Chapter 5

Introduction

Developing your engineering career within the Public Health Service requires the knowledge of two separate yet interrelated personnel systems: The USPHS Commissioned Corps and the Civil Service personnel systems. Engineers who choose a career through the Civil Service personnel system need some familiarity with the Commissioned Corps personnel system if they supervise commissioned officers. Conversely, commissioned officers must be familiar with Civil Service procedures, particularly when locating and competing for jobs. This chapter is not a detailed description of the two systems. The *Commissioned Officer's Handbook* is one of many excellent sources for that information. Rather, this chapter will explore and explain some differences between the two systems with regard to promotions and career development. These differences include appointment standards, promotions, assignments, and compensation. Note that the career development information in this chapter applies only to engineers or those persons in closely related fields, such as architects.

The Civil Service System

The Civil Service personnel system is used by most Federal agencies for their civil, i.e., non-military employees. The Civil Service personnel system is centrally managed by the United States Office of Personnel Management (USOPM) in Washington, D.C. Civil Service laws, rules, executive orders, regulations and policies that apply to Federal personnel are found under Title 5 of the *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* entitled *Administrative Personnel.* Each of the PHS agencies has its own personnel department to set agency-specific rules and hire personnel for that agency. In addition, there are many operating personnel offices at different geographic locations within the PHS agencies.

1. Occupational Group and Series

All Federal government jobs, including Civil Service (CS) and PHS Commissioned Corps (CC) positions, are classified according to an occupational group or further by an occupational series. The occupational groups and series are defined in the *Handbook of Occupational Groups and Families*. Most Civil Service engineers and architects fall within the GS-0800, Engineering and Architecture Group. However, many CS and CC engineers hold positions which are administrative or closely related to engineering, or within groups in other technical fields such as the GS-2200, Information Technology Group.

2. Position Classification Standards

The USOPM uses Position Classification Standards to classify all positions based on duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements. Position Classification Standards define the

occupation, explain significant factors for evaluating positions, and define work characteristics for various grade levels. *The Classifier's Handbook* lists experience, training and/or knowledge, skills, and ability requirements for each grade.

The method for determining the occupational series is the same for all positions, but the methods for determining grades differ according to the basic job evaluation approach used. The Factor Evaluation System (FES) is the method most often used to assign grades to non-supervisory positions under the General Schedule. The FES includes nine factors common to most non-supervisory positions in General Schedule occupations, as follows:

Factor 1	-	Knowledge Required by the Position
Factor 2	-	Supervisory Controls
Factor 3	-	Guidelines
Factor 4	-	Complexity
Factor 5	-	Scope and Effect
Factor 6	-	Personal Contacts
Factor 7	-	Purpose of Contacts
Factor 8	-	Physical Demands
Factor 9	-	Work Environment

Several of these factors have two or more sub-factors or concepts that together represent the intent of the whole factor.

Candidates from outside the Federal Government can apply for positions at all grades. In addition to the basic requirements outlined below, applicants must have additional specified professional experience required for the specified grade plus any selective placement requirements, such as a specific engineering degree (e.g., Masters in Civil Engineering) and/or professional registration. Additional education may frequently be substituted for experience. All requirements are clearly described in the position vacancy announcement.

The following paragraphs provide a brief description of the Civil Service occupational requirements for all professional engineering series, including architects. (Consult *The Classifier's Handbook* or a personnel specialist for more detailed information.)

2.a. Professional Engineers

2.a.i Professional Registration

Registration as a professional engineer can be an appropriate selective factor when the duties and responsibilities of a position support such a requirement. Positions, for which registration is appropriate, have duties and responsibilities meeting one of the following criteria:

- Responsibility for final approval of designs of major structures and facilities involving public safety where the organization must demonstrate that work is performed by competent engineers; or

- Responsibility for engineering determinations concerning major aspects of design and construction work performed by engineers in the private sector where the confidence and respect of these private sector engineers are necessary to achieve cooperation on critical engineering issues.

