



Merit Systems Protection Board

Contact: Arlin Winefordner
(202) 653-6772, ext. 1162
V/TDD 1-800-877-8339
(Federal Relay Service)

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SURVEY SHOWS AGENCIES HAVE STRENGTHS TO COMPETE FOR HIGHLY SKILLED WORKERS

Chairman Neil A. G. McPhie released the latest U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) report today. Titled “In Search of Highly Skilled Workers: A Study on the Hiring of Upper Level Employees from Outside the Federal Government,” the report presents the findings of a study on the hiring of new employees at the upper level grades 12, 13, 14 and 15 in the General Schedule or equivalent in fiscal year 2005.

“Our findings suggest that Government service has strengths that agencies can capitalize to compete for highly skilled workers,” said Chairman McPhie. The survey of upper level new hires shows that they hold favorable views of their agencies compared to their last employers. For example, they viewed their agency’s workplace flexibilities, such as telework and alternative work schedules as better or the same than their last employers. They also indicated that their Federal work is more challenging than their previous non-Federal jobs and that working for their new agencies gives them a better chance of making a difference. They also viewed their agencies as more ethical than their previous employers.

The MSPB conducted this study to find ways to improve the Federal Government’s ability to compete with other employers for highly skilled, well experienced and much sought after workers. Chairman McPhie stated that the “hiring of upper level employees from outside the Government has steadily increased in the last 15 years, but especially since 2000.” This trend is likely to continue as more employees retire and must be replaced. 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 Government.

Although survey data from the study also shows that the Government can compete for highly skilled workers, Chairman McPhie notes that “some hiring practices agencies use can make it more difficult to hire the best possible workforce.” For example, other than posting their job vacancies on USAJOBS, agencies rarely use other tools to ensure they have a highly qualified diverse applicant pool. Instead, many new hires relied on their network of friends, their relatives, and their new Federal supervisors and co-workers to learn about job opportunities. While word of mouth can be an effective tool for some applicants and for agencies trying to find high-quality applicants, it has a limited reach and cannot be relied upon to ensure a diverse applicant pool. Based upon the findings on this report, the MSPB offers a number of recommendations that agencies and policymakers may consider to improve the hiring of highly skilled workers.

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, send an e-mail to STUDIES@mspb.gov; call (202) 653-6772, extension 1350; or write to the U.S. 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.

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