

# URGE

## Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



EARTH SCIENTISTS  
NEAR HANGAR ONE

WE'RE ACTUALLY  
REALLY COOL

### Hiring Policies

This is what was found by the Earth Scientists at Hangar One URGE Pod at NASA Ames Research Center on Hiring Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve. Some of the information here was obtained from public NASA web sites; some was obtained via conversation with NASA employees, grantees and contractors. Most of these responses are constructed with Civil Service hires in mind. We are not Human Resources professionals, and we make no claim as to the accuracy of the information below. This is a best-effort product.

*Note: We acknowledge this information is not always accessible to students and even staff. If you do not have access to this information, please reflect on your own experience and outline what admissions and/or hiring should be like to foster a diverse and inclusive community.*

- **What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement<sup>1</sup> is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available<sup>2</sup>?**

<https://www.nasa.gov/careers> refers to USAJOBS.gov

At the bottom of a job vacancy announcement:

<https://www.eeoc.gov/federal-sector/federal-employees-job-applicants>

More:

<https://www.eeoc.gov/eeo-policy-statement>

<https://www.nasa.gov/offices/odeo/policy-and-publications>

[https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/eeo\\_policy\\_statement\\_2020\\_tagged\\_v2.pdf](https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/eeo_policy_statement_2020_tagged_v2.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> R. Kelley, 10 Samples of an Effective EEO Statement, [blog.ongig.com/diversity-and-inclusion/eeo-statement-samples](http://blog.ongig.com/diversity-and-inclusion/eeo-statement-samples), (2017).

<sup>2</sup> <https://careers.who.edu/opportunities/diversity-inclusion/>

<sup>3</sup> K. Cobb, #GRExit Resources, <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.13215461.v1>, (2020).

<sup>4</sup> J. Posselt, Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjghw8s>, (2016).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.brandeis.edu/diversity/dei-recruitment-hiring/rubric-for-evaluating-diversity-statements.html>

<sup>6</sup> K. Griffin, J. Bennett, T. York, Leveraging Promising Practices, Washington DC: Aspire Alliance, (2020).



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- **Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?**

The main venue for open NASA vacancies is USAJOBS. Almost all NASA vacancies are also on LinkedIn. Sometimes vacancies are shared among networks, professional societies, committees, or Twitter or Facebook by individual selecting officials. NASA used to have an annual presence at selected society/meeting venues -- SACNAS, for example. During the 2020-2021 pandemic and beyond we are not sure if this is being sustained. There are targeted STEM efforts for student hires at [intern.nasa.gov](https://intern.nasa.gov). NASA Ames maintains a presence on handshake at <https://app.joinhandshake.com/employers/nasa-ames-research-center-10275>

NASA provides funds to other institutions with a focus on underrepresented groups via the Minority University Research & Education Project (MUREP, <https://www.nasa.gov/stem/murep/home/index.html>), the Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR, <https://www.nasa.gov/stem/epscor/home/index.html>), a partnership with UC Merced (<https://www.nasa.gov/centers/armstrong/features/nasa-partnership-with-uc-merced-advances-minority-growth-in-stem-education.html>). Collectively these are an effort to increase diversity within NASA's portfolio of internal and external work.

USAJOBS.gov

- **What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores<sup>3</sup>/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?**

In general, NASA vacancies include a list of requirements and competencies and the applicant's responses to those items are used in the evaluation. For most General Schedule (GS) hires, additional documents such as a letter of recommendation are not required. Test scores and grades are not required; however, transcripts can be required to validate a degree requirement.

Example: This position has a positive education requirement. To be eligible, you must clearly state in your resume the following: degree, major and/or minor, and college/university.

- **How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric<sup>4,5</sup> public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?**



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NASA has begun to neutralize language in vacancy announcements, using 'crewed spaceflight' for example, instead of 'manned spaceflight'.

Below is an excerpt from one NASA vacancy, Planetary Protection Officer, closing 3/31/21. This is a 'senior level' job and so has a link to additional evaluation criteria:

[https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/final\\_sl\\_application\\_and\\_evaluation\\_process\\_2.pdf](https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/final_sl_application_and_evaluation_process_2.pdf)

In short, the rubric is public. This POD believes, however, that the first step in the evaluation process is automated -- a computer matching algorithm -- based on keywords in the vacancy. Thus, anyone with a knowledge of the keywords may fare better in the initial evaluation which divides applicants into the three categories mentioned below, best qualified, highly qualified and qualified. We did not find that it was explicitly stated that this first step is automated. One has to dig to find details of how best to tailor application materials, and the required formatting is inconsistent with many other job application formats. There is a 10-page limit, for example, that is not immediately apparent. In the resume builder application, items will appear to the selecting official newest to oldest, based on start dates entered for each section. To our knowledge, names are not removed when a list of qualified candidates are forwarded to the Subject Matter Expert(s) for review, but the list of qualified candidates may not include all qualified candidates due to the automated evaluation. A public Google search uncovered the following link (dated information) about the automated system:

[https://searchpub.nssc.nasa.gov/servlet/sm.web.Fetch/Revised\\_Manager\\_Hiring\\_Guide\\_-\\_Final\\_8-5-11.pdf?rhid=1000&did=1120495&type=released](https://searchpub.nssc.nasa.gov/servlet/sm.web.Fetch/Revised_Manager_Hiring_Guide_-_Final_8-5-11.pdf?rhid=1000&did=1120495&type=released)

From the selected vacancy, believed to be representative of all or most vacancies a subset of evaluation criteria is included here:

### How You Will Be Evaluated

You will be evaluated for this job based on how well you meet the qualifications above.

