

STATE OF ALASKA  
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION  
DIVISION OF PERSONNEL AND LABOR RELATIONS

# STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

## 15 Advanced Step Placements

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### I. ADVANCED STEP PLACEMENT FOR INITIAL APPOINTMENT

#### A. Purpose

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to provide guidelines and required procedures for approving advance step placement upon initial appointment and upon appointment of current employee to a lower class in a different class series.

Advanced step placement is an exception to the normal starting rate of pay in a salary range for new employees. The purpose of allowing for advanced step placement is to give management flexibility in the pay plan in order to competitively compensate exceptionally qualified individuals and offer additional compensation for positions difficult to fill.

Advanced step placement is an exception to the merit principle and is strictly controlled in order to assure consistency in the pay plan providing like pay for like work. Approval of advanced step placement must be based on the exceptional qualifications of the individual and/or difficulty in recruiting for the position.

Prior to determining step placement based on this SOP, the employee's collective bargaining agreement must be referred to as the agreement may provide an alternate method for determining step placement.

#### B. Scope

The requirements in this SOP apply in all cases where exceptional qualifications of the applicant and/or recruiting difficulty is used as justification for the advanced step placement of an employee. This may include initial appointment or the appointment of a current employee to a lower class not in the same class series. No advanced step hire may be authorized for nonpermanent employees unless the request is thoroughly documented and found to be an extremely compelling argument (Personnel Memorandum 90-8). Step placement for appointments made through transfer, rehire, promotion, and demotion are not covered by these procedures.

Note: Step placements upon promotion under 2 AAC 07.331 are covered by these procedures.

For purposes of this SOP, the following definitions are applied:

“initial appointment” means the first appointment of an employee into a position covered by the Personnel Act.

“qualified” means that an applicant has a background of training, education and experience that satisfies the published minimum requirements (MQs) for employment in the job class.

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### C. Authority

Personnel Rule 2 AAC 07.320, Article 21.06 (a) of the General Government Bargaining Unit Agreement, and Article 24.8 (a) of the Supervisory Unit Agreement provide for exceptions to placement at the minimum rate of pay in a salary range for initial appointments. For other bargaining units refer to the applicable collective bargaining agreement.

### D. Guidelines

Advanced step placements for initial appointments or appointments to a lower class in a different class series must be based on the exceptional qualifications of the appointee and/or difficulty in recruiting for the position and must be approved prior to the appointment by the director of the Division of Personnel and Labor Relations unless delegated to department human resources staff.

Note: Personnel Rule 2 AAC 07.320 allows the principal executive officer of a department to authorize a beginning salary higher than the minimum rate for a position in the partially exempt service. Steps up to and including the final merit step in the range may be considered.

#### 1. Exceptional Qualifications

- a) The appointee's exceptional qualifications are demonstrated using the following criteria:

The training, education and/or experience of the appointee must substantially exceed both the minimum qualifications for the job class, and the training, education and/or experience of all other qualified candidates,

and

The exceptional qualifications will be of particular benefit in the position.

The approving authority is responsible for:

Reviewing the recruitment to assure a legal appointment.

Reviewing the application of the appointee and applications of other qualified applicants to determine if the qualifications of the appointee substantially exceed those of all other qualified applicants.

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Reviewing the Position Description (PD) to verify the appointee's exceptional qualifications are relevant to the position.

- b) If it is determined that the appointee's qualifications exceed those of all other qualified applicants, if the appointee's qualifications exceed the level of those required to meet the minimum qualifications and if those qualifications will be of particular benefit in the position, advanced step placement may be approved.

For each complete year of experience at a level higher than that needed to qualify for the job class, one step above Step A can be authorized, up to Step D; for each earned college degree above the qualifying degree requirement for the job class, one step above A step can be authorized, up to Step D. The authorized step is calculated from Step A. In no case is a step beyond Step D authorized based solely on qualifications.

### 2. Recruiting Difficulties

- a) Difficulty in recruiting for a position must be demonstrated through competitive, recent recruiting producing fewer than five qualified, eligible and available applicants. Within Workplace Alaska, a competitive recruitment is open to "Alaska Residents" or "All Applicants". For positions in which Workplace Alaska is not used, the position must have been advertised in a manner that notified the general public of the job opportunity.

The approving authority is responsible for verifying the recruitment history. Continuous open recruitment cannot be the sole justification for advanced step placement.

