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# National Science Foundation

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## *Hiring Reform Action Plan*

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FY 2010 - FY 2011

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## Introduction

The National Science Foundation (NSF) invests in the best ideas generated by scientists, engineers and educators working at the frontiers of knowledge and across all fields of research and education to:

- Promote the progress of science;
- Advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; and
- Secure the national defense.

NSF's mission, vision and goals address maintaining and strengthening the vitality of the U.S. science and engineering enterprise. NSF is visionary, dedicated to excellence, broadly inclusive and accountable.

NSF's mission requires that the agency hire and retain a dynamic workforce ready to meet its strategic goals. Establishing efficient hiring procedures that work toward finding, assessing and selecting the highest quality employees will help NSF attain its vision and goals. NSF has many programs in place focused on helping the organization select the best candidates in a timely manner. The Foundation can make additional improvements by incorporating the President's Hiring Reform Initiative mandates and by addressing internally identified hiring reform barriers.

## **Presidential Hiring Reform Memorandum**

The ability of agencies to perform their missions effectively and efficiently depends on a talented and engaged workforce. On May 11, 2010, President Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum geared toward improving the Federal recruitment and hiring process for positions covered under Title V of the U.S. Code. The initiative attempts to overhaul the way agencies recruit and hire the civilian workforce, to make it easier for applicants to apply for Federal jobs and to allow agencies to select diverse, high-quality candidates more efficiently. The new initiatives also require that managers and supervisors assume greater leadership responsibility in recruiting and selecting employees with the support of human resource offices.

More specifically, the Presidential Hiring Reform Memorandum requires that agencies with Title V positions take the following actions by November 1, 2010:

1. - Eliminate any requirement that applicants respond to essay-style questions when submitting their initial application materials for any Federal job
2. - Allow individuals to apply for Federal employment by submitting resumes and cover letters or completing simple, plain language applications, and assess applicants using valid, reliable tools
3. - Provide for selection from among a larger number of qualified applicants by using the "category rating" approach (as authorized by section 3319 of title 5, United States Code), rather than the "Rule of 3" approach, under which managers may select only from among the three highest scoring applicants
4. - Require that managers and supervisors with responsibility for hiring are: (a) more fully involved in the hiring process, including planning current and future workforce requirements, identifying the skills required for the job, and engaging actively in the recruitment and, when applicable, the interviewing process; and (b) accountable for recruiting and hiring highly qualified employees and supporting their successful transition into Federal service, beginning with the first performance review after November 1, 2010

5. - Provide OPM and OMB timelines and targets to:
  - Improve the quality and speed of agency hiring by: (a) reducing substantially the time it takes to hire mission-critical and commonly filled positions; (b) measuring the quality and speed of the hiring process; and (c) analyzing the causes of agency hiring problems and actions that will be taken to reduce them
  - Provide every agency hiring manager training on effective, efficient and timely ways to recruit and hire well-qualified individuals
6. - Notify individuals applying for Federal employment through USAJOBS, an OPM-approved Federal web-based employment search portal, about the status of their application at key stages of the application process

### Action Plan: Initiatives and Barriers

While NSF is taking many steps toward improving recruitment and hiring, the Foundation’s Hiring Reform SWAT team has identified five process barriers it must overcome to accomplish the President’s initiatives and improve the hiring process across the Foundation.

<b><i>NSF-Identified Barriers</i></b>	<b><i>Presidential Hiring Reform Initiatives</i></b>
1. Recruitment Planning Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRI 4: Ensure managers are involved in and accountable for hiring process</li> <li>• HRI 5: Improve quality and speed of hiring</li> <li>• HRI 6: Notify applicants at key stages of application process</li> </ul>
2. Interview Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRI 5: Improve quality and speed of hiring</li> <li>• HRI 6: Notify applicants at key stages of application process</li> </ul>
3. Hiring Tools and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRI 5: Improve quality and speed of hiring</li> </ul>
4. Job Opportunity Announcements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRI 1: Eliminate narrative questions in job applications</li> <li>• HRI 2: Allow individuals to apply with resumes and cover letters</li> <li>• HRI 5: Improve quality and speed of hiring</li> </ul>
5. High Quality Applicant Scarcity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRI 3: Implement category rating exclusively</li> <li>• HRI 4: Ensure managers are involved in and accountable for hiring process</li> <li>• HRI 5: Improve the quality and speed of hiring</li> <li>• HRI 6: Notify applicants at key stages of application process</li> </ul>

