



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We received a Hotline complaint that alleged abuse of authority regarding how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 9 conducted hiring under the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP). Based on the complaint, we sought to determine whether (1) the Region's use of a job fair and registration code was inappropriate, and (2) opening a vacancy announcement for only 4 calendar days (2 business days) denied potential applicants the opportunity to apply for the positions.

Background

EPA Region 9 held a job fair in San Francisco on July 28-30, 2009. EPA provided only job fair participants with the registration code needed to apply for the four FCIP vacancies. The associated vacancy announcement was open from Friday, July 31, to Monday, August 3, 2009. The FCIP has few requirements, allowing flexibility in recruiting, but agencies must still meet Merit System Principles.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional, Public Affairs and Management at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2010/20100426-10-P-0112.pdf

Results of Hotline Complaint Review of EPA Region 9 Hiring under the Federal Career Intern Program

What We Found

The specific Hotline allegations against Region 9 were unsubstantiated, but we found that the Region engaged in a prohibited personnel practice.

Neither the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) nor EPA prohibits the use of a job fair and registration code as recruiting and hiring methods. Also, neither OPM nor EPA requires a minimum number of days for performing applicant intake. Therefore, the specific allegations were unsubstantiated.

However, Region 9 engaged in a prohibited personnel practice by giving four FCIP job fair participants improper advantages not provided to others attending the job fair. Records show that these four individuals were favored for hire and offered paid travel to the FCIP job fair by Region 9 before the fair or vacancies were publicly announced. The EPA Human Resources Shared Service Center in Las Vegas (Team Vegas), which took over hiring authority for Region 9 in early 2009, considers pre-employment interview travel to be appropriate only after applicants have been qualified and listed on a selection certificate – processes that occur after a job fair is held and candidates have submitted their job applications. Region 9 also arranged for these four individuals to participate in interviews and meetings with regional officials during the job fair – advantages not provided to others attending the fair. Three of the four individuals were subsequently hired for this vacancy announcement; the fourth was hired by Region 9 under a different announcement. We concluded that Region 9 used a legitimate job fair recruitment method to mask hiring persons favored by management. We also believe Team Vegas's oversight of Region 9's hiring activities related to this job fair was insufficient.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA's Region 9 Administrator take appropriate administrative actions against the individuals who engaged in a prohibited personnel practice in violation of Merit System Principles. Region 9 did not agree with the report's conclusions and its comments were not responsive to our recommendation. We are referring this matter to the U.S. Office of Special Counsel. We also recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Administration and Resources Management (1) require that job fair plans (outreach, notice, application process) be approved by a senior management official hosting the job fair, and (2) verify that Shared Service Center oversight processes are sufficient to provide reasonable assurance that EPA does not engage in prohibited personnel practices. Although positive, the Agency's comments did not address these recommendations, which remain unresolved.