- b) When difficulty in recruiting is the sole reason for considering advanced step hire, steps up to and including Step D may be authorized.
3. When recruiting difficulties and exceptional qualifications exist together, higher steps up to and including the final merit step in the range may be considered. Neither exceptional qualifications nor recruiting difficulties can be used as a basis for granting pay increments.

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### E. Procedures

1. The approving authority is responsible for maintaining files on all advanced step hire requests and approvals. These files must contain completed and approved Advanced Step Placement Analysis/Worksheet forms.  
These files must be available to the Division of Personnel and Labor Relations staff for inspection and audit.
  
2. The approving authority must submit an annual report for the fiscal year to the director of the Division of Personnel and Labor Relations on the department's activity in advanced step placement by July 31<sup>st</sup> each year. This report shall include the names of appointees granted advanced steps, their date of appointment, the PCN and job class of the position, the justification for the advanced step placement (recruitment difficulties, exceptional qualifications or both) and the approved step placement.

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### II. **ADVANCED STEP PLACEMENT UPON MOVEMENT OF WORK FROM THE EXEMPT SERVICE TO THE CLASSIFIED OR PARTIALLY EXEMPT SERVICE**

#### A. Purpose

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to provide guidelines and required procedures to departments for requesting advanced step placement when two conditions are met; 1) the work performed by an individual is transferred from the exempt service to the classified or partially exempt service and, 2) the individual who performed the work at the time the work was transferred is appointed through a competitive hiring process to perform that same work in the classified or partially exempt service.

Advanced step placement is an exception to the normal starting rate of pay in a salary range for new employees. The purpose of allowing for advanced step placement under these conditions is to give management flexibility in recognizing the work performed by individuals in the exempt service when that work is moved to the classified or partially exempt service and the same individual is appointed to perform that work through a competitive hire process.

Advanced step placement is an exception to the merit principle and is strictly controlled in order to assure consistency in the pay plan providing like pay for like work. Approval of advanced step placement must be based on exceptional qualifications as demonstrated by creditable state service as described elsewhere in this SOP.

#### B. Scope

To qualify for advanced step consideration under the provisions of this SOP, individuals must move directly from the exempt service to the classified or partially exempt service, with no break in service. Placement into the classified or partially exempt service must be made through a competitive hire process and the individual must be appointed to perform the same work that he or she was performing in the exempt service. Within Workplace Alaska, a competitive recruitment is open to "Alaska Residents" or "All Applicants". For positions in which Workplace Alaska is not used, the position must have been advertised in a manner that notified the general public of the job opportunity.

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Step placement based on the provisions of this SOP may not be combined with advanced step placement as defined in SOP 15-1 – Advanced Step Placement for Initial Appointment.

C. Authority

Personnel Rule 2 AAC 07.320, Article 21.06 (a) of the General Government Bargaining Unit Agreement, and Article 24.8 (a) of the Supervisory Bargaining Unit Agreement provide for exceptions to placement at the minimum rate of pay in a salary range for initial appointments. For other bargaining units refer to the applicable collective bargaining agreement.

D. Guidelines

When the work performed by an individual moves from the exempt service into the classified or partially exempt service advanced step placement may be authorized for the individual providing the individual is hired through a competitive process to perform the newly classified work without a break in service. Advanced step placement for initial appointments must be based on the exceptional qualifications of the appointee, as demonstrated by creditable state service, and must be approved prior to the appointment.

1. Advanced step placement shall be based on creditable state service.

For purposes of movement between the exempt service and the classified or partially exempt service, creditable state service is time served in the exempt service and permanent or probationary employment within the classified or partially exempt service which demonstrates progressively greater value to the State as this phrase has been interpreted for granting performance incentives within the classified and partially exempt services. Such work must be at or above the level of the salary range of the job class of the position to which the individual is moving. All work performed that is continuous with the work performed in the exempt service may be considered for creditable state service purposes.

2. Creditable state service cannot be used as a basis for granting pay increments unless the pay increment was previously earned at the same salary range or above.

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E. Procedures

1. Determination of advanced step placement for individuals moving from the exempt service to the classified or partially exempt service shall not be delegated.
2. The appointing department is responsible for requesting and obtaining approval for the advanced step from the director of the Division of Personnel and Labor Relations prior to the appointment and for providing the justification and documentation required supporting the claim of creditable state service. Documentation may include any evidence that demonstrates the salary range of positions held in the exempt service to support the claims of creditable state service as described in D (1) above. Files containing the documentation for advanced step placements approved by the Division of Personnel and Labor Relations will be maintained within the Division of Personnel and Labor Relations.