2.a.ii Training

Applicant must meet one of the following two minimum requirements:

A degree in engineering from a college with at least one curriculum accredited by the Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET) as a professional engineering curriculum **OR** have a degree from a program the curriculum of which includes differential and integral calculus and courses in five of the following seven areas of engineering science or physics: (1) statics, dynamics; (2) strength of materials; (3) fluid mechanics, hydraulics; (4) thermodynamics; (5) electrical fields and circuits; (6) nature and properties of materials; and (7) any other comparable area of fundamental engineering science or physics, such as optics, heat transfer, soil mechanics, or electronics; **OR**

- A combination of college-level education, training, and/or technical experience that provided a thorough knowledge of the physical and mathematical sciences underlying professional engineering and a good understanding, both practical and theoretical, of the engineering sciences and techniques and their applications. Such knowledge and understanding must be demonstrated by one of the following;

- Current professional registration, except those who received such registration through means other than a written test, will be limited to positions within or closely related to their specialty field of registration;

- Successful completion of the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) examination and a bachelor's degree in engineering technology from an accredited program. If the program is not accredited, at least one year of additional education or experience is required. Applicants are limited to those positions within or closely related to the specialty field of the engineering technology program;

- Successful completion of a minimum 60 semester hours of courses in the physical, mathematical, and engineering sciences typical in a standard professional engineering curriculum; or

- Successful completion of a bachelor's degree in engineering technology or in an appropriate professional field such as physics, chemistry, architecture, computer science, mathematics, hydrology or geology, provided the applicant has at least one year of professional engineering experience acquired under professional engineering supervision and guidance.

Graduates of professional engineering curricula may qualify for higher grade positions with:

- Superior academic achievement at the baccalaureate level in a professional engineering curriculum (GS-7);
- Completion of all requirements for a Federal baccalaureate level student-trainee program, including 1040 hours of work experience, 320 of which was at the GS-5 level, (GS-7);
- A combination of superior academic achievement and one year of appropriate professional experience (GS-9);
- Appropriate experience as a technician equivalent to grade GS-5 or higher (credited for grade GS-7 only up to twelve months);
- Successful completion of a five-year bachelor's degree in engineering with at least 160 semester hours (GS-7); plus one year of appropriate professional engineering experience (GS-9).

2.a.iii Graduate Education:

Graduate level training is creditable in the following circumstances:

- Completion of all requirements in a Federal graduate-level, student-trainee program is creditable towards noncompetitive conversion to a GS-9 position provided it includes completion of a master's degree in engineering and completion of 640 hours of work experience, 320 hours of which were at GS-7.
- Completion of all requirements of a master's or higher degree in engineering, irrespective of the field of undergraduate study, is fully qualifying, provided overall education and experience combined demonstrates substantially equivalent knowledge, skills, and abilities to the courses described under the minimum training requirements.
- For certain positions, a graduate degree in a related field is creditable with a bachelor's degree in engineering. The key in determining whether graduate education is creditable is whether or not the education provided the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform the work of the specific position.

2.a.iv Work Experience

Professional engineering experience is defined as non-routine engineering work that requires professional knowledge of engineering, professional ability to apply such knowledge to engineering problems, and positive and continuing development of professional knowledge and ability.

- Professional knowledge of engineering is that equivalent to the depth and breadth of mathematical, physical, and engineering sciences in a specialty field of engineering as in a four-year professional engineering curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree.

- Professional ability to apply engineering knowledge is that demonstrated through application of fundamental and diversified engineering concepts, theories, and practices; adaptation and application of methods and techniques of related scientific disciplines; and analysis and evaluation of scientific data to solve engineering problems.

- Continuing development of professional knowledge is that demonstrated through continuing education in engineering and related fields or similar continuing personal efforts to stay current with the advancing and changing discipline.

- College-level teaching may also be creditable as professional engineering experience. Teaching experience is evaluated according to the same specific qualification requirements as the evaluation of professional experience such as grade level, responsibility, scope, specialization, and knowledge.

2.b Professional Architects

2.b.i Professional Registration:

Registration as a professional architect can be an appropriate selective factor when the duties and responsibilities of a position support such a requirement. Positions for which registration is appropriate have duties and responsibilities meeting one of the following criteria:

- Responsibility for final approval of design standards and criteria for designs of major structures and facilities involving public safety where the organization must demonstrate that work is performed by competent architects; or

- Responsibility for architectural determinations concerning major aspects of design and construction work performed by architects in the private sector where the confidence and respect of these private sector architects is necessary to achieve cooperation on critical architectural issues.

