

## Staffing and Classification Transcript

Thank you so much. Welcome again. I am Tony John. I'm with the office of personnel management. I've partnered with USDA Rural Development to deliver this classification and staffing training for you all.

Before we get into that training, again, I want to reiterate, if you are listening or participating in this training as a group, please, if you could e-mail Allison Savage and let her know that you all participated so we can have a record of that and you can all get credit for participating.

Also, if you at any time hear me referring to the handout for this training, if you look on your screen, I have done this every training; there is an icon with three white pieces of paper. Click on that. We have a stack of handouts for this training. Why would we have so many handouts for the training?

In general, I cannot in one hour -- we have two hours together and to topics. I can't with one hour for each topic teach you all the things that you need to know in order to be a classifier, or in order to be -- to know what you need to know about staffing.

What this training is designed around is to give you practical advice and practical reminders that you need in order to manage better. If I've done my job right at the end of this training, you will have at least one, maybe two things you needed reminding of that you wanted to invest extra energy and resources towards or maybe there is something you will do differently. If I've done my job all right, you will be having these types of thoughts about that.

Here is our agenda for today. The first half, the first hour, is going to be what we call classification work. I divide that into three pieces for we will first talk about position descriptions, then classification in general, and then we talk about position management, design questions that managers are responsible for. At that point we will take a 10 minute break and we get back from the 10 minute break and we are going to talk about hiring, the three parts of hiring. Hiring strategy and veteran's preference. We will talk about how you rank candidates and what that means and what do managers need to know when they look at certificates and the ranking of employees. How does that influence the interviews that they do? How do you do interviews that allow you to validly and systematically take the best applicants for the job? What should those be based on? At the very end of the training there is time for a Q&A session.

I have two people from USDA rural development who, while I'm speaking pretty expertly based on my experience with lots of different agencies, we have Mr. Daniel Nash and Timothy Gaines, who are here to answer questions specifically about Rural Development. They are going to answer any questions -- if something comes up in the middle of the training, I may ask them to the cap, but -- to speak up, but for the most part they're going to stay quiet. This is a great opportunity to ask your questions and pick the brains of people who helped lots of managers do this within Rural Development.

First thing we're going to talk about -- in my experience, consulting with managers across the federal government and especially early on when I get a lot of staffing work, position descriptions, keeping them updated, is one of the weakest links in our federal HR system. Partly it is because managers aren't given

time to do it. They are not reinforced or rewarded for doing a good job of keeping on top of their position descriptions.

In my experience it can gum up the works when trying to do the most human resource actions that we try to do in the federal government. The position descriptions are the official record of duties. It is not just a record of duties that the employee has. The foundational piece for almost all HR action.

It is the legal basis by which we justify paying people. Within the unionized environment, oftentimes the PD becomes a huge tool and it is important that the things that an employee does, they need to match the things in their position description. Otherwise, grievances are filed and it is important.

PDs guide us in determining what are the qualifications that we use in order to build jobs and promote employees into other positions. Also, along with the performance plan –useful document to hand over to new employees, enabling them to know what it is expected of them. A lot of times we don't have a very good system for employees and positions fiction that is updated could fill part of that cap. It also enables managers -- it helps them make systematic ascriptions on employee development. When a pd is updated, they know and knowledge, skills, and abilities they have to have to do their job and it allows them to create performance standards and decide what training is going to -- it is a foundational piece.

Not that -- I will protect my clients , not using their names come but I just finished a project during performance management work -- performance management work, and a lot of their performance plans, they weren't up to date. Ask the executive management team if we could see the PDs that we were writing performance plans for. They said sure and share to those position descriptions with us and some of those were from 1975.

That in and of itself is not necessarily a problem. It is really important to that we make sure that these documents are up to date because that middle piece is so much of the work that we do. Because supervisors know the most about what their employees do, what it is that is important to the job, supervisors, the buck stops with you all. You are responsible for keeping the position descriptions updated.

You don't necessarily -- writing all of it from editing it, and you initiate conversations and you are the one who is monitoring these PDs to make sure that they are up-to-date and that they match the things you folks are doing. You are not alone in that. The HR staff can help you speak HReeze; can help you especially with figuring out what needs to be written in these positions captions. If you haven't done it before, there are certain parts that need to be in a and they can help you. Also, it has been my experience that employees, they should be leveraged as job subject matter experts, and I have seen a lot of smart supervisors put into their employee performance plans, that the employee was going to help update the PD and that was going to be one of the results -- that was a measurable result of the manager held them accountable for over the course of the year.

Oftentimes it is useful to use it as a differentiator if the employee is going to help you do that. Sometimes you want your best employees doing those things because you get high-quality work. Again, you are not alone in creating these position descriptions.

This is a typical PD update scenario you see on your screen. The manager says I need to hire someone for the HR specialist position. The staffing supervisor says OK, in order to create the job announcement and assessment, we need the updated position description. They look at the PDs and say, um, garbage, these position descriptions are really old. They test the employee to partner with HR to write the initial draft of the position description and then the supervisor finalizes it. They review it and ensure the adequacy and accuracy of the information. HR staff makes sure that all the I's are dotted and -- all the T's are crossed.

One of the first questions I ask for all of you is how often do you review your team's position descriptions. I will show you the answer you see clusters around once a year. That is pretty common clusters for the answer to this question when I deliver this training. When people say "rarely," often that means I do it as needed. When a position opens up they respond to that by looking at the position description to make sure it is updated.

In my experience it is best practice for federal managers to review the performance plan about once a year. Reviewing it doesn't mean you have to update it. It is just making sure that the performance plans match the work that folks do. Some managers leverage their employees to do this view. Some do this by making it the end of year performance discussion.

