

Rule of Many Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

What Is the Rule of Many?

Rule of Many is a numerical ranking process, which means applicants are assigned numerical scores (augmented for veterans' preference) and listed in rank-order for selection. Agencies make their selections from among a pre-determined number of qualified applicants. Agencies may use it when filling jobs under delegated examining procedures or in the excepted service.

What is Rule of Many designed to do?

The “**Rule of Many**” replaces the former “Rule of Three” in federal hiring. Under this updated approach, agencies can consider and select from a larger pool of qualified candidates for competitive and excepted service appointments. The Rule of Many is designed to:

- **Expand flexibility** in hiring decisions,
- **Improve fairness and efficiency** in federal recruitment,
- **Support merit-based selections** using valid assessment tools, and
- **Enhance the ability** to identify top talent without artificial limitations.

Is the Rule of Many just another version of Category Rating?

No. Rule of Many uses **numerical scoring** and ranks candidates in score order, while category rating uses **predefined quality categories** (e.g., Best Qualified, Qualified) to assign candidates to a quality group. Both processes involve using an assessment(s) to determine placement on a certificate of eligibles based on either 1) a numerical score or 2) a quality category. For more information, please see: [Rule of Many Compared to Category Rating](#).

What Are the Benefits of Rule of Many?

- Rule of Many is a key foundational step in effectively implementing merit-based hiring using validated, skills-based assessments, and rigorous candidate ranking. (See the [Merit Hiring Plan](#), May 29, 2025, Section II Reforming the Candidate Ranking, Assessment and Selection Process to Emphasize Merit and Competence.)
- Expands the talent pool available to hiring managers.
- Rule of Many combines the advantages of both rule of three and category rating procedures. It allows the hiring agency to make finer distinctions among applicants based on their relative qualifications for the position.

Under the new rule, what candidate rating and referral methods can agencies use?

- With the publication of this rule, agencies are no longer limited to Category Rating. They may use either **Category Rating** or the **Rule of Many**. The **Rule of Three** has been **eliminated** and may no longer be used.

At a glance:

- Category Rating — **Allowed**
- Rule of Many — **Allowed**
- Rule of Three — **Eliminated**

Mechanics of Using Rule of Many

When May Agencies Use the Rule of Many?

Competitive Service (Delegated Examining)

- The Rule of Many is used under delegated examining procedures (i.e., when accepting applications from all U.S. citizens and nationals) when an agency is using numerical rating and ranking to create a certificate of eligibles.

Excepted Service under title 5

- The Rule of Many may be used when using numerical rating procedures under 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 302 to fill positions in the excepted service.
- The same Rule of Many procedures are used in both competitive and excepted service hiring.

How does the agency determine the number of eligible candidates to refer?

An agency may use one of the **four methods** to determine the “sufficient” number of applicants referred:

- 1. Cut-off Score (Assessment-Based):**
 - Established based on job analysis and test expert input.
 - Used to identify highly qualified candidates.
- 2. Cut-off Score (Business Necessity):**
 - Based on agency needs such as resource limitations.
 - Example: Using a cut-off to manage volume for costly assessments.
- 3. Set Number of Candidates:**
 - A predetermined number from the top of the ranked list (e.g., Top 15).
- 4. Percentage of Top-Ranked Candidates:**

- a. A predetermined percentage of the highest-ranking eligible candidates (e.g. the top 25%).

Note: The hiring agency must select and document the method it will use before the job is posted. An agency must also establish policies regarding the use of these methods. For more information, please see: [Sample Rule of Many Policy](#).

Veterans' Preference

Veterans' preference applies under the Rule of Many.

- Veterans' preference **points are added** to the passing score of candidates eligible for either 10-point or 5-point preference.
- Disabled veterans with a **10% or more service-connected disability** are placed at the **top of a certificate** of eligibles regardless of score (except for General Schedule (GS) scientific and professional positions at GS-9 or above (or equivalent) grade levels). See Appendix K of the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook for a list of Professional and Scientific positions.
- Ties in ratings are broken by veterans' preference eligibility, that is, preference eligible candidates are listed **ahead of non-preference eligibles** within each rating. For example, a 5-point preference eligible with a score of 94.0 is listed ahead of a non-preference eligible with the same score.

For a more detailed discussion of veterans' preference under the Rule of Many, please review the [Applying Veterans' Preference under the Rule of Many Fact Sheet](#). What does a certificate of eligibles look like under the Rule of Many?

At a minimum, a certificate of eligibles will include the candidates' names, ratings, and veterans' preference category codes.

Scenario: An agency is filling Program Analyst, GS-11, positions and plans to make three selections. Prior to announcing the position, the agency determined that a cut-off score of 95 would be used to determine the number selected. After the announcement closes the agency scores the assessment; adjudicates veterans' preference and adds preference points; and creates a ranked list in score order, including veterans' preference points.