2.b.ii Training

Applicant must meet one of the following two minimum requirements:

A degree in architecture **OR** a related field that includes 60 semester hours of course work in architecture or related disciplines including 30 semester hours in architectural design and 6 semester hours each in structural technology, properties of materials and methods of construction, and environmental control systems; **OR**

- A combination of college-level education, training and/or technical experience that provided a thorough knowledge of the arts and sciences underlying professional architecture, and a good understanding, both theoretical and practical, of architectural principles, methods, and techniques and their

applications. Such knowledge and understanding must be demonstrated by one of the following:

- A degree in architectural engineering the curriculum of which provided knowledge, skills, and abilities equivalent to those typical in a standard professional architectural curriculum; or

- One year of experience doing architectural work for each year short of a degree in architecture. In the absence of college courses, five years experience is required provided the experience demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the fundamental principles and theories of professional architecture.

Graduates of professional architectural curricula may qualify for higher grade positions with:

- Completion of a five-year Bachelor of Architecture or higher degree, with at least 160 semester hours, from an accredited college or university (GS-7);

- Appropriate experience as a technician equivalent to grade GS-5 or higher (credited for grade GS-7 only up to 12 months);

- Registration to practice architecture under standards meeting the basic minimum provisions of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (GS -11).

2.b.iii Work Experience

Professional architectural experience is experience in an architect's office or in architectural work which demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the fundamental principles and theories of professional architecture. Creditable professional architectural experience does not include the following:

- Professional landscape architecture work,

- Experience in the application of interior design,

- City and community planning work.

3. Position Descriptions

All Civil Service positions have a position description (PD) that describes the duties, responsibilities, and supervisory relationships of the position; the title, series, and grade of the position; and knowledge and skills required to successfully perform the duties of the position. The position may have a billet description if it can also be filled by a commissioned officer.

To learn about PHS job opportunities that could be intermediate or ultimate career goals, it is strongly recommended that you obtain copies of the position or billet descriptions from the agency's local personnel office.

4. Promotion / Compensation

Compensation for Civil Service positions is based on the grade of the job. Professional engineers generally start at the GS-5 or GS-7 level and move up to GS-9, GS-11, GS-12, GS-13, GS-14, and GS-15. You are eligible for promotion to the next higher grade after one year of experience in your current grade with a performance rating of at least fully successful. Promotion is not guaranteed or automatic. Salary advancement can also be achieved through incremental increases within a grade. These within-grade increases are based on an acceptable level of competence and a required waiting period. Eligibility for within-grade increases (or step increases) is as follows:

- 1 year each - to go to steps 2, 3, and 4
- 2 years each - to go to steps 5, 6, and 7
- 3 years each - to go to steps 8, 9, and 10

Within-grade increases are automatic provided the individual receives at least fully successful performance ratings.

Assuming you are eligible, there are two primary ways to achieve promotion to the next higher grade. The first method for achieving promotion to the next higher grade is by holding a career ladder job, such as a job advertised as GS-11/12. After one year as a GS-11, you may be promoted to a GS-12 subject to the approval of your supervisor, fully successful performance, and assumption of the responsibilities associated with that grade. Career ladder jobs are usually posted with a statement such as: "Promotion potential to grade 12." This means the individual may remain in the same location and receive promotions commensurate with the assumption of additional duties up to the target grade.

The second method for achieving promotion to the next higher grade is to seek and be competitively selected to assume a position at a higher grade. After submitting a letter of interest with an attached resume and any required additional submittals such as a knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) statement to the personnel office that issued the vacancy announcement, you may be selected from a competitive panel of qualified applicants by a selecting official, usually the person who will be supervising the position.

Civil Service engineers interested in promotion are constantly improving their skills and focusing their efforts on changing jobs. Vacancy announcements are typically advertised for two to four weeks. This means the Civil Service engineer must be well prepared. Here are some tips for maintaining that preparedness. (Review Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of this issue.)

- Obtain the training and/or experience needed for the positions you may want in the future.
- Routinely review vacancy announcements. Also, contact personnel offices and network contacts for current available opportunities.
- Keep an up-to-date resume on hand and send to the appropriate personnel office when a vacancy announcement is posted. Your resume should highlight any skills and experience you may have that are specific to the position being filled.

Typically, the highest grade that can be reached in engineering, without supervisory responsibilities, is GS-13; however, there are some non-supervisory GS-14 positions for very specialized engineers.

Civil Service personnel files, called Official Personnel Folders (OPFs), are kept at the servicing personnel office. These files contain resumes, current PDs, copies of personnel actions, and cash awards. Performance ratings are usually kept in a separate file at the same location. Both files transfer as the employee transfers. Unlike the commissioned officer OPF, the information in the CS OPF is not used to determine competitiveness for promotions except possibly to check qualifications. Any Civil Service employee may see his or her OPF by contacting their servicing personnel office.