I would suggest, talking to my supervisor, I think she doesn't excellent job. She -- she does an excellent job. She reviews were team's PD s about a month before we have the performance discussion. Better to do it before the crush of performance discussions take up a lot of time. You almost hear a lot of your eyes rolling. I understand.

This is another position that is important that isn't necessarily -- it is very rarely performance plans -- there aren't many performance awards for having position descriptions that are updated. Agencies rarely rewarded and recognize. I think we do a good job of this and that is why managers don't do it and because it is not rewarded, it is hard sometimes to feel justified in taking the time.

Just so you know, it is easy for me from my ivory tower to say I would suggest reviewing your performance plan once a year. If you can't do it once a year, I would then suggest figuring out how often you can do it and setting that time apart. I understand you all have a lot of work to do. Federal managers are not underworked.

It is a strategic position that managers need to make because when you do get to hiring, a lot of times when there is an opportunity to do some hiring -- and my understanding is that there is going to be a fair amount of hiring in the not-too-distant future.

Allison Savage shared with me a document -- as part of the Rural Development agency goals for fiscal year 2015, there are some goals to have some pretty serious hiring efforts. I think one of the goals is to hire approximately 800 new employees. That is going to mean a lot of work. If you haven't reviewed your PDs-- haven't got into that and you are hoping to bring in some new people, the process is going to go easier if your PDs are up-to-date.

They enable you to know what qualification your folks need, and in the hiring process that is a critical factor. When I first started my federal career I did a lot of staffing work for other agencies. I was hired to help them do their examining. I would help them create the job announcement and the job assessment. For my experiences working with hundreds of agencies, a lot of them tell me you are from OPM; you know what you are doing. Just take a look at the PD and you create the assessment. That is an all right attitude and plan of attack except that oftentimes the P D they gave is out of date. It creates an assessment, and then they get a certificate of applicants that was really long, and lots of people scored really high on it.

I give that to the hiring manager. "Tony, this is crap" -- pardon my French. "These people aren't qualified." The problem is we haven't done as a team -- me and them -- as a team we had it done our homework up front and we had put crap into the process and were getting crap out of it and this is a common problem with the federal system and it leads to a lot of the delays that people here are -- leads to a of delays that people hear about. The huge certificate lists -- managers are hesitating to giving the certificates hire or move forward or even the centralized HR staff from giving this certificate to the hiring managers because they know they are not going to be happy about it. We haven't done our work on the front end.

I hope this is a clarion call. Position descriptions are an important part of your job, even though you are probably not reinforced for doing it. It is important. It doesn't have to be a huge time suck. You can do it relatively quickly, but work with your HR staff. When it comes to what goes into a PD, it has an introduction, then it has the listing of major duties.

Sometimes I see descriptions that have about five or 10 major duties or 15. Then I see one that has a page on a page and a half of major duties. Typically it is somewhere in the 5-15 range. Then outside of that, you have nine factors for classification. We will talk about that in the next section. The PD contains information that enables the classifier to know what level you're person is doing their work at, and then how are we going to pay that.

I think the questions are coming in. All right, I will get to these questions in a little bit when I see a break. These questions are really good. When it comes to classification, what do you need to know? I am not a classifier but I still taken -- take in 2 two-week sessions within a month of classification training so I could potentially -- so I can know how the system works. I have about 15 minutes to share with you some of the high points so that you can know -- what do managers need to know about classification outside of knowing how to do it?

There are three different types of paid systems when it comes to the federal government. There is a GS system, which is our general schedule system, the federal wage system, and then there is alternative HR system. Today the rest of the training pertains to GS system. That covers a majority of positions within Rural Development. Federal wage is different. There are alternative HR systems that do classifications differently. Identification of the pay system of the position, the job series of the position, and also the grade level.

This is how my job is classified. I started GS-9 and as I worked up from 9 to 13 my job has changed with its characteristics. I started as a 9 but as I increased the people that I talked to, I've gone from having only internal customers to working with customers across the government, hiring managers, and now I work a lot of times that the executive level management. With each change in my job, the changes in the nature of my work, the position is classified. We will talk about what the nine factors are.

Why do we do classification? It reinforces the merit system principle that we want to reward people equally for equal work. And so the hope is that the specialist in OPM in Kansas City is going to be paid similarly to an HR specialist who is doing similar work who works rural development in North Dakota. The classification system helps that happen. Supervisors can know how to answer questions. Sometimes employees say "you know what, I deserve a pay raise. I know I am topped out at my position about my position has changed and I deserve a pay raise." Managers need to know that there are nine different factors. You don't have to have these memorized.

You can have a discussion with the folks. Did their job change? Did the knowledge that is required to do the job; did that change substantially from before? Was there more supervisory control? Either extra guidelines, or complicated guidelines, laws or regulations that are high profile that they need to know about in order to do their jobs?

How wide is the scope and effect of their work? I will give you an example when it comes to my job. From nine to 13, I have gone from interacting with frontline HR folks to sometimes hiring managers to interacting with executive level managers. That increases my personal context. That increases complexity of my work, the scope and effect of my work. Unsurprisingly, it is one of the defining factors we develop -- in the developing of the professional ladder.

The last two a lot of times don't change is much of the physical demands -- you have to pick up 50-town boxes -- 50 -pound boxes. When those things change come they can change the classification position. What is important is that you need to know that OPM, for every job, as treated standards for each of the nine factors. If you are a classifying program analyst, you look at the jobs. It is usually 20 to 30 pages that dictate the nine factors.

How do you figure out -- it acts as a standard for the classifier. You just need to know that it exists. This is the process of classification. The very basis of the job analysis, create a basic PD. The manager and the classifier, HR staff, they are trying to know when you use -- the occupational group and theories. That all happens simultaneously. The basic PD and what was written about this nine classification standards, and then you compare it to OPM standards.

