in the competitive service, 71 percent were appointed through the VEOA,<sup>27</sup> a quarter were appointed under competitive examining, and the remaining 4 percent under direct hire.

The VEOA was enacted in October 1998 to give former military members the opportunity to compete for jobs that are normally open only to internal candidates. That is, when agencies decide to open their internal merit promotion vacancies to Federal employees other than their own, they must also accept applications from VEOA-eligible veterans. Both military officers and enlisted personnel are eligible for VEOA appointments if they were separated from the armed forces under honorable conditions after completing 3 or more years of active service. To be selected, the veteran must be found to be among the best qualified. Because internal merit promotion procedures are used, veterans' preference rules do not apply. That is, veterans who are preference-eligible do not receive additional points to their rating score or "float" to the top of the list of referred candidates.

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<sup>25</sup> The direct hire authority to appoint outside applicants for the health insurance administration positions was approved for the Department of Health and Human Services to staff its Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The Centers are responsible for implementing the new Medicare prescription drug program.

<sup>26</sup> Unless otherwise noted, veterans hiring as discussed in this report pertains to the hiring of individuals who served on active duty in the armed forces and was released or discharged under other than dishonorable conditions. They may or may not have veterans' preference.

<sup>27</sup> Initially, appointments under the VEOA were only in the excepted service. Congress amended the VEOA in 1999 (P.L. 106-117), providing that if an eligible veteran competes under an agency's merit promotion procedures and is selected, the veteran will be given a career or career-conditional appointment in the competitive service.

Since its implementation, the use of the VEOA has grown considerably. In FY 2000, 520 veterans (equal to 6 percent of all upper level new hires) were hired under this method to fill upper level jobs. By FY 2005, the number had grown to 3,132 (equal to 26 percent of all upper level new hires). Notably in FY 2005, DoD and its components hired 86 percent of all VEOA selections made that year.

As stated, the hiring of former military members to fill upper level vacancies has been increasing, especially after 9/11. Among the various reasons for the increase is that VEOA has made hiring of former military members without veterans' preference easier for agencies. Since veterans' preference rules do not apply under the VEOA, former military officers who are not eligible for preference can easily be selected so long as they are rated one of the best qualified candidates. Veterans, especially officers, typically have the education, training and leadership experience that make them strong candidates for upper level positions. Additionally, the Government's increased emphasis on homeland security and national defense makes many veterans ideal candidates for upper level jobs. Given these positives, it is not surprising that in FY 2005 former military members comprised the majority of upper level new hires in security (74 percent), logistics (90 percent), contracting (66 percent) and intelligence (70 percent). They were also strong candidates for supervisory or managerial positions, in keeping with a study conducted by Korn/Ferry International in which researchers found that "military training offers lessons in leadership that can prove invaluable in the boardroom."<sup>28</sup> That this can also be true in the Federal Government is demonstrated by FY 2005 data showing that 18 percent of the veterans hired in upper level positions were appointed in supervisory/managerial positions, compared with only 8 percent of nonveterans. Another reason former military members are attractive as potential civilian employees is that they often possess security clearances. Many positions, especially those involved in national defense or homeland security, require security clearances that can be very difficult and take a long time to obtain. Because many military personnel have current or easily updatable security clearances, they can have a significant advantage over candidates who do not have security clearances.

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<sup>28</sup> Tim Duffy, *Military Experience & CEOs: Is There a Link?*, Korn/Ferry International in cooperation with the Economist Intelligence, 2006.

## Achieving a Representative Workforce

Earlier we discussed the fact that the types of positions filled at these upper levels affect the demographic composition of the upper level workforce. **Table 8** shows that the hiring method used also affects this composition.

Demographics	Hiring Method			
	Competitive Examining	Direct Hire	VEOA	Excepted
Men	63.8	53.8	89.2	69.7
Women	36.2	46.2	10.8	30.3
All minority	24.0	25.6	17.6	22.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	8.0	7.9	2.3	8.0
Black	11.6	12.5	10.7	8.4
Hispanic	3.7	4.4	4.2	4.0
Native American	0.7	0.7	0.4	1.5
White	75.4	73.8	82.0	77.5

Source: OPM, Central Personnel Data File.

