

MICROCOMPUTER ASSISTED RATING SYSTEM (MARS)

1. What Is MARS?

MARS (Microcomputer Assisted Rating System) is an electronic rating and ranking software package available by reimbursable agreement from the Office of Personnel Management.

2. Why Should We Use MARS?

MARS mimics the activities of the staffing function in the personnel office. It scans applications, records applicant responses, assesses minimum eligibility for the position, rates and ranks applicants, produces an electronic certificate of eligibles and/or the best qualified applicants. MARS can perform these services in less than half the time of the personnel office and at less than half the cost.

3. How Does The Applicant Use MARS?

Applicants may phone in or mail in their application to the Office of Personnel Management.

4. Where Should The Application Be Sent?

The application should be sent to the Office of Personnel Management office that issued the announcement.

5. Who Determines Area Of Consideration And Opening and Closing Dates?

The manager who has the vacancy will make these decisions.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

6. **Who Responds To Complaints, Freedom of Information Act Requests And Applicant Questions Regarding General Information or Status?**

The Office of Personnel Management office that issued the vacancy announcement.

7. **Who Does the Quality Review for Applicant Inflation?**

The Office of Personnel Management will review the Form C and the application of each referred applicant.

8. **What Does MARS Cost?**

Currently DOI users are charged \$500 for a merit promotion certificate and \$250 for an accompanying competitive certificate. There is no charge for any accompanying noncompetitive, reassignment or change to lower grade list.

9. **How Do We Fund MARS?**

You may simply include MARS in your financial plan and establish an account with sufficient funds to fill a portion or all of your projected vacancies by the Office of Personnel Management service. During the year, as you use the service, the Office of Personnel Management will bill against the previously established account.

NOTE: A comprehensive MARS Users Guide is attached.

MARS OVERVIEW

How MARS Operates. MARS (Microcomputer Assisted Rating System) is a PC-based software package which was developed by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to automate the process of developing an applicant rating schedule and processing candidate responses.

OPM personnelists create the rating schedule by entering questions into the MARS system which are based upon job factors obtained from the position description and qualification standards. After the questions have been entered into MARS, the program creates a questionnaire used to rate the applicants. The questionnaire is then saved into a computer file. A nationwide inventory of these MARS questionnaires is available to OPM Service Centers.

The MARS processing program uses information from either of two sources, depending on the type of position to be filled. With some lower-level positions, applicants can submit qualification information over the telephone. Their responses to specific questions are stored and processed. For most positions, MARS reads and processes applicant information from an optical scan form. The optical scan form is used by the applicants to respond to the questions on the questionnaire

which was generated by the MARS developmental program. The applicant's name, address, veteran preference, and responses to the questionnaire are read into the computer which will assign numerical ratings to each applicant and create a report showing the name, social security number, and rating of each applicant scanned. After ranking the applicants, the system prepares a certificate of eligibles which is mailed or telefaxed to the requesting office.

Costs. Costs may be renegotiated each fiscal year. For 1995 the charges are \$500 per list of eligibles for a merit promotion action. In 1996 OPM is implementing a pricing schedule based on a sliding scale where fees vary from \$175 for a list from an unchanging rating schedule using the telephone application to \$775 for a complex, one-of-a-kind case at an upper grade level.

The costs associated with the use of MARS must be considered when decisions are being made concerning the scope of recruitment necessary to fill a vacancy. Using MARS to generate lists of candidates at multiple grade levels and multiple series can become prohibitively expensive. The position level and degree of recruiting difficulty should be realistically reviewed before determining that the purchase of

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

multiple lists is appropriate.

Benefits. We expect to receive a number of benefits from the use of MARS including:

- significant decrease in the amount of time required to fill a vacancy since the review of individual applications and the development of crediting plans will be automated.

- simplified application procedure for applicants (resume and optional scan form versus SF 171 and narrative statements). In the future applicants will also be able to use the telephone to respond to the questionnaire instead of submitting a C-Form for certain vacancies.

- ranking panels will not be required when MARS is used; and,

- in keeping with National Performance Review goals, a reduction in the number of personnel staff needed.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

HOW TO USE MARS

Managers

- Request to Fill a Vacancy.