As you compare it, they assigned a point value, and the more likely they are to get a higher rated position. At the end, after you have compared all of those factors, you had them up and you get a final GS level. All of that is in the classifier's document. When talking to your employees and they say "I deserve a raise, I'm doing more work," hopefully you can be a little bit more conversant in what we are going to do, and we are going to reclassify the positions. The position is reclassified and the person typically goes through merit promotion process.

We will talk about that hiring process later on. Finally, when you handle -- when you've got your classification stuff handled, you understand how that works, oftentimes there is an opening on a manager's team. It is an excellent opportunity to think about position management, how your team is constructed, and organizing your team around these principles.

The first principle to come to everyone's mind is to minimize the cost of getting the job done. In today's work environment, managers have given a lot of reinforcements for not necessarily rushing into hiring more people, and sharing job duties that used to be done by other folks being flexible about that and minimizing costs. I will say that that is, of course -- these other two things are also important. And sometimes they end up in the short-term looking like the cost money but in the long-term the end up saving money. They are also in charge of positively affecting how well your organization meets its goals, and also, increasing your ability to keep the folks who are good at their job. Having turnover is expensive.

Having people leave because they don't like their work or they are doing the work for one and a half people or they are doing stuff that doesn't really match the level of work they are hired to do, having good people leave is expensive. It costs a lot of money when people turn over. When there is an opening on our teams, it is a good time to assess, OK, is my team designed appropriately -- do we have the appropriate design to help us accomplish our goals as efficiently as possible? As you try to do that assessment, think about these things. How many people do you need to have to accomplish our mission? Sometimes as a manager you know if you are missing one person, but sometimes that requires a little bit more thought. It requires analysis.

If you need ideas for instrument, I can help you with that. That is -- ideas for brainstorming, I can help you with that. How many people doing need to do our mission? Also, what are the skills that are required to perform the work? How are you structured? What kinds of mixture of people do need to have on your case? How much support staff and professional staff? I was working with an agency if humans ago -- a few months ago and they were having an emergency because due to sequestration and budget pressures, their managers were losing a lot of their administrative staff and were not rehiring. The administrative staff they had was overloaded and a lot of their high-level positions, GS14 and 15 positions, or spending upward third of their time handling making copies, working with -- they did a lot of creating certificates for training and it was a very expensive way to get the work done. And organizational -- the climate surveys were starting to reveal that the employees were very much considering leaving. The economy is kicking up -- it is fine.

It is making agencies like this think that they're turnover problems are gone away and they're turnover problems are coming bac. Just be careful of thinking strategically about the mix of positions. And what are those possibilities for each person? Abilities for each person? These are the most common position management issues that I see.

A very common one is that they are still I think stove--piping, or between teams in the agencies. People don't develop other skills. They just become very regimented and their work sometimes becomes redundant in a way that is needed and then what happens when we are stove-piped, there is one of

these all hands on deck moments. Other persons in the agency are left to help because they don't know what the other part of the agency does. OPM is in charge of handling federal retirement for the federal government. In the last few years that rate at which they get retirement is going very high. It is a very politically loaded aspect of what OPM does. The retirement group has started to ask for help from people like me. Unfortunately, because OPM is so stove-piped, I don't know the first thing about federal retirement. I can't really help them without going to a huge training process and making sure I have the skills and knowledge to do the work. Because OPM is stove-piped, we are vulnerable when we are hit with a huge amount of work in one session.

We can't help each other. And the other agency where the managers -- an excellent example of those other local the shopper level employees -- the upper level employees doing lower level work. Boo hoo, it is too bad that you need to do copies, welcome to the real world. But in many ways is just an inefficient and expensive way. There are high costs when we have work that misaligned and is given to people who are not in their position description. Also, unnecessary position that has been common in the federal government.

The PD doesn't reflect the work that the person actually does. The team holds onto to them because they don't want to lose them. I call these unnecessary positions panda's thumbs. Pandas have thumbs that are calcified, they can't use them. They lead to higher costs and they don't need to, a very common problem with federal teams. Their PDs are oftentimes inconsistent from one HR specialist to another team's HR specialist. It often leads to bad performance management and people feeling like other people are getting ever whether they are not getting. -- getting a reward that they are not getting. You see a lot of agencies that, for this reason, try to standardize the description. In my opinion, as a consultant, that is in a first step to a good classification process.

It is great that every HR specialist within a certain agency starts off with the same position descriptions. I strongly suggest that each manager goes over these PDs and it reflects all the important work that the employees do for the team. If it is missing something that requires a different skill but it is not in the position description, that is the time to bring it up with the centralized HR staff and maybe you have a totally different position on your team. That is fine. For doing that work enables you in the future when you are trying to report someone, when you are trying to write your performance plans, when you're trying to hire a new person, and allows you to have the foundational document that you can actually use instead of just having this paper that is supposed to be important.

Now, I am going to take a look at these questions that I am getting and see if I can answer them to the best of my ability before we move on to the hiring stuff. You know what we are going to do? I will answer these individually. I got through the classification work. We will do another 10 or so minutes and then we will take our 10-minute break. We will talk about the hiring strategies that you need to understand in order to manager folks while in how -- manage your folks well and how -- what you need to understand. As a manager, you need to have a working knowledge of the ways in which you can bring new people into your team. There is open competition, where you can open up your position to everyone, essentially.

There are merit promotion procedures, which are more internally based, and then there is excepted services, which are hiring opportunities that are outside any sort of competitive procedure. It will talk about each of these three. Open competitive examining is a process that enables managers to recruit the best ethical people -- best possible people from the general public. Typically within certain geographic regions. With telework capabilities, they are extending their pools. Now, three very, very brief history lessons. OPM used to do all the hiring for the whole federal government. It was before my time, but OPM used to do all of the hiring for all the federal government. OPM were the protectors of the merit system principles.