**Table 8** shows that disproportionately more men were hired under all the hiring methods, especially the VEOA. Almost 9 in 10 of the VEOA hires were men. As also shown in the table, the different minority groups did not fare equally across the hiring methods. Hispanics did comparatively poorly under all of the hiring methods. While there is no evidence that the disparate hiring of various groups is a result of discriminatory practices, it is clear that the hiring methods used have an impact on the demographic composition of the new hires, especially under the VEOA.

It is important to note that as a matter of public policy, former military members have hiring preferences that are dictated by laws that provide them those benefits. Furthermore, many of these former military members are highly qualified for their upper level jobs. Under veterans' preference laws, disabled veterans only have to meet minimum qualifications to be referred for selection. Other veterans, however, must be found best qualified or rated among the top to be referred under veterans' preference laws or VEOA. Thus, for these highly qualified veterans, their selection is based on merit.

While the hiring of veterans complies with the law, it would be difficult for the Government to achieve a workforce reflective of America at the higher grade levels if the current composition of the military and the agencies' hiring practices remain unchanged. As **Table 9** shows, in FY 2004, the commissioned officer corps—the group most likely to qualify for the upper level jobs—of the various armed services (Coast Guard, Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines) was primarily comprised of nonminority males. The proportion of minorities in the commissioned officer corps

of the various armed services ranged from 16 percent in the Coast Guard to 25 percent in the Army, and the proportion of women ranged from 6 percent in the Marines to 18 percent in the Air Force.<sup>29</sup> The table also shows that these percentages somewhat reflect the demographics of former military members hired in FY 2005 in upper level jobs: 19 percent were minorities, while 12 percent were women. These demographics for the commissioned officer corps make clear how difficult it would be for the Government to increase the participation of minorities and women in the workforce if the current hiring trends at the upper level grades continue. The hiring of women and Hispanics into upper level positions will not significantly increase unless agencies make a special effort to attract and hire more qualified women and Hispanics under the VEOA or through the use of other hiring authorities.

Demographics	New Hires, FY 2005 <sup>#</sup>	Commissioned Officer Corps, FY 2004 <sup>@</sup>				
		Air Force	Army	Coast Guard	Marines	Navy
Men	88.0	81.7	83.3	85.1	94.2	84.8
Women	12.0	18.3	16.7	14.9	5.8	15.2
Black	11.6	6.5	12.3	4.7	5.6	7.2
Hispanic	4.4	3.7	5.0	5.1	6.2	5.2
Other minority*	3.0	8.4	7.3	6.0	11.2	7.2
All minority	19.0	18.6	24.6	15.8	23.0	19.6
White	80.5	81.4	75.4	84.2	77.0	80.4

<sup>#</sup>Source: OPM, Central Personnel Data File.

<sup>@</sup>Source: <http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/demographics.asp>.

\* Includes Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native.

Veterans' rights and the first merit principle need not be an either/or proposition. We believe agencies can meet their obligations to veterans and *achieve a workforce that is representative of all segments of society* by addressing both in their strategic recruitment plans. Moreover, military data MSPB obtained from the Office of the Secretary of Defense show that the composition of the various armed services is changing. In fact, the proportion of women and minorities—for both commissioned officers and enlisted personnel—increased from FY 2000 to FY 2005. We have no reason to believe that this trend will not continue. As more military occupations open up to women, women will find a military career a viable option, which can encourage more women to join the military. An increase in the proportion of women and minorities in the military would mean an increase of women and minority veterans in the labor pool from which agencies can potentially select to fill upper level positions under VEOA. Additionally, agencies should make strategic use of other hiring authorities available to them to ensure that they have a representative workforce at all grade levels.