The 2010 NSF-identified barriers mirror those identified in the Foundation’s 2009 Hiring Reform Action Plan. NSF is pursuing actionable steps to eliminate barriers surrounding the effective recruitment and selection for all positions and is making progress toward overcoming barriers and improving the hiring process. The following detailed action plans outline steps NSF will take to address each of the Presidential Memorandum requirements and the internally identified barriers applicable to Title V positions at the Foundation. NSF anticipates that hiring reform efforts focused on Title V positions, which currently constitute a little over half of the NSF workforce, will also have a broader, positive effect on hiring across the Foundation.

**Hiring Reform Initiative 1: Eliminate use of narrative questions in job applications**

**Presidential Hiring Reform Initiative:**

Eliminate any requirement that applicants respond to essay-style questions when submitting their initial application materials for any Federal job.

**Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:**

NSF’s job opportunity announcements currently require narrative information as part of the initial application process.

**Date:**

July 2010

**Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):**

The Foundation currently uses narrative questions to assist in determining minimum qualifications because another process for making such determinations has yet to be identified and approved.

**Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:**

NSF’s initial application process allows candidates to apply by answering questions or assessment items that do not require narrative responses and allows the agency to make accurate and timely qualifications determinations based on these submissions.

**Primary Action Planning Team**

**Lead:** Hiring Reform SWAT Team

**Members:** Designated Agency Management, Hiring Managers, and HRM Representatives

**Action Steps**

<i><b>Actions to be Taken</b></i>	<i><b>Key Deliverables/ Output</b></i>	<i><b>Start Date/ End Date</b></i>	<i><b>Responsible Party (Parties)</b></i>	<i><b>Budget, Resources and Approvals</b></i>
1.1. Develop a plan for determining candidate qualifications using resumes and assessments that do not require essay or narrative responses	Assessment plan developed	August 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> HRM	\$10,000 contract support and .25 FTE (NSF)
1.2. Identify and make necessary system changes to accommodate revised assessments	System changes/revisions completed	September 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice:</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> HRM	\$30,000 contract support and 1 FTE (NSF)
1.3. Update NSF job application procedures and processes to eliminate the need for essay and narrative questions in the initial application	Job application and assessment processes revised	September 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$15,000 contract support and .25 FTE (NSF)

1.4. Train NSF hiring officials and HRM staff on revised hiring processes and available resources	Refer to initiative 5, action 5.2 for detailed information on training. Training to reflect the new initiatives, processes and procedures as a result of this action plan will be completed together in a series of sessions targeted to hiring managers and human resource staff.			
1.5. Work with individual hiring managers to develop job announcement language that will result in accurate and timely qualification determinations for individual job announcements	Job announcements approved by hiring managers that result in accurate and timely qualification determinations	November 2010/ Ongoing	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$10,000 contract support and 1 FTE (NSF)
1.6. Evaluate effectiveness of new assessments, processes and procedures, and accountability initiatives; revise as necessary	Evaluations used to inform continuous improvements	May 2010/ Ongoing	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$13,000 contract support and 1 FTE (NSF)

## **Hiring Reform Initiative 2: Allow individuals to apply with resumes and cover letters**

**Presidential Hiring Reform Initiative:**

Allow individuals to apply for Federal employment by submitting resumes and cover letters or completing simple, plain language applications, and assess applicants using valid, reliable tools.

**Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:**

NSF's job opportunity announcements currently require narrative information as part of the initial application process.

**Date:**

July 2010

**Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):**

NSF assesses candidates using responses to narrative questions.

**Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:**

NSF's initial application process allows candidates to apply by submitting a resume and cover letter along with answers to questions or assessment items that do not require narrative responses and allows the agency to make accurate and timely qualification determinations.

**Primary Action Planning Team**

**Lead:** Hiring Reform SWAT Team

**Members:** Designated Agency Management, Hiring Managers, and HRM Representatives

### **Action Steps**

<i>Actions to be Taken</i>	<i>Key Deliverables/ Output</i>	<i>Start Date/ End Date</i>	<i>Responsible Party (Parties)</i>	<i>Budget, Resources and Approvals</i>
2.1. Develop a plan to accurately determine candidate qualifications using resumes and cover letters, and as necessary, other flexibilities allowed by OPM	Assessment plan developed	August 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> HRM	\$10,000 contract support and .25 FTE (NSF)
2.2. Identify and make necessary system changes to update NSF job application procedures and incorporate assessment of resume and cover letter in initial application	Job application system changes/ revisions completed	September 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> HRM	\$30,000 contract support and 1 FTE (NSF)
2.3. Train Hiring Officials and HRM Staff on revised hiring processes and available resources	Refer to initiative 5, action 5.2 for detailed information on training. Training to reflect the new initiatives, processes, and procedures as a result of this action plan will be completed together in a series of sessions targeted to hiring managers and human resource staff.			
2.4. Work with individual hiring managers to develop job announcement language that will result in accurate and timely qualification determinations for individual job announcements	Revised job announcements	November 2010/ Ongoing	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> HRM	\$10,000 contract support and 1 FTE (NSF)
2.5. Evaluate effectiveness of new assessments, processes and procedures, and accountability initiatives; revise as necessary	Refer to initiative 1, action 1.6 for detailed evaluation information.			

**Hiring Reform Initiative 3: Use category rating exclusively**

**Presidential Hiring Reform Initiative:**

Provide for selection from among a larger number of qualified applicants by using the "category rating" approach (as authorized by section 3319 of title 5, United States Code), rather than the "Rule of 3" approach, under which managers may select only from among the three highest scoring applicants.

**Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:**

In 2009, the NSF SWAT team identified the scarcity of qualified applicants as a barrier. Since then, the Foundation has improved targeted outreach and marketing. NSF has not yet fully implemented category rating as required by the Presidential Hiring Reform Initiative.

**Date:**

July 2010

**Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):**

NSF's goal is to target and hire the highest quality candidates. It is believed that the traditional "Rule of 3" limits the number of qualified candidates that managers can consider for selection, but the exclusive use of category rating has yet to be required within NSF.

**Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:**

Category Rating is used exclusively and the "Rule of 3" is retired.

**Primary Action Planning Team**

**Lead:** HRM

**Members:** Designated Agency Management, Hiring Managers, and HRM Representatives

**Action Steps**

<i><b>Actions to be Taken</b></i>	<i><b>Key Deliverables/ Output</b></i>	<i><b>Start Date/ End Date</b></i>	<i><b>Responsible Party (Parties)</b></i>	<i><b>Budget, Resources and Approvals</b></i>
3.1. Revise selection procedures to implement category rating exclusively for DEU recruiting (i.e., recruiting for non-government candidates for Title V positions)	Hiring procedures updated; use of "Rule of 3" retired	August 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	.75 FTE (NSF)
3.2. Train Hiring Officials and HRM Staff on revised hiring processes and available resources	Refer to initiative 5, action 5.2 for detailed information on training. Training to reflect the new initiatives, processes and procedures as a result of this action plan will be completed together in a series of sessions targeted to hiring managers and human resource staff.			
3.3. Evaluate effectiveness of new assessments, processes and procedures, and accountability initiatives; revise as necessary	Refer to initiative 1, action 1.6 for detailed evaluation information.			

### **Hiring Reform Initiative 4: Ensure managers are involved in and accountable for hiring process**

**Presidential Hiring Reform Initiative:**

Require that managers and supervisors with responsibility for hiring are: (a) more fully involved in the hiring process, including planning current and future workforce requirements, identifying the skills required for the job, and engaging actively in the recruitment and, when applicable, the interviewing process; and (b) accountable for recruiting and hiring highly qualified employees and supporting their successful transition into Federal service, beginning with the first performance review cycle starting after November 1, 2010.

**Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:**

In 2009, the NSF SWAT team identified concerns about the effectiveness of recruitment planning at NSF. Since then, NSF continues to improve the recruitment planning process and improved its staffing planning process to further promote manager involvement and establish key milestones within the process. However, hiring managers are generally not held accountable for involvement in the hiring process through their performance management plans.

**Date:**

July 2010

**Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):**

The NSF recruitment planning process has not been fully communicated and has not been fully utilized. Additionally, performance plans do not uniformly address managerial accountability for involvement in the hiring process.

**Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:**

An increased number of managers participate in staffing and hiring planning initiatives. Recruitment plans are jointly developed by hiring managers and HRM for each recruitment. Hiring managers' performance plans include accountability for recruiting and hiring.

**Primary Action Planning Team**

**Lead:** Hiring Reform SWAT Team

**Members:** Designated Agency Management, Hiring Managers, and HRM Representatives

#### **Action Steps**

<b>Actions to be Taken</b>	<b>Key Deliverables/ Output</b>	<b>Start Date/ End Date</b>	<b>Responsible Party (Parties)</b>	<b>Budget, Resources and Approvals</b>
4.1. Revise performance plan objectives to hold managers accountable for hiring highly qualified employees and supporting their successful transition into Federal service	Manager's performance plan objectives are updated to include accountability for hiring	August 2010/ December 2010 (for Executive hiring managers) May 2011 (for General Workforce hiring managers)	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	.5 FTE (NSF)
4.2. Review NSF's Recruitment Planning Tool for possible improvement	Updated Recruitment Planning Tool	August 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$8,000 contract support and .5 FTE (NSF)

4.3. Communicate the availability and required utilization of NSF's Recruitment Planning Tool to hiring managers	Communications about the updated Recruitment Planning Tool	September 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Management, HRM	.25 FTE (NSF)
4.4. Develop training for hiring managers regarding recruitment planning	Training documents developed and training courses provided to hiring managers	September 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> HRM	\$15,000 contract support and 1.5 FTE (NSF)
4.5. Ensure that an agreed upon recruitment plan is completed by the hiring manager and HRM for each recruitment action	Completed recruitment plan developed for each recruitment action	September 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Management, HRM	.5 FTE (NSF)
4.6. Evaluate effectiveness of NSF's Recruitment Planning Tool and the recruitment planning process; revise as necessary	Refer to initiative 1, action 1.6 for detailed evaluation information.			

### **Hiring Reform Initiative 5: Improve quality and speed of hiring**

**Presidential Hiring Reform Initiative:**

Improve the quality and speed of agency hiring by: (a) reducing substantially the time it takes to hire mission-critical and commonly filled positions; (b) measuring the quality and speed of the hiring process; and (c) analyzing the causes of agency hiring problems and actions that will be taken to reduce them. And provide every agency hiring manager training on effective, efficient and timely ways to recruit and hire well-qualified individuals

**Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:**

In 2009, the NSF SWAT team identified a number of barriers to hiring high quality candidates efficiently, including recruitment planning, process issues and interview scheduling.

**Date:**

July 2010

**Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):**

The limited communication and use of detailed, up-to-date guidance, tools and resources inhibits efficient processing of hiring actions. Additionally, timing of the interview process causes significant delays in hiring.

**Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:**

Hiring managers and HRM consistently use available recruitment planning guidance, tools and resources to improve the efficiency of the hiring process. Assessments of dwell time show reduced time to hire at most steps in the hiring process. Candidate quality, as measured through manager feedback via the CHCO Hiring Managers Survey, remains high.