Now, as the government has gotten too large, that has become unwieldy. OPM delegates their examining authority to other agencies, other agency employees, and typically centralized HR staff. They get trained and certified as examiners and they are trained to do these things. USDA rural development has people that can help you do a competitive examining, go through this process. But you can also -- we still sometimes turn to OPM. When I started with OPM as a consultant that was the first consulting work that I did. I would help agencies with their vacancy announcements and their assessments, and a lot of agencies leverage OPM to do some of that work.

When doing -- going through the open competitive hiring process, it is really important for managers to know that you need to have these three pieces of information locked and loaded. Number one, a valid position description. And then also a list of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary for successful performance of the positions. That list is based on the major duties that you have in the position description. And your HR staff can help you. But don't get confused. The federal government has used those letters in days gone past. The term KS A referred also two essays that people that were applying to jobs -- maybe some of you on the phone line had to apply for jobs like this -- where you had to fill out one as a -- one essay regarding the knowledge, skills, and abilities . Those essays, that were called KSAs, those are no good anymore. We do not use those long narrative essays on the front end of the hiring. What I mean by KSAs are literally an identification of the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to do the job.

The manager has to work to create a questionnaire that will be used to rank candidates. That is some of the work that I used to do. If the position description is crap, pardon my French, then the KSAs won't be good and the questionnaire won't be good and the people who are candidates that are on certificate will not be useful. I have seen this happen when too often. -- way too often. I think this is a bit -- excuse me -- a big part of President Obama's push towards hiring reform. Hiring reform started in 2010. A big part of hiring reform is pushing managers to be more involved in the hiring process. And actually, if you click on one of the handouts, you can download -- it was him or maybe is a part -- I would just bring it up on the screen.

This is one sub agency within USDA that created this hiring reform roadmap to meet -- to dictate that President Obama has asked federal managers to me. -- to meet. You see in blue, it says manager's accountability. I would say part of this, even know it says managers are accountable for only those things in blue, I really would adjust this. In my opinion, managers play an important part in helping HR staff in reviewing and creating the job announcements and job assessments.

Even part of the language in President Obama's hiring forms says managers need to be involved in the hiring process. Not just in the interviewing process. I need to fill a vacancy. It really -- just from personal experience, being centralized HR staff, I can create assessments very easily based on a position description. But there was such a difference between those agencies that took the process little bit more seriously and their managers that got on a call with me and reviewed those assessments step-by-step to make sure everything they wanted to be in their was there.

And I know from my personal expense that they got better candidates because they were involved that way. Anyway, if you want to download -- this is the process you are supposed to go through. You will notice that President Obama has set the goal that we would do hiring -- the whole hiring process would take no longer than 80 days. Part of the reason for this is that the federal government was losing out on good candidates because it was just taking too long to make the decision.

People who were on the certificate, they weren't finding out about it quickly enough and they were taking other jobs, where they would have been great candidates for the federal job. We want to position her role development and the rest of the federal government as employers of choice; we need to make sure that when people apply for jobs that they are able to -- that they feel like they are getting information in a timely manner from us.

Anyway, without detail -- with that detail, with that instruction, you are going to take a 10-minute break, and when we come back, we will talk a little bit more about hiring reform and how it affected hiring strategies. It is 10 minutes to the hour now. Going to take a 10-minute break until 2:00 central time, 3:00 Eastern time. I will myself on -- I will put myself on mute and answer some questions and start talking again in 10 minutes. Go to the bathroom, check your blackberry's, and we will talk again.

All right. Welcome back. I did my best to answer some of the questions, but, again, if people want to stay on the line at the end of this training, we have Dan and him on the line, and you can ask some very specific, and, I think, pertinent classification questions that I am able to sympathize with, but that I am not able to give a rural development-specific solution. If you can stay on the line, we will probably have at least 15 or so minutes at the end of this training for people to ask questions.

Welcome back to the training. I talked about President Obama's hiring reform. I showed you the roadmap that some parts of USDA are using. You will notice two of the other handouts. If you click on the handouts -- there is both the memo that the White House put out, and then also an article that summarizes President Obama's efforts to streamline the federal hiring process. So, you will also see -- a bunch of other things that can be really useful stuff. In the document, in President Obama's memo, he outlaws the rule of three. So, when an issue took staffing training more than five years ago, the rule of three was part of that training. We do not have to do that anymore.

Competitive positions are supposed to you -- use category ratings, category rankings to rate applicants that are applying in an open, competitive job posting. What is category rating mean? It means that agencies decide before hand what the categories are going to be, and then, even how many categories you have to have. In my experience, most agencies use three categories, and usually they divide them accordingly. They will say people that score 90 and above are in the best categories.

The people that are 80 to 90 are in the better category, and the people that score 72 80 hearted -- 70 to 80 are in the good category. The names are arbitrary. They give them the names because of the work. I think I learned that rural development has specific names they use that are different than those, but the names of the category are not really as important as much as you understand the principle that when you put out an open, competitive announcement, that often times when you are going to get back -- in my experience, typically with the hiring manager gets back from the HR official is they are going to get a certificate of the applicant that could be considered in that best category.

We are going to talk about -- it is important to understand the candidates that are eligible for veteran's preference. They are always placed on those certificates of non-preference-eligible candidates. So, they are at the top of the best, top of the middle category, and top of the bottom category. We will talk quickly what -- about what veteran's preference is. They are our small way of respecting the skills and abilities of those that put their lives on the line for our country, so this is a benefit given to veterans, qualified veterans that apply to competitive examining. He does not use during their promotions. -- it does -- it is not used during Marriott promotions.