<sup>29</sup> Profiles of active duty commissioned officers in the Coast Guard, Army, Air Force and Navy are available at <http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/demographics.asp>.















tools include programs that allow employees to better balance their work and family responsibilities (selected by 26 percent of respondents as one reason they applied for their job) as well as assignments to special projects. Agencies must also do all they can to ensure that the new hires receive high-quality supervision. Good supervisors can develop a work environment that will fully utilize the new hires' talents and keep them fully engaged in their work.

### **Government's Benefits and Pay**

While pay was also a reason for applying for Federal jobs, it ranked only ninth among the 16 items listed on the survey. As **Figure 6** shows, the Government's benefits were more likely to entice new hires to apply for a Federal job than was pay. Benefits, such as medical insurance and retirement coverage, have become an important employment consideration for an aging labor force. This is particularly true since retiree medical coverage is becoming less common in the private sector. Additionally, the number of private sector companies that provide defined benefit pension plans has declined in the last decade and, in many cases, these pension plans are less generous than the plan available to new Federal employees.<sup>38</sup> All of these things make the Government's benefit package, especially its retirement and health insurance coverage, a big draw, as this new hire wrote:

*"During the interview, 5 out of 6 interviewers indicated that I appeared to be over-qualified. Yet when the job offer was made, the salary offered was at the bottom of the salary range.... With a reduction of pay and [rate of] accrued leave, I accepted the job offer only because of the health care coverage."*

## **Strengths of Federal Employment**

To gauge the Government's ability to compete in the labor marketplace, we asked the new hires to compare their current Federal agencies with their last employer in 17 discrete areas. It is quite notable that, as shown in **Table 11**, the new hires rated their new Federal agencies better or the same than their last employers in most areas except dealing effectively with poor performers.<sup>39</sup> Notably, formerly self-employed new hires were especially critical of their agencies' dealings with poor performers.

**Table 11** shows that many upper level new hires view their agencies as better, not worse, than their former employers in important areas concerning the work itself,

<sup>38</sup> John A. McDonald, *Survey Finds Federal Workers Share Poor Retirement Planning With All Workers, but Have More Savings*, Employee Benefit Research Institute, vol. 27, No. 12, December 2006, pp. 2-7.

<sup>39</sup> Our survey did not define "dealing effectively with poor performers." It is likely that the new hires, based on their experience, such as in business, have a broader definition of "poor performer" to include marginal or even "average" employees and "dealing effectively" means removal. This definition may partly explain why agencies received the lowest mark on this item. In the Federal Government, however, an employee has to be rated unacceptable in one critical element in an approved performance plan to warrant removal.

not just the areas concerning the benefits of Federal employment. For example, many new hires rated their agencies better than their last employer in providing challenging work, and providing opportunities for training and development. A great many also saw the Government as better in giving them a chance to make a difference and treating employees with respect.

**Table 11. Upper Level New Hires’ Views Comparing Their Agencies and Last Employers (in Percent)**

Areas	My Current Agency Is...			
	Better	About the Same	Worse	Not Sure/ Don’t Know
Job security	60	34	3	4
Workplace flexibility (e.g., telework, alternative work schedule)	44	36	15	5
Chance to make a difference	42	45	9	4
Opportunities for training and development	41	40	16	4
Retirement program	40	33	20	6
Opportunities for advancement	38	35	17	10
Leave benefits (annual, sick and holidays)	36	28	35	1
Pay	33	34	32	1
Challenging work	32	58	9	1
Quality of managers/supervisors	29	56	12	3
Treating employees with respect	29	60	8	2
Physical work environment/conditions	25	61	13	1
Using employees’ skills and abilities effectively	24	57	15	4
Ethical practices	24	69	2	5
Quality of co-workers	21	68	10	2
Providing feedback on performance	21	58	15	6
Dealing effectively with poor performers	7	36	42	15

Source: MSPB Upper Level New Hires Survey, question 17a-q.