When a request for eligibles is initiated using the Federal Personnel and Payroll System (FPPS) automated SF52 system, the personnel consultant in the servicing personnel office will contact the supervisor about the use of MARS to fill the vacancy. It is intended that the majority of positions will be filled using MARS. The supervisor will be asked to provide a position description. The supervisor has the option of contacting OPM directly or working through the personnel consultant.

- Working with an OPM Service Center. Although the local OPM Service Center will customarily provide MARS service, the requesting organization has the option to work with any OPM office nationwide. A list of OPM offices is included with this Guide. However, there are benefits to be gained from establishing a working relationship with a specific OPM office where the staff can become familiar with specific types of positions and management styles.

- Providing Documentation. Once the OPM Service Center has been identified, the supervisor or personnel consultant will place a telephone call and notify the MARS contact that a MARS request is being placed. OPM will need the following documents:

- MARS Case Processing Cover Sheet, and

- The classified position description

Once Proclass Plus has been implemented, it will create a MARS file when the supervisor uses the software to create a new position description. This will make it easier to produce documentation should you decide to fill the position using MARS.

The first time an OPM office provides MARS processing services, they must also receive a copy of the signed OPM Form 1616, Reimbursement of Advance of Funds Agreement Between Federal Agencies, for the Bureau, and a copy of the local merit promotion plan. Only one Agreement is signed for the Bureau.

If this is the first vacancy to be filled using MARS in a specific office, a copy of the local merit promotion plan must also be included.

- Developing the Questionnaire.

OPM will assign a personnelist to the MARS case who will work with the supervisor and the personnel consultant to develop an appropriate and satisfactory rating questionnaire. They will fax a copy of the drafts to the supervisor or personnel consultant, depending on the supervisors preference. The supervisor and the consultant will review the draft and either approve it or ask OPM to make modifications. Once the rating schedule has been approved, opening and closing dates will be established in accordance with the applicable merit

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

promotion plan. A copy of the announcement will be faxed to the supervisor or consultant for review.

When considering non-status candidates, managers also have the option of using the "agency add-on option" where scores of candidates are rounded to 70, 80, or 90 by MARS. Veterans preference points are then added and all 90-level scores are referred to the selecting official where the applications can be reviewed and up to 9 additional points added based on a job-related review of qualifications. This option works particularly well when the position is unique, highly technical, or a research position where agency subject-matter experts are in the best position to decide on such fine points. Interviews or work samples can also be used to add these additional points under this option.

- Advertising the Vacancy. The vacancy will be advertised as follows:

Entry into the Departmental Automated Vacancy Announcement Distribution System (AVADS). The AVADS database is accessible throughout the DOI and OPM's Washington, DC, Service Center via Local Area Networks and stand-alone pc's. Interested candidates can also reach it with a modem at 703-648-6000 or through the Internet.

Entry into OPM's electronic bulletin board OPM JOBS by OPM

(912) 757-3500.

- Referral Lists. Once the vacancy announcement has closed, OPM will process the applications and develop a referral list. The list will be faxed to the supervisor or personnel consultant. The person to receive the fax should ensure that the fax machine is either in a protected location or that someone is nearby to collect the list when OPM sends it since the information is sensitive. The resumes associated with the candidates on the list will be mailed. The referral lists will be separated into separate categories (i.e., promotion eligibles, reassignment eligibles, nonstatus candidates, handicapped eligibles, etc.). The names on each list will be in the order specified by the merit promotion plan. Managers will have 30 days to review the referral list and make a selection. An extension of an additional 30 days can be granted if needed.

- Interviewing the Applicants. Supervisors may request additional information from the applicants at the time of the selection interviews such as supervisory appraisals or work samples if appropriate. Supervisors may not require applicants to submit SF 171's or narrative descriptions of their knowledge, abilities, or other characteristics (KASOC statements).

- Making a Selection. Once a selection is made, the selectee must complete an Optional Form 306, Declaration of Employment, if they are new hires into the Federal government.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

The referral list is annotated and returned to OPM.