It does not float the same way. Category ratings -- again, they are listed at the top of each quality group, and in fact, the CP veterans, those that have a disability, if they are qualified -- they would otherwise be in the lowest category -- as long as they are minimally qualified, they actually wrote to the top group, the top-level category -- float to the top group, the top-level category. The veteran who serves during a time of combat for our country -- there are other rules for that, but that is the overarching game. When you have served in a time of combat for our country, we at least give you veteran's preference. If you have been hurt at a level of 10% or higher, that is compensable according to the V.A. letter.

You receive these numbers. If you have a service disability of less than 10%, or you received a Purple Heart, you can receive xp veterans preference, and then family members of veterans who have been hurt in the line of duty and are unable to work for themselves -- family members that support them, spouses, mothers, widows, they can derive their veterans preference from those folks. This is a very quick and dirty summary of these things. If you can, it is worth it to look at the veterans guide on OPM.gov. All of this will come up. There is a lot of information.

Every hiring official typically has this printed out. It is something they get to know very, very well. When it comes to applying veterans preference to category rating, eligible candidates float to the top of the top quality category, regardless of their score, as long as they are minimally qualified unless, unless the position is considered a scientific or professional position. Now, I cannot give you a comprehensive list of what is considered "a professional position." A quick answer is if it position requires some sort of license to practice, and again, at AGS nine level or about -- at a GS-nine level or above it is considered a professional position. Lawyers are a good example. There are other examples.

It does not like I.T. people are not professionals, but a lot of times it is not considered a professional position. It is something to consider. Work with your central HR ask folks and -- folks and ask them because that will change. Also, preference acknowledgment cannot be selected over non-preference eligible in the same category.

You have to consider all of the veterans before considering the nonveterans in that category. Also, one of the things that is different about category ratings than the other, the old rule of three hiring -- a fact is a -- vet is a vet is vet. That means you can consider any one of those first, and that expands the pool of what it would otherwise be. Today, with so many people serving our country, if you are going to hire 800 people this year within rural development, you will become familiar with many people that have served our country that are looking for work, and if they are qualified, we need to consider them for our jobs. We always to them. 15 -- 08 to them. -- owe it to them. You want to make sure you have written an assessment that gives you qualified candidates.

Too often, well-being managers put themselves between a rock and a hard place because they have people that are not qualified and they have served our country, and they do not know what to do. The very first part, the first step is to make sure that our PD and our assessments are good, so that you are not in the position of having a certificate of people that are not qualified to do the job. Within each veteran's category, it must be selected or there must be some objection sustained. One of the things you need to know is there are different authorities that are housed in different parts of the government. For example, USDA has the authority to approve of an objection if a candidate is deemed not qualified. This is something you do not want to use a whole lot.

Do not want to be creating job announcements that give you a bunch of candidates, especially veteran candidates that will be deemed not qualified. It is a sign that the assessment is not very good. Also, there is a way to respond to surveys in a way that is not truthful. So, those people can be -- they can be weeded out, and you can deem someone is not qualified. Also, USDA has sole authority for objection requests due to suitability and security issues. Often times that is done through background checks. Only OPM -- OPM has the authority to approve objections for veterans. That is a key factor.

Also, if a manager wants to object a job applicant for medical reasons -- again, OPM asked to approve of decision -- of that decision, especially if they pass over and add original veteran -- an eligible veteran. Did I hear noise -- did Tim or Dan want to say something about that? OK, I just wanted to make sure.

No, I am good.

OK, I thought I heard a noise, and I do not know if that was you trying to get my attention.

Oh, OK.

We will do a brief activity. It is not too complicated. Do not get too worried. I will bring up this category sharing activity. You will see it on your screen. If any of you are baseball fans, you will notice I am from Kansas City; my son is obsessed with a small, so there is a team to these names. -- them to these names.

If people could use the QA and day function -- QA day function to tell me who are the candidates and the top category that would be on the certificate you would get from centralized HR folks? Again, who would be in the top quality bracket? Again, if you look -- hopefully, you can see it on the screen -- it says this is not a professional or scientific position and the categories are 70-79, 80-89, and 90-100. All right, we are getting some answers. Let's see. All right, Jamie Shields.

Since it is not a professional position, Jamie Shields is going to be the person that must be considered first, because even though Jamie Shields -- she got a good, and initial quality score, she, because she is a CP veteran, she was bumped up to the top level of the top quality, and she has to be considered first. Now, there is a potential, and it is not something you should be hoping for, but there is a potential that Jamie is not qualified. So, let's say -- obviously, you can see that if this was a professional or a scientific position, that Jamie would not get bumped up to the top level, and the candidate you would have would be Sally, Omar, and Billy.

They would be from the best quality, and you would be able to pick any one of those three candidates. When it comes to category rating, once you have -- if no veterans apply, or if you have considered all of the veterans -- you have done your due diligence there, you can consider all of the other candidates that are in the best pool before moving on to the next lower quality round, and that is one of the reasons for category ratings. The intention is so that managers -- its intention is that so managers can use expertise to decide on who would be the best candidate and not relying on these quick and dirty assessments. If you have ever taken some of these assessments online, they are -- you know, the system can be gamed if the applicant wants to.

So, it is important that managers are involved, and that they are helping get better candidates. That is what category rating is designed to do -- give managers that flexibility. I want to ask another question. Let's say that for shame, the process took too long, and all of these candidates along with Jamie Shields, Jamie, Omar, Sally, and Billy, they all got other jobs. We took too long. By the time we got back to them, they say sorry, I took another job. When you told that to the hiring official, who would be the next candidate that would come to you on the certificate if they were just giving you the candidates at the next level down? Again, this is, kind of, obvious. It kind of answers the question. It is Alexis and Eric. They are at the initial quality level, so, they can be considered.

