



Merit Systems Protection Board

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New MSPB Report Finds that Federal Entry-Level New Hires May Not Be What Most People Expect

Who are Federal agencies hiring to fill entry-level positions? Why do they come to work for the Federal Government? What were they looking for in a job when the agency recruited them? These questions form the basis for the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's (MSPB) recent report, *Attracting the Next Generation: A Look at Federal Entry-Level New Hires*.

Recruiting a qualified stream of new hires is already a tough proposition for many occupations, locations and salary levels. Add to that a retirement wave projected to strike over the next 5–10 years and the numerous studies indicating that the Federal Government is not an attractive employer to younger, less experienced applicants who generally fill entry-level positions, and recruitment will become even more difficult.

Given this context, MSPB conducted a study of Federal entry-level new hires in professional and administrative occupations to identify how the Government can improve its entry-level hiring. MSPB surveyed almost 2,000 GS-5, 7 and 9 new hires in professional and administrative occupations to find out why they came to work for the Government and what barriers they experienced during the hiring process. MSPB also explored the perceptions younger generations have of Federal employment to identify the obstacles the Government faces in attracting and hiring high-quality applicants.

“Our research points to a number of positive conclusions about the Federal Government’s ability to attract the best and the brightest,” observes Chairman Neil A. G. McPhie. The Federal Government offers what many new hires—regardless of age or generation—want in an employer, including job security, good benefits and the ability to make a difference with their work. In addition, many of the new hires faced fewer obstacles in the hiring process than expected, were fairly determined to obtain a Federal job and plan to stay with the Government for a long time.

Chairman McPhie also notes, however, that “there are some troublesome trends that could thwart merit-based hiring over time.” For instance, it appears that agencies are relying more on excepted service appointment authorities to hire new employees. The report cautions that these authorities can inadvertently circumvent merit because they often narrow recruitment sources, potentially short-circuiting fair and open competition.

MSPB makes a number of recommendations that agencies and Federal policy makers should consider when reflecting on how to improve the Federal hiring process.

Ultimately, the results of this study demonstrate that the Federal Government can more ably compete for entry-level new hires than some of the contemporary research suggests, but there is much room for growth.

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; 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.

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