The new hires’ ratings on leave benefits and pay were mixed. In pay, where we expected Federal agencies to do poorly, many new hires indicated that Government pay is either better (33 percent) or about the same (34 percent); only 32 percent said it is worse. Former private sector employees (who were not previously Federal contractors) as well as previously self-employed new hires were more likely to say Federal pay is worse (45 percent and 67 percent, respectively). Not surprisingly, many of the new hires who indicated that the Government’s pay is worse joined the civil service for quality of life issues. That is, they entered Government service because they wanted less stressful work conditions or to better balance their work responsibilities and family needs. Also, how new hires viewed pay depended on their grade level. That is, new hires appointed at GS-12 were more likely to say the Government’s pay was better than that of their last employers, while those at

GS-15 were more likely to say it was worse. This was not surprising. Many new hires at the GS-15 level were medical doctors who earned more in private practice or were supervisors and managers who commanded higher pay, especially if they had been in technical fields. However, they typically had to put in long hours in their former positions. Workplace flexibility can counterbalance lower pay, especially for people with family obligations. Therefore, it is in agencies' best interests to highlight their workplace flexibility programs in their vacancy announcements to attract highly qualified applicants who seek balance between their family needs and work responsibilities.

## Recruitment Incentives

The Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990 (FEPCA) established compensation flexibilities that were intended to enable agencies to compete for talent in a tight labor market. The Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004 amended the flexibilities established by FEPCA and provided additional flexibilities that give agencies more tools to use to fill positions that would otherwise be difficult to fill. The compensation flexibilities permit agencies the authority to:

- Pay recruitment bonuses and relocation allowances.
- Set initial salary at a higher rate than the lowest rate for a given grade based on superior qualifications.
- Pay off some or all of the employee's student loan debt.
- Allow new employees to accrue leave at a higher rate by crediting directly related work experience gained elsewhere.

Perhaps because agencies were able to hire someone they wanted without incentives, or because of the stringent requirements for using these flexibilities, or because of limited funds, a majority of the upper level new hires in this study (64 percent) did not receive any of these incentives when hired. For those who did, the most common incentive was setting their starting pay above the minimum rate for the grade of the position based on superior qualifications (70 percent). A distant second was recruitment bonuses, which were given to 16 percent of the new hires. Moreover, perhaps because many of the upper level new hires may no longer have student loan debt, only a handful of the upper level new hires received the student loan debt relief incentive (3 percent).

At the time of the survey, the authority to credit outside experience for leave accrual purposes was newly implemented. Perhaps for this reason, only a few (5 percent) of the new hires were given this incentive. Judging from comments respondents wrote on their surveys, this benefit appears to be especially important to attract former military personnel, as this respondent wrote:

*“Stop ignoring the 20+ years served by retiring military when calculating leave. Going from 30 days per year to 13 is tough and not equitable. I work side by side with CIA civilians who got credit for their retired military time and earn 8 hours of leave per pay period! We constantly hear how the civilian ranks are losing experience. Changing this rule would attract more military retirees to the civilian ranks, bringing the 20+ years experience back to the Federal Government.”*

It appears that using hiring incentives to fill upper level positions can sometimes be critical, based on responses of our upper level new hires. When asked whether they would still accept the job had no incentives been offered, a majority (68 percent) of those who had received incentives said “No.” However, a significant minority (32 percent) said “Yes.” This 32 percent may indicate that incentives are an unnecessary expenditure in a tight budget era. Using hiring incentives is discretionary, meaning that agencies may offer them or not, but only in positions individual agencies deem hard to fill. When offered, the incentives are implemented based on the agency’s established recruitment incentive plan and must apply uniformly across the agency unless the head of the agency determines otherwise.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is important that when agencies develop their incentive plans they consider not only what they would like to accomplish by using these incentives, but equally important, the financial implications of the incentive plan.