Again, since they are both veterans, and they're both in the same category, you can consider them both at the same time. So, the manager -- you can bring them both in for interviews, and you can pick Alexis over Eric if you wanted to because they both have veterans preference, and, again, if you lost out on air, you could get another certificate -- on Eric, you could get another certificate. Typically, a certificate for the best candidate will be more than three people. It might be 100. A lot of times HR people will only give managers the top level and sometimes only the veterans at the top level from -- so they save them from printing out a long list they do not need to see, and again, if Jamie is already considering another job, you would have to consider Lauren before moving on.

The principle is you need to consider the people of veteran's preference before the people without it, but you can consider all of the people within the same category, who do have veteran's preference, at the same time. Once -- if all of those people do not want that job, or they have taken other jobs, or you have disqualified them for other reasons, then you can move on to all the people that are not veterans, and you can consider all of the people in that same category at the same time.

Some managers do not like it, but in my experience, it enabled managers to get better candidates. I think it is a better process than the rule of three, but the ball, in a lot of ways, is in the manager's court.

They are the ones -- they have to leverage their skills to find better folks. Now, we just talked about open, competitive job openings on USAjobs.gov, or however you do it, but there are other hiring strategies. Agencies -- I would say typically agencies open up merit promotion job openings at the same time they open up an open, competitive job opening. They typically run them concurrently. Merit promotion is more of an internal place to process.

What I mean by internal -- we will talk about who can apply. It is people who are within the government, or have worked within the government, or veterans. Merit promotion/each agency -- merit promotion plans -- each agency has its own merit promotion plans. You have to work with people like Dan and Tim, and they can help you know, OK, how do we do our openings? How long can it be open? How many candidates are we supposed to be interviewing? How are unsuccessful candidates supposed to be notified? Each agency has the authority to do it differently.

It is important that you work with that centralized HR to do that correctly. Who is considered for merit promotion? Current agency employees. It could be federal agency employees from other agencies. They could be former Federal employees who have reinstatement eligibility, and, like a said, veterans applying under the veterans employment opportunity act. Now, there are certain types of position openings that are required to have a merit promotion position open that people can competitively apply for, and then there are other types of positions and it is up to the agency's discretion. Details and temporary promotions that are greater than 120 days -- an agency is supposed to open a merit promotion vacancy.

If there is a selection, if a manager selects certain members of their team for training that is required for promotion, they are supposed to go through a process where there is a ranking or a competition for that opportunity. If there is reassignment to a position with more promotion potential, or reinstatement to a higher grade, those are all supposed to be competitively applied. These are the things you see on the right side of your screen -- it is up to a manager, and really an agency to decide whether or not they want to use a merit promotion situation in order to justify who they selected for the position.

Now, when it comes to another final hiring strategy, there is excepted service. It consists of civil service positions that are not in the competitive circle. They are not competed for because there is a certain law, an executive order, or some sort of OPM regulation. Now, another word that I do not like that the federal government uses, there are different schedules for this excepted service. I am not clear why we call them schedule A, B, C, and the. It makes it confusing to me, four different types. Schedule a is for position, and it is not practical to expand. It is typically a temporary position.

As an example, after 9/11, and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, they were given a lot of schedule a hiring. There were critical needs that needed to be that fast and they did not have to go through the same hiring process that everyone else does. Now they do. There is also schedule b hiring, positions that are initially temporary, and also in the form of hiring programs. Do not get that confused - there are also student programs as part of the pathways programming. That is scheduled c programming. For those of you that do not know what pathways is, it is one of the handouts that you can download.

A manager needs to be familiar with pathways in order to fully consider the recruiting strategies. So, my federal hiring story is I was hired under the federal career internship program, which is now defunct. It is now -- not available to agencies, but the program is very similar to the pathways program. It has just been updated to make sure it is a more fair process, but agencies need to center -- you know, a lot of agencies are struggling -- struggling to recruit a more diverse workforce. Whether the workforce is representative of the citizens that they serve, whether it is in balance when it comes to age, or whatever, sort of, protected group, agencies need to consider utilizing different schedules.

We will be talking next week about eeo, and those types of things, and what you need to know. Smart agencies leverage these types of programs to meet some of their diversity needs to get qualified candidates. Again, you do not need the hiring authority just to bring on anybody. It is about bringing on people to do the job. So, again, a key part of this process is making sure you have done your homework so that you know what skills and ability an employee has in order to do well on the job. On the things you need to be aware of when putting out a job announcement is that there are people who have potentially lost their job that are also given priority depending on your type of opening.

So, if employees have been part of a ruff, have been used -- reduced in force. There are also applicants. Also, for DOD employees, there is a program. Those are staffing considerations. Again, what do centralized HR staff -- work with your centralized HR staff to see if these things apply for the position you are wanting to make an opening for. When it comes to ranking candidates, we did an exercise regarding this. Managers are so important in identifying the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are used to design questionnaires, so that these ranking certificates are not bunk. Somebody actually asked a question over the live-meeting QA day function -- you -- Q&a function.

They were hesitant to use that to put on a job announcement because if you're KS are only A's 30% representative -- are only 30% representative, maybe you might get a candidate that is good, that you are likely to get a bunch of candidates that are not good, and it is likely -- my guess is that the effect is more likely to be general in nature, and so, when assessments are more general, you get a wider applicant pool. Sometimes it is what you are sometimes it is not what you want, and sometimes it leads to a bunch of candidates you are not interested in hiring. If I have not hit it hard enough, it is so important for managers to be involved.

They are so critically a part of the processing getting good applicants. They participate with centralized HR folks to conduct a job announcement and identify KSA's. Typically they help determine what are the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are ratable? What of the things we have to -- if someone does not have this skill, they should not even be considered, and then what are the skills that they need to have if they are higher in it, and if they have less of it, they are lesser candidates it is one of the -- candidates? It is one of the things managers have to help HR staff with.

