



Public Service Commission  
of Canada

Commission de la fonction publique  
du Canada

## Effective Merit Criteria



**A closer look at job opportunities  
in the public service**

Canada

# What we did

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We randomly reviewed a sample of **100 external** job ads for the most common classification groups found in the federal public service

To support inclusivity in hiring practices, we looked at the **merit criteria** to identify potential barriers

# What we found

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The vast majority of job ads reviewed contained potential barriers for external candidates

## Common practices with potential barriers

Qualifications that can **only** be acquired through previous government employment

Knowledge that can easily be learned **on the job**

Emphasis on **experience** vs **ability**

# Qualifications that can only be acquired through previous government employment

## Real examples

Experience editing, coordinating, reviewing, formatting and proofreading ~~ministerial correspondence, briefing notes~~ and other presentation material

Experience working in a natural resource-based ~~government department or industry~~ organization

Experience in the materiel management/procurement field ~~within the federal public service~~

Knowledge of ~~federal government~~ security procedures as they apply to ~~classified~~ documents

## Considerations

Using government-**specific** terms limits the candidate pool to only those with previous government experience

# Knowledge that can easily be learned on the job

## Real examples

Knowledge of the National Joint Council travel directive

Knowledge of sections 32, 33 and 34 of the *Financial Administration Act*

Knowledge of Treasury Board's directive and travel procedures

Knowledge of the Finance and Administration Branch

## Considerations

Impedes opportunities to recruit quality candidates who could **easily acquire** the knowledge on the job

Makes the assessment process more **cumbersome** than it has to be, potentially affecting time to staff

# | Emphasis on experience vs. ability

## Real examples

Experience in supervising staff

Experience in a facility that repairs heavy machinery

Experience in practicing law

## Considerations

Experience and ability provide **different** and **complementary** information

May provide **false** assurance of a candidate's ability to perform a certain task  
(having done it ≠ being good at it)

Find a **balance** between experience and ability by taking the requirements of the position into consideration as well as the feeder pool

# | Other observations

## Recent Significant Extensive

Use of these terms to quantify the level of experience could discourage quality candidates from applying and could be viewed as discriminatory (for example, period away from work due to medical reasons, family responsibilities)

Consider explaining the reason for the qualifier (for example, a new technological environment, new act, change in policy) rather than using a number of months or year, or other temporal expression

## PMP WFA SAP

Use of government-specific acronyms or terms

Consider explaining the need in a way that can be understood by external applicants

# Key takeaways

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Express merit criteria in a way that reflects qualifications for the job without creating barriers

✓	Consider own organizational needs and context
✓	Adapt merit criteria to feeder pool
✓	Focus on clear and simple language
✓	Pay attention to the linguistic equivalence in both official languages
✗	Avoid re-using previous merit criteria without questioning their relevance
✗	Don't copy the work description's key activities



## Want to know more?

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Your human resources advisor can help you establish effective merit criteria that will allow candidates to demonstrate their interest and attract a broader range of talent to your organization!



Find out more about staffing:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission.html>