Usually the hiring office notifies the nonselected candidates of the decision. OPM will notify the nonselected candidates of the decision if arrangements are made in advance.

- Merit Promotion Case File.

OPM retains the merit promotion case file and all pertinent documentation.

- Responding to Applicant Inquiries Including Freedom of Information Act Requests. OPM will respond to all applicant inquiries other than those seeking detailed information about the selection itself or the selection process.

Applicants

- MARS Application Forms.

Applicants will complete the following forms to apply for a vacancy being processed with MARS:

- **C-Form**, an optical scan form which cannot be photocopied. Applicant must have the MARS questionnaire (**Supplemental Qualifications Statement**) in order to complete the C-Form.

- **Resume or Optional Form 612**, Optional Application for Federal Employment

- **Optional Form 306**, Declaration of Employment (collected from new hires to the Federal

government only)

- **DI 1935, Race and Ethnic Data Survey** (submission is voluntary)

Those candidates who are included on the referral list can be requested to provide copies of supervisory appraisals as part of the final selection process.

The SF 171 has been abolished. Applicants cannot be required to submit SF 171's. Applicants may submit resumes as long as all the information on the Option Form 612 is included on the resume.

- Obtaining the Forms. The application package must be obtained from OPM. The C-Form cannot be completed without the questionnaire which may differ somewhat for each vacancy even though the type of job remains the same. The package will also contain a copy of the OF 612 and the DI 1935. The vacancy announcement will provide the applicant with a telephone number to use to order the application package. The telephone number is usually an automated voice mail system which will ask the applicant to leave address information as well as identifying the specific announcement wanted.

- Submitting the Forms. The application must be mailed to the OPM address provided on the vacancy announcement. Do not mail it or drop it off in the servicing personnel office since it cannot be processed there.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

Applications postmarked by the closing date will be accepted if they arrive before OPM begins processing the questionnaires. **Do not submit photocopies of the C-Form.** OPM will retain your application package whether or not you are referred.

- Notification of Referral/ Selection.

The notification of your referral or failure to make the best qualified list will come from OPM. The job offer will be made by the servicing personnel office. Applicant rights to file grievances or Equal Employment Opportunity complaints concerning the referral or selection process have not changed, but information on that part of the process controlled by OPM must be obtained from OPM.

Personnel Consultants and Processors

Interface with OPM. The personnel office may act as an intermediary between OPM and the supervisor. In this role, the personnelist may initiate contact with OPM, forward the necessary documentation, review the draft questionnaire along with the supervisor. The personnelist may annotate the referral list, noting selections, after the selection and return it to OPM. The personnel consultant may check the telephone number provided by OPM for applicant use in ordering forms to ensure it is correct and may address problems in development of the questionnaire.

- Interface with AVADS.

Identifying a MARS Vacancy. The personnel office may be responsible for entering the vacancy announcement information into AVADS. AVADS provides a list of OPM offices to choose from when using MARS to fill a vacancy. The office chosen will appear as the point of contact for the vacancy on the OPM JOBS bulletin board. It is important to indicate that the vacancy will be processed using MARS since failure to do so will mean that the wrong point of contact will appear not only on AVADS and OPM JOBS but also in commercial job search publications which use AVADS data (e.g., "Federal Research Service").

Recruitment Analysis. AVADS allows a data entry person to enter summary Race and Ethnic Origin (RNO) data. The personnel office forwards DI-1935 forms received from OPM to the EEO Office. The EEO Office completes a summary data form and returns it to personnel where the data is entered into AVADS. Entry of this data into AVADS may be accomplished at another point including the EEO Office or the requesting supervisor, depending on management preference.

- Interface with the clients (supervisors and applicants).

Supervisors. The personnel office will work closely with the requesting supervisor in processing vacancies with MARS if the supervisor so chooses. The supervisor should review and approve the questionnaire. If the supervisor prefers to work directly with

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

OPM, the personnel consultant can still provide advice and assistance. The supervisor is responsible for preparing the position description if a classified position description does not exist.