Managers need to help screen out applicants. One thing you will find is in order to say something is essential; it needs to be validated by the position description. A manager cannot just say off of the top of their head this skill is essential, I know it is. It needs to be part of a valid PD, so sometimes you will get pushback from centralized HR folks that say you are telling me it is critical, but your position description

does not reflect it. You can see how not having an updated PD delays this process. I will bring it up again. We look at this diagram. It says one to 10 days to review and classify a position. Well, the more you have done your work on the front end, the quicker this initial session can get done. So, it is important that managers deliver on monitoring their PD and making sure they are up to date and updating the HR staff when they are creating these assessments based on the KSA's.

It has been my experience at the best assessments I have ever created were ones that managers were fully involved in. I know you have a lot of work to do, but if you want to get good candidates, this is work that you have to do -- you have to make sacrifices, put in this time. Once you get past creating the assessment, and you have done the job announcement, worked hand-in-hand with the centralized HR folks, and you probably have hundreds of people applied for the job, and they haven't put into different categories, do you get -- you get a certificate of the top candidates.

Really, some agencies require this. Some agencies do not. I did not put it in the training, but some agencies do background. They do reference checks based on what is in the resumes. My rules are if you are going to do reference checks for one of the applicants, you have to go for all, so once you open that bag; you need to have a system in which you treat all of the applicants the same. So, that is just my word of caution about that. Do not just check references for one applicant. You need to check for all applicants once you have gone down that path.

Once you have done that, you move on to interviews. Again, a vet is a vet is a vet. You can consider all veterans if you want to, or if there are no qualified veterans, of all of the people, you can choose who you want to interview of all of the top quality people. The things to consider when you are doing your interviews are this -- the interviews need to be job-related. They need to be consistent. You need to be objective. Try to use the questions like what is your biggest weakness? I feel a lot of times we use questions like that because that is how we were hired, or in some ways that is part of our pop culture. The interview process can be used to liberate the super-duper -- separate the super-duper stars from the super stars. Here are a few tips. Think about the questions beforehand.

Do not forget to ask questions about skills that may not be in the position description -- things like their self-motivation, problem-solving. A lot of times some of these things like self-motivation, if you put that in your assessment, everyone is going to say they are self-motivated. Those are often not worth putting into what you use, but it can be worth asking the question about it, because when you ask real questions about behavioral examples, people are not able to BS as much. Also, standardize your note-taking. You do not have to have written down everything you candidates say, but take meaningful notes so you can see differences between the people you are interviewing.

As you are asking questions, keep in mind open questions are better than closed questions. "our -- closed questions are have you done this, yes. Those are close questions. You are not enabling people to give you more information, and you want more information. Leading questions are bad. What I mean by leading questions, questions where the applicant can tell by the way you ask, what type of answer you want. That invalidates the question. The behavioral event questions are the best. I will give you an example. Asking questions like can you tell me about a time you work team you were on face a problem,

and tell me about the context of the problem, how you try to solve it, how you did solve it, what other, sort of -- solvent, what other, sort of, resist -- decisions you made and what were the results of your decisions? Asking an applicant to tell you a story about some good work that they did enables you to pick up on -- if it is a good, structured interview, you know what knowledge, skills, and abilities you are looking for, and you can pick out the times they bring those up in their story and you can, in a more valid way, use the question to get at the things that you care about instead of asking them what the greatest weakness is, and whatever you do, avoid questions that lead candidates to think that you are concerned at all about protected factors like race, religion, sexual orientation.

This is the second to last slide. Before we get to questions, and I want to bring Daniel and Tim out of mute purgatory, the things that I want to hit home is that position descriptions, classification descriptions, are the bedrock of how a supervisor manages their team and HR decisions that come from that. So, consider updating those or reviewing them on a yearly basis. Do not wait until you have a job open. If role development is going to hire 800 people this year, -- rural development is going to hire 800 people this year, then you will have to will relatively fast, and having to update the PD's -- typically, in my expense, people are hurried, they either do a crummy job on the PD, so they get crummy job applicants, or they ignore the PD and do their best to compensate by creating an assessment off the top of their head, which is quasi-legal, and still, less valid because it is rushed. If you put garbage in, you are often going to get garbage out. Structure-based interviews are often the best, and also think about how to ask people about past behaviors, and make sure it is based on the things you really need to know.

Keep on top of the ways you can bring people in, whether it is the pathways program -- one of the hand is that I have for this training is scheduled a -- schedule a hiring. It is for qualified, but severely disabled veterans to get extra consideration. If you can bring on all of the people that would do a good job that type of schedule a hiring can be a really great thing. Work with your centralized HR staff to make sure you are dotting your i's, crossing your t's, and make sure you're doing what is right for your team. We have about 20 questions left. I see we have a few questions. I will try my best to answer them. Someone asks, and it came and Daniel you want to take yourself off of, feel free to answer -- if a person is advertised only to merit promotion, but no one was selected, only one candidate applied, could a new advertisement be issued, or are we up limited -- limited since merit was only advertised with no selection?

Normally we would advertise at how the management would like it, but recently we have had an update with our HR Director saying that management had to select one or the other. If they wanted to re-announce, it would be the merit or the other -- it is one or the other.

Really, one or the other? OK.

Yeah, because we had a low usage rate on DEU, and there is a cost involved, so when it is not being utilized there is no reason to use DEU as much, so we decided to go with that -- either one or the other.

OK. I have some previous questions. In your experience, does rural development require the use of standardized position descriptions? There were some questions about that.