Assessment Scores with Veterans' Preference Points Added		
Candidate	Assessment Score	VP Augmented Scores
1.	85.0 CPS*	95.0 CPS*
2.	86.0 XP	96.0 XP
3.	96.0 NV	96.0 NV
4.	90.0 TP	95.0 TP

5.	90.0 TP	95.0 TP
6.	95.0 NV	95.0 NV
7.	84.0 TP	89.0 TP
8.	89.0 NV	89.0 NV
9.	84.0 NV	84.0 NV
10.	82.0 NV	82.0 NV

Ranked List in score order, including veterans' preference points	
Candidate	Score/VP
1.	95.0 CPS*
2.	96.0 XP
3.	96.0 NV
4.	95.0 TP

5.	95.0 TP
6.	95.0 NV
7.	89.0 TP
8.	89.0 NV
9.	84.0 NV
10.	82.0 NV

*CP/CPS veterans “float” to the top, except for scientific and professional positions at the GS-9 and above.

Since a cutoff score of 95 is being used, the certificate is created using those who scored 95 or higher.

Certificate of Eligibles		
Created using cut off score of 95		
Candidate	Score/VP	Action
1.	95.0 CPS*	Selection 1

2.	96.0 XP	Selection 2
3.	96.0 NV	Selection 3
4.	95.0 TP	
5.	95.0 TP	

6.	95.0 NV	
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Under the Rule of Many procedures, the agency is not limited to considering the top three candidates, nor does the agency have to consider candidates in groups of three. Any of the preference eligibles may be selected. Because this action fills only three vacancies, the two non-veterans may not be selected over higher ranked veterans' preference candidates unless pass over procedures are completed.

If a hiring action involves four or more selections, the agency may—beginning with the fourth selection—use the three considerations rule. For candidates properly removed under this rule, pass over procedures are not required. More information on the three considerations rule is available in the [FAQ: Three Considerations Rule](#).

Notice and Documentation Requirements When Using the Rule of Many

Agencies must document their procedures in internal policies or operating manuals and be able to demonstrate compliance during audits or oversight reviews.

Are there additional notice requirements when using the Rule of Many?

Yes. When an agency uses the Rule of Many procedures it must clearly state this intent in the job opportunity announcement (JOA). Specifically, the JOA must include the following:

- A statement that Rule of Many procedures will be used.
- A brief explanation that agencies may consider more than three eligible candidates who are tied or closely ranked based on their examination scores.
- Information on how the Rule of Many will affect the referral, selection, or pass over of candidates.

This ensures transparency for candidates about the assessment and selection process.

Sample JOA Language

Referral Method:

This announcement uses the [Mechanism name] method under 5 CFR § 332.402. If set number/percentage: All applicants tied at the cut line will be referred.

We will provide the selecting official with a sufficient number of names, when available, to consider at least three candidates per vacancy. If fewer than three eligible and available candidates per vacancy result, we will expand the group in accordance with our pre-announced supplement strategy and OPM policy.

Is advance notice to OPM required when using the Rule of Many?

No. Agencies do not need prior approval from OPM to use the Rule of Many.

Do HR staff need test measurement experts to set cut scores?

Only if using test-based cut-off methods. Otherwise, HR and subject-matter experts can use business needs, fixed numbers, or percentages.

Is there a minimum number of referrals?

Yes—at least three candidates must be referred for every vacancy filled (5 CFR 302.401(a)(2) and 5 CFR 332.402(b)). An agency chooses the number of eligibles to be referred using one of four methods (i.e., cut-off score based on the assessment, cut-off score based on a business necessity, set number, or percentage).

What documentation must be maintained for audit purposes?

Agencies must retain the following documentation when using the Rule of Many:

- A copy of the job opportunity announcement reflecting the use of Rule of Many procedures.
- Certificates of eligibles, including any tie-breaking or ranking justifications.
- Selection and non-selection justifications (including any removals of candidates from further consideration under the Three Considerations Rule).
- Pass over requests and approvals, if applicable.
- Documentation supporting the decision to consider more than three candidates.

This information is subject to review by OPM during Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) audits.

For the Public: What This Means for You

If you're applying for a federal job:

- Your eligibility and rank will be based on scored assessments.
- You may be among a larger pool of candidates considered than under previous rules.
- Veterans with qualifying disabilities are still given preference as required by law.
- Agencies are required to select fairly and document decisions clearly.

Best Practices for HR Specialists

- Always choose your referral method **before** posting the announcement.
- Document the selection rationale and keep it in the examining case file.
- Coordinate with labor relations and legal counsel if collective bargaining is involved.
- Ensure valid assessments are used to generate numerical scores.

- Explain veterans' preference accurately to candidates.
- Use structured interviews, simulations, or other validated tools.