

AmeriCorps Updating Hiring Practices Following Investigation of Alleged Pre-selection

Closed 03/28/23

The AmeriCorps Office of Inspector General (AmeriCorps OIG) received an allegation that AmeriCorps' selection for a senior-level management position was predetermined and that the selected candidate did not possess the required qualifications but was selected through favoritism. AmeriCorps OIG engaged Amtrak OIG to investigate whether the selection of the manager was predetermined or improper.

Amtrak OIG reviewed material related to the job announcement and conducted interviews of the complainant and senior AmeriCorps officials involved in the hiring process. Ultimately, Amtrak OIG's investigation determined that the selection of the new manager did not violate the Merit System Principles or the Standards of Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, nor was it otherwise predetermined or improper. The selected candidate possessed the necessary qualifications, though unintentional inconsistencies between the Executive Core Qualification (ECQ) requirements described in the vacancy announcement and the eligibility language in the application may have contributed to confusion about the selection criteria.

While Amtrak OIG's investigation did not find wrongdoing, it identified areas improvements to policies or procedures that would prevent potential favoritism or the appearance of it. Amtrak OIG's Report of Investigation (ROI) recommended that AmeriCorps (1) require the involvement of a neutral and detached authority to assist in potential hiring process conflicts, including perceived conflicts; (2) incorporate protective controls regarding potential conflicts of interest and favoritism into AmeriCorps guidance, policies, and processes related to the hiring, interviewing, and selection processes; and, (3) ensure job application questions match the eligibility requirements set forth in vacancy announcements.

Agency/Administrative Actions

In response to Amtrak OIG's ROI, AmeriCorps indicated that the Office of Human Capital (OHC) would issue internal guidance to the agency workforce providing best practices and protocols for conducting recruitment and selection, and that the guidance will advise employees to consult with an agency Ethics Official as soon as practicable regarding any actual or perceived conflicts of interest. AmeriCorps also reviewed and updated the NX-2 vacancy announcement template by clarifying language in the "Qualifications" and "How You Will Be Evaluated" sections, and adding bullets to the template clarifying what applicants should submit for their ECQs and Technical Qualifications (TQs). For all other vacancy announcements, OHC staff will be issued reminders and trained to ensure assessment questions align with each vacancy announcement.

Case ID 2022-002