## The Importance of Knowing Applicants’ Motivations

Survey data show that the Federal Government has strengths that can enable agencies to compete for highly qualified applicants for upper level jobs. For example, the Government has an advantage over other employers when it comes to job security. It has an excellent benefits package. Its pay can be competitive. It is seen as a place where people can find challenging work and can realize their potential. Overall, the positives outweigh the negatives. It is not surprising, therefore, that an overwhelming majority of the new hires (89 percent) intend to stay in Federal service, at least for the year following the survey. For those who intend to leave, the major reason they gave was that their talents were not being used effectively (82 percent). A distant second was that they felt they were bogged down by too much paperwork or red tape (59 percent).

What does this all mean to agencies? It means that agencies must be fully cognizant of the range and depth of the challenges they face in hiring highly qualified, diverse, upper level employees. These challenges are surmountable with carefully developed hiring strategies that capitalize on the strong attractions of Federal employment, the great variety and appeal of agencies’ missions, and the involvement of the right people in the many required steps in the recruitment process. Perhaps one of the most significant challenges is for agencies to be more creative and proactive

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<sup>40</sup> 5 CFR 575.107(c).



## Why They Applied for Their Jobs

recruiters. For example, agencies need to attract not only the active but also the passive jobseekers through persuasive messages about the good things agencies have to offer, such as the Government's benefit package, the chance to serve the public, or the chance to make a difference. A second pressing challenge is for agencies to have a well-designed hiring program that maintains applicants' interest throughout the process, especially when the process is overly lengthy. Later in this report, we discuss in more detail the challenges and barriers supervisors and new hires faced during the hiring process.







## HR Staff Expertise and Managers' Involvement

HR specialists are the first guard in ensuring that agencies win the war for talent; but they can also be a barrier. Most of the occupations that are filled at the upper levels are highly specialized. Usually, HR specialists do the first evaluation of applicants' qualifications, which determines whether they meet OPM's minimum qualification standards. Many of the standards are broad and general, requiring HR specialists to exercise considerable judgment. For a variety of reasons, such as lack of training, inadequate guidance, or insufficient knowledge and understanding of the occupation, some HR specialists make erroneous determinations about minimum qualifications, as these new hires can attest:

*"...[S]everal times I was assessed by HR personnel as not qualified at a level for a position for which I was well-qualified. When I inquired why, I was informed that the HR staff was either new or didn't understand the position. This type of issue will turn well-qualified applicants off because they are treated better by non-Government recruiters who respect the time of these applicants.*

*Qualification review process needs work. I applied for a GS-7 (in my retired military career field) and came up not qualified; but then I applied for a GS-12 (same field) and came up qualified. This is the job I have now. Make sense to anyone?"*

To be fair, HR specialists are attempting to do complex work under trying circumstances. HR offices lost many of their senior specialists during the downsizing of the 1990s, and this expertise has not yet been fully restored. Problems such as the ones just described can happen. To minimize erroneous minimum qualification determinations, HR can solicit assistance from subject-matter experts or input from supervisors or other selecting officials who can make better minimum qualification determinations, especially for highly technical jobs.

The HR staff members are not the only ones responsible for making the hiring process a success. Also responsible are the supervisors and managers who need their upper level jobs filled. Yet, some supervisors do not get involved in the hiring process, before and during selection. **Table 12** shows that, while the majority of supervisors were personally involved in the many phases of hiring their new upper level employees, a significant minority were not involved during the pre-selection phase. Additionally, some 21 percent of supervisors indicated they did not select (or recommend the selection of) their new hire.

**Table 12. Extent Supervisors Agree or Disagree They Were Personally Involved in The Following Tasks (in Percent)**

Tasks	Agree	Disagree
Developing the assessment tools/rating instruments used to identify the best qualified applicant	79	12
Reviewing applications	91	6
Interviewing applicants	90	6
Checking references	78	12

*Note: "Neither agree nor disagree" responses are not shown.*

*Source: MSPB Supervisory Upper Level New Hires Survey, question 13i.*

Supervisory involvement is crucial in hiring new employees with the right talent. For example, of the supervisors who were involved in developing the assessment tools used to identify the best qualified applicant, 98 percent said they got the talent they need to accomplish their mission. For supervisors who were not involved, the percentage went down to 82 percent. Supervisors' involvement in reviewing applications, interviewing applicants, or checking references revealed similar trends. In sum, supervisors who were involved in the pre-selection phases of the hiring process were more likely to have a positive view of their hiring decisions than those who were not involved.