5. Evaluations

There are several evaluation systems used for civil service employees. The purpose of these systems is to (1.) improve individual and organizational effectiveness through the integration of the performance planning, review, and appraisal processes with basic management functions; and (2.) be used to execute basic management and supervisory responsibilities, to communicate goals and objectives, to identify individual accountability, to evaluate and improve individual and organizational accomplishments, and to base personnel actions on appraisal results. The performance appraisal system provides for identification of critical and non-critical elements (position duties), establishment of performance standards, communication of elements and standards to employees, establishment of methods and procedures to appraise performance against established standards, and appropriate use of appraisal information in making personnel decisions.

These evaluations are important documents in the career progression of Civil Service engineer or architect. Often an applicant for a new position is requested to include his/her most current evaluation with an application. The evaluation is also reviewed and consulted whenever an engineer or architect is being considered for a promotion, award, and/or reassignment.

Since Civil Service employees may be rated by Commissioned Corps Officers or by a non-technical supervisor, it may be helpful for you to consider the following tips:

- At the beginning of each evaluation period, review the responsibilities of the position and the rater's expectations for the year;

- Keep accurate records of your various activities, difficulties, issues, and accomplishments;

- To avoid surprises at the end of the year, routinely meet with the rater to discuss your performance to date;

- Provide the rater with a completed self-evaluation which emphasizes your strengths and accomplishments over the past year; this can be an excellent basis on which a rater can begin your evaluation.

These suggestions are not a substitute for frequent, open dialogue with the rater. Good communication between raters and employees ensures fair performance evaluations.

The Commissioned Corps System

The Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (CC) personnel system is managed by the Division of Commissioned Personnel (DCP) located at the Parklawn Building in Rockville, Maryland, which is organizationally under the Program Support Center (PSC). Because DCP has no offices outside the Parklawn Building, all CC personnel system transactions are done in this office. However, each PHS agency, along with EPA, has personnel staff or Commissioned Corps Liaisons who handle Commissioned Corps affairs for that particular agency. Agency staff should also be able to assist you with issues or questions concerning the Commissioned Corps. The Commissioned Corps Personnel Manual (CCPM), which is maintained by the DCP, contains all the personnel rules for the Commissioned Corps. The Commissioned Officer's Handbook is a valuable resource for many issues of concern to commissioned officers and should be used as the first point of reference.

1. Appointment Standards

The following paragraphs provide a brief description of the Commissioned Corps engineer appointment standards (see *CCPM, CC23.3, Instruction 4, Appointment Standards and Appointment Boards* for more detailed information).

1.a Reserve Corps

All newly appointed commissioned officers are commissioned in the Reserve Corps.

1.a.i Professional Registration:

Registration as a professional engineer is not required.

1.a ii Training:

An applicant must meet one of the following two minimum requirements:

- A bachelor's degree in engineering from an engineering program accredited by ABET; degrees in an engineering-related curriculum, e.g., engineering technology are not acceptable; **OR**

- The applicant must have earned a bachelor's degree, **plus** a master's degree in engineering from a program accredited by ABET at either the baccalaureate or master's level. The applicant must have completed the necessary engineering and engineering-related courses during the bachelor's curriculum, or supplemental to the master's curriculum, which serve as a firm foundation for the advanced degree in engineering. This course work must have the same or greater breadth and depth of course work in mathematics, physical and biological sciences, engineering mechanics, and liberal arts as are found in an approved engineering curriculum at the bachelor's level.

The current appointment standards for the engineer category only recognize architectural-engineering degree programs accredited by ABET. Those architectural programs accredited by the National Architectural Accreditation Board (NAAB) are not accepted.

The applicant is given four years of credit for the four-year academic program. A maximum of five years credit is given for a bachelor's degree earned from a university with a bona fide cooperative or five-year academic program.

The applicant can also be given more than four years credit if he or she took courses in addition to the degree requirements that are judged by the board to be highly similar to courses required in the bona fide five-year bachelor's degree program. The five-year degree curriculum shall be used as the standard by which to judge the appropriateness of the additional course work taken.

1.a.iii Graduate Education

After completion of the qualifying professional education, full credit is given for graduate training in engineering or in allied, relevant fields that will