Applicants. Personnel consultants may assist applicants by providing information on the job duties; providing the correct OPM telephone number to order application packages; and responding to applicant inquiries about the status of the selection process. Applicant inquiries about the referral list itself should be directed to OPM.

- **Processing Selections.** The following steps should be taken in processing a selection:

Make the selection offer.

Establish Enter on Duty date.

Collect OF 306, Background Questionnaire, from the selectee if new hire to the Federal government.

Request SF 75 information if appropriate.

Arrange for drug testing if appropriate.

Return annotated referral list to OPM so that OPM can notify the nonselectees of the decision.

Process SF52 into FPPS.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

**OPM REGIONAL OFFICES
AND SERVICE CENTERS**

ALASKA

OPM Employment Information Center
U.S. Federal Courthouse
222 West 7th Avenue, #22
Anchorage, AK 99513-7572
(907) 271-5823

ALABAMA

OPM Huntsville Service Center
520 Wynn Drive, NW
Huntsville, AL 35816-3426
(205) 837-1271

CALIFORNIA

Federal Employment Information Center
9650 Flair Drive, Suite 100A
El Monte, CA 91731-3008
(818) 575-6510

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Federal Employment Information Center
Suite B (Courtyard)
120 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 744-5627

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Federal Employment Information Center
1029 J Street, 2nd Floor
Room 202
Sacramento, CA 95814
(415) 744-5627

COLORADO

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Denver Service Center
P.O. Box 25167
Denver, CO 80225
(303) 969-6931

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Washington Service Center
P.O. Box 14080
Washington, DC 20044
(202) 606-2700

GEORGIA

Atlanta Service Center
Richard B. Russell Federal Building
75 Spring Street, SW
Suite 940
Atlanta, GA 30303-3309
(404) 331-4531

HAWAII

Federal Job Information Center
300 Ala Moana Boulevard
Room 5316
P.O. Box 50028
Honolulu, HI 96850
(808) 541-2791

ILLINOIS

OPM Job Information Center
230 S. Dearborn Street
Room 2916
Chicago, IL 60604
(312) 353-6192

MASSACHUSETTS

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Boston Service Center
Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Federal Building
10 Causeway Street
Boston, MA 02222-1031
(617) 565-5900

MICHIGAN

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Detroit Service Center
477 Michigan Avenue, Room 565
Detroit, MI 48226-2574
(313) 226-2095

MINNESOTA

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Twin Cities Service Center
1 Federal Drive, Room 501
Ft. Snelling, MN 55111-4054
(612) 725-3430

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK**

MISSOURI

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
601 E. 12th Street, Room 131
Kansas City, MO 64106
(816) 426-5705

OPM Job Information Center
Room 400, Old Post Office Building
815 Olive Street
St. Louis, MO 63101-1531
(314) 539-2285

NORTH CAROLINA

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Raleigh Service Center
4407 Bland Road
Suite 200
Raleigh, NC 27609-6292
(919) 790-2822

NEW MEXICO

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Albuquerque Service Center
505 Marquette Avenue, NW
Suite 910
Albuquerque, NM 87102-2160
(505) 766-8174

NEW YORK

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
100 S. Clinton Street
Syracuse, NY 13202
(315) 448-0480

OHIO

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Dayton Service Center
200 West Second Street, Room 507
Dayton, OH 45402-1430
(512) 225-2576

PENNSYLVANIA

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Philadelphia Service Center
William J. Green, Jr., Federal Building
600 Arch Street, Room 3256
Philadelphia, PA 19106
(215) 597-7035

PUERTO RICO

OPM Job Information Center
U.S. Federal Building - Room 328150
Carlos E. Chardon Street
Hato Rey, PR 00918-1710
(809) 766-5242

TEXAS

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
San Antonio Area Office
8610 Broadway, Suite 305
San Antonio, TX 78217
(210) 805-2423

VIRGINIA

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Norfolk Service Center
Room 500
200 Granby Street
Norfolk, VA 23510-1886
(804) 441-3373

WASHINGTON

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Employment Information Center
915 Second Avenue
Seattle, WA 98174