## Complexity of the Application Process

With each agency being responsible for its own hiring, each agency has established its own application process. Thus, there is no standard way to apply for Federal jobs, making it complex and frustrating for applicants to pursue multiple job opportunities. For example, some agencies ask applicants to submit their applications electronically, others by mail or facsimile. Some agencies accept applications through USAJOBS, while others only accept applications submitted through their own Web sites. Additionally, some agencies ask applicants to submit written descriptions of their knowledge, skills and abilities, while other agencies ask applicants to respond to occupational questionnaires online. With such a variety of application methods, often with differing requirements, applicants often find the application process complex, confusing and burdensome. Even more regrettable, much of the complexity of agencies’ application and hiring processes is self-inflicted. All too often, agencies create steps that can unnecessarily complicate and cause delays in the hiring process, as this supervisor wrote:

*“The Federal hiring process is too complicated. My organization’s has more than 60 steps: 45 are OPM required; 15 are my agency’s. Some take a week to complete. No one seems to care as they think nothing of adding an extra step.... I enclose a check-list of the possible steps in our hiring process, which usually takes 6 to 15 months to complete.”*

A burdensome and complicated application process can discourage potential applicants from applying for Federal jobs. When asked whether they did not pursue applying for some jobs they were interested in, 39 percent of new hires said “Yes.”

Reasons	Percent
Had to write/re-write descriptions of my knowledge, skills and abilities	32
I decided I was not qualified or a strong candidate	23
Had to re-write or re-format my résumé	22
I learned there was someone lined up for the job	22
Had to respond to a lengthy questionnaire	18
Required too much of my time	13
Off-putting vacancy announcements	9
HR wasn’t helpful when asked for more information	8
Had to submit supporting documentation	4

Source: MSPB Upper Level New Hires Survey, question 11b.

There are various reasons why applicants give up applying for Federal jobs. As **Table 14** shows, the most common reason for upper level new hires to give up is the requirement to write or re-write narratives describing their knowledge, skills and abilities. Agencies generally require descriptions for multiple KSAs. Even online questionnaires can include multiple essay questions that can become too long, thus defeating the purpose of “automation.” Whether they are to be done online or on paper, the writing and rewriting of KSAs can become burdensome when done and redone for every job of interest, as was the case for this new hire who did not pursue other Federal jobs he or she would have liked to apply for:

*“Required too much of my time—this is compounded by the numerous stovepiped processes found in each agency—takes too long to fill out individual résumés and KSAs for each agency, each job.”*

MSPB understands that writing essays in response to the required KSAs takes time and serious effort from applicants. However, to conduct a fair and effective evaluation of applicants’ qualifications, agencies have to have detailed information about applicants’ KSAs. Unfortunately, agencies sometimes get carried away, requiring write-ups for far too many KSAs, of which many are too closely related. For example, one vacancy announcement posted “open to the public” required applicants to give “a complete and detailed answer” to any of the 14 “yes/no” questions they responded to affirmatively. Out of the 14 questions, 9 were related to supervision or management of subordinate staff. In an attempt to elicit more substantive information to ensure a good assessment, the agency failed to consider the burden its questions placed on applicants who responded to some or all of the related questions affirmatively. Agencies have the responsibility to make good assessments and to require interested applicants to submit the necessary information. However, they should balance their need for good assessment with the need to reduce the burden they place on applicants where possible. Agencies should realize that they might attract many more highly qualified applicants if jobseekers find that the application process is not unreasonably burdensome.