All qualifications requirements must be met by the closing date of the announcement. You will be evaluated based on how well you meet the qualifications above. To determine your qualifications and referral status, we may review your resume and supporting documentation and compare it against your responses to the assessment questionnaire. Overstating your qualifications and/or experience in your application materials or assessment questionnaire may result in your removal from consideration.

You will be assessed on the following competencies:

- Astrobiology
- Conflict Management
- [Other examples deleted]
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Under NASA's category rating process, applicants will be assessed on the position competencies and placed in one of three categories identified and defined below:

- Best Qualified Category - Applicants who demonstrate a superior level of all evaluation criteria.



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- Highly Qualified Category - Applicants who demonstrate a satisfactory level of the evaluation criteria.
- Qualified Category - Applicants who demonstrate the basic qualifications, with general knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Names of all qualified candidates in the Best Qualified category will be referred to a panel of subject matter experts (unless a sufficient number of qualified veterans are found - in which case only those names will be initially certified). Candidates within the Best Qualified category who are eligible for veterans' preference will receive selection priority over non-veteran preference eligibles. The panel will further evaluate candidates against the Senior Level (SL) evaluation criteria under the "Qualifications" section of this vacancy announcement.

- **Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?**

The vacancy is typically constructed by the selecting official and a Human Resources (HR) manager, working together. The selecting official (SO) is often the supervisor of that vacant position, and provides the technical content of the vacancy. The HR manager ensures that the process meets federal regulations, and guides the manager in the process and with the tools. The SO may seek input from others (e.g., seminars, group interviews, etc.); this is not required.

### **Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?**

USAJOBS is established by law to be the one public place for competitive hiring. We believe this traces back to the Federal Code of Regulations. Industrial organizational psychologists are used to tie job duties to competencies in the federal system.

We cannot say whether the NASA hiring process has been evaluated by outside consultants. The Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) responds to unfair labor practice complaints. The Merit System Protection Board (MPSB) can be involved during the appeals process. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission hears and decides discrimination complaints. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) provides advice on employment, staffing, benefits and the like.

Source: <https://www.mspb.gov/About/about.htm>

NASA also hires non civil servants through contracts, cooperative agreements and grants. Many of those hires are part of the on-site workforce. Thus, there are several employers beyond the NASA's direct federal hiring, that comprise the full NASA team. In our local organization, the Earth Science Division at NASA Ames, those include the Bay Area Environmental Research Institute (BAERI), the Universities Space Research Association (USRA), California State University at Monterey Bay (CSUMB), Science &



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Technology Corporation (STC), Logical R and the NASA Postdoctoral Program (NPP). We do not know if these entities have been reviewed by an outside organization. We are checking to see if they use 'diversity words' in vacancy announcements or in their recruitment materials.

Discussions found BAERI HR to be receptive to lessons from URGE in advertising, hiring, and retention procedures, as well as in-house equity efforts.

The NPP process consists of a non-anonymous review of postdoc proposals based on scientific merit, external to Ames, which generally results in half the proposals being "selectable". Qualified proposals are in theory subject to a finite number of postdoc positions, but currently this has not been a limitation to selection. However, who is encouraged to write a proposal can be at the sole discretion of the potential postdoctoral advisor. To our knowledge, potential postdoc advisors are not offered or required any mentoring training prior to bringing in a postdoc.

- **Has your university or company implemented or considered strategies like cohort hiring, mentoring, dual career support and partner hires, re-visioning your work culture, or other considerations outlined in "Leveraging Promising Practices"<sup>6</sup>?**

NASA states a goal of neutrality in hiring processes. Once selected, a candidate can negotiate particulars of the hire: pay rate, seniority (for annual leave), relocation costs, hiring bonus, etc.

Dual career support and partner hires. There are no official 'partner hires', although some couples are able to negotiate arrangements with nearby or contract employers.

Mentoring. Mentoring varies widely. Theoretically the supervisor serves as mentor, or a senior researcher, but this varies based on the particular situation. Some may argue there is no planned mentoring; the employee must seek it.

Cohort hiring. The only program that falls into this category at this time is the NASA Pathways Internship Program, [www.nasa.gov/careers/pathways-program](http://www.nasa.gov/careers/pathways-program). These individuals enjoy synced onboarding and communication, and become a community as they mature.

Re-visioning the work culture. NASA is currently tackling 'The Future of Work' to determine future parameters for the workplace and expectations of employees. This is ongoing and we have no conclusions or announcements to share.