**Primary Action Planning Team**

**Lead:** Hiring Reform SWAT Team

**Members:** Designated Agency Management, Hiring Managers, and HRM Representatives

#### **Action Steps**

<b>Actions to be Taken</b>	<b>Key Deliverables/ Output</b>	<b>Start Date/ End Date</b>	<b>Responsible Party (Parties)</b>	<b>Budget, Resources and Approvals</b>
5.1. Review SWAT recommendations for improving job opportunity announcements (JOAs), and ensure that JOAs meet OPM requirements and satisfy NSF hiring managers	Revised JOAs that meet OPM requirements and satisfy NSF hiring managers	July 2010/ November 2010	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$25,000 contract support and .5 FTE (NSF)

5.2. Train Hiring Officials and HRM Staff on revised hiring processes and available resources	Briefings, training materials and training sessions	November 2010/ November 2011	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$25,000 contract support and 2 FTE (NSF)
5.3. Evaluate and update NSF's recruitment planning documentation	Recruitment planning documentation is updated	October 2010/ November 2011	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$15,000 contract support and .25 FTE (NSF)
5.4. Communicate NSF's updated recruitment planning documentation to hiring managers	New communication tools developed to promote awareness of available recruitment planning tools	November 2010/ November 2011	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	.25 FTE (NSF)
5.5. Update/implement an automated hiring system to comply with hiring reform initiative mandates	An updated automated hiring system that provides elements for compliance with hiring reform initiatives	November 2010/ November 2011	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$70,000 contract support and 2.5 FTE (NSF)
5.6. Assess current outreach programs to identify new opportunities (e.g., social networking websites) to attract quality applicants	Findings and recommendations from assessment	November 2010/ November 2011	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	.5 FTE (NSF)
5.7. Pilot/Evaluate - Identify and establish specific dates for interview window during recruitment planning process for specific jobs	Interview window identified for specific jobs in pilot; findings and recommendations from assessment	November 2010/ November 2011	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	\$5,000 contract support and .25 FTE (NSF)
5.8. Pilot/Evaluate – Include the specific dates for interview window in the job opportunity announcement (JOA)	Job opportunity announcements containing specific dates of interview window in JOA for positions in pilot; findings and recommendations from assessment	November 2010/ November 2011	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Hiring Managers, HRM	.5 FTE (NSF)

5.9. Promote use of CHCO Hiring Managers Survey	Increased hiring manager participation in survey	November 2010/ November 2011	<i>Accountable Officials:</i> Agency Management <i>Oversight and Advice :</i> SWAT <i>Action:</i> Management, HRM	.25 FTE (NSF)
5.10. Evaluate effectiveness of new processes, procedures and initiatives; revise as necessary	Refer to initiative 1, action 1.6 for detailed evaluation information.			

**Hiring Reform Initiative 6: Notify applicants of status at key points in hiring process**

**Presidential Hiring Reform Initiative:**

Notify individuals applying for Federal employment through USAJOBS, an OPM-approved Federal web-based employment search portal, about the status of their application at key stages of the application process.

**Describe the barrier, problem, or deficiency being addressed:**

No barrier currently.

**Date:**

July 2010

**Describe what is causing the barrier/problem (i.e., What is the root cause?):**

No barrier currently.

**Define success or the desired outcome upon completion of applied tasks:**

Applicants are informed of their status at key stages of hiring process.

**Lead:** Hiring Reform SWAT Team

**Members:** Designated Agency Management, Hiring Managers, and HRM Representatives

**Action Steps**

<i><b>Actions to be Taken</b></i>	<i><b>Key Deliverables/ Output</b></i>	<i><b>Start Date/ End Date</b></i>	<i><b>Responsible Party (Parties)</b></i>	<i><b>Budget, Resources and Approvals</b></i>
6.1. Continue current process for notifying candidates of status (*Ensure NSF's new Automated Hiring System links to the USA Jobs website to notify applicants at key stages of hiring process)	Applicants are notified at key stages of hiring process	Complete	Complete	Complete
6.2. Train NSF hiring officials and HRM staff on revised hiring processes and available resources	Refer to initiative 5, action 5.2 for detailed information on training. Training to reflect the new initiatives, processes and procedures as a result of this action plan will be completed together in a series of sessions targeted to hiring managers and human resource staff.			