High, Tony, it is him. To be honest, standardized PD's, they are something that is still kind of new with RD. There is a big push to use them. I did see the question there. I would say, yeah, if the standardized ED is only 30% accurate, that would be something to the person asking the question would have to bring up to their representative. In that instance, generally speaking, you know, with a standardized TV, we want to outline, as you all know, the major duties, but instead of saying something like, you know, uses all of these very different, specific programs, maybe we would say something more like uses information programs to accomplish missions, or something like that -- more generic language.

Again, though, if that is the issue you are running into, where you truly believe it is 30% accurate, we would not want to use that because standardized PD's, as you well pointed out, are typically for fairness, things like that, but at the same time we are not willing to sacrifice efficiency and accuracy in the name of fairness. I would much rather create a custom PD for that particular, you know, job, rather than settle a manager with a 30% accurate PD.

Thank you so much for that brief response. I think another question -- and I think, at least in my experience, when a PD is 30% accurate, if that really is the case, you may, potentially in your team, and I am pretending it is an HR specialist or a program analyst -- if it is only 30% the same as the other program analyst in rural development, there is a chance that it may have evolved into a different job classified position. It may be a different position altogether.

Again, that is something you want to work with smart people like Daniel and Tim to figure out. Another question I got, does a PD have to be reclassified when it is updated. So, if you as a manager update the PD, do the yearly review like Tony from OPM suggested, do you have to reclassify it every time?

No, not at all. We can do things such as pending changes. A new push we are trying at RD is to have PD's recertified at least once every three years. That is kind of a new thing for us, and I would encourage all the managers, supervisors listening in, if possible, if you have the time, do what Tony's supervisor does - a little bit before your and your you comes out, check out the PD, give it a quick skim, and say is this accurate, and if it is not, then you have time to work with myself or one of the other classifiers here in my office and we can make quick changes.

That way you know what your employees responsible for and you can better gauge their performance, like Tony said, and they can gauge their performance, this is what it says, I am on it, and I should get a performance appraisal because I do what is on my PD. That also plays into employee relations, labor relations. If you have a PD that is an accurate, that employee can go back to their labor folks and file a grievance. Obviously we want to minimize that, and one of the best ways to do that is to have an accurate PD.

A man -- me. For an example of what my supervisor has done, how it has affected our PD's in the five years that I have been on this particular federal team, the nature of my position has changed in that I am now able to deliver these virtual trainings. We did all in-person training strikers were from our you still now -- and now everyone on my team has the ability to change these PD's and we believe we will be in a good position to bring on someone. Anyway, it was not a huge change, but a change that needed to be made because it is an important skill that we need to have in order to do our job.

If I could take -- if everyone could be taken off of mute so that they can -- mute, so that they can ask questions out loud -- a couple of people have raised their hands and I want to give them a chance to ask their question if they still have it.

All right, sir, I will open the lines. OK, they may ask their questions.

Do we have any brave souls? Who are the people -- if you have a question, now is the time. You have a captive audience.

Was that Mr. Gaines that was speaking most recently regarding the adjusting of standardized position descriptions?

Yes, it was.

My question is the states received an e-mail that says they should use of the standardized PD's Monroe development is made -- Rural Development is mandatory and we cannot make changes to them. When we find that they are that far out of whack, and some of them are, what is our Avenue? Who do we send the through now that we are regionalized?

That is --

Our HR teams are being told they cannot change -- change it. We are being told we cannot change it. We are kind of chasing our tails.

Understood. I had been -- had heard the states hadn't been given -- had been given that guidance. I will check and follow up on that. I do know there are the abilities to add addendum's two things.

We are trying to push the standardized PD because, for the most part, most jobs can be described in a more standardized way, and we are trying to get away from the nitty-gritty, and more broadly describe what the position as.

Again, if you do find that that standardized PD is sacrificing accuracy because it is a standardized PD, that is something you do need to bring up 2 -- I believe it is the folks you're going to be working with, and for the one question -- they did not want to post a vacancy announcement.

We never want you to not post a vacancy announcement because you feel the quality is lacking. That would be any -- an issue that I would encourage you to push upwards and get some sort of answer on, and if the answer is coming back know, you have to keep using the 30% quality PD, keep asking the question until it can come to either one of us in the office. Again, you can take down my e-mail.

It is Timothy.Gaines@STL.USDA.gov, so if you have any questions regarding that issue, feel free to e-mail me. I will get with my people, and I will feel a little bit better as to the guidance the states have been given and I will broach that topic. What, in that instance, are you guys supposed to do, and I will hopefully get a more specific question for you.

Tim, this is Allison. When you get that information, can you share it with me, so I can make sure everyone in this audience gets that information?

good. Definitely.

This is Jennifer Jackson. I am the one that presented the scenario with 30% accuracy with rural development, and to let you know, I gave you a very detailed, bolted objection to the use of the three PD's that I was offered, and it is my understanding that that went on the region of -- that went beyond the regional, and I am still here on able to back fill those positions because I will not use them for my own personal positions because they are not accurate, and I also have a union that says they will file a grievance on it.

Absolutely, and is because you are giving your employees a position discussion for duties that they may not do, and how will you hold them to performance standards? It is difficult to do that. If you could get with me off-line, and hopefully we can get some satisfactory response.

Great. Thank you very much.

You are welcome.

Any other questions? I am OK if there is not. Timothy and Daniel, thank you for being brave enough -- I think often times these sessions, and sometimes the questions and answers are some of the most difficult, but some of the most useful for people to have their real questions answered, and I appreciate your willingness to take time and come and help me, and also deliver this training for folks. Again, you will be getting a survey about this training. Please respond to that survey. It is very, very quick. Let us know what your responses are to the training -- if it was useful. That is very useful for us and thank you all for your time this afternoon. Have a good day.

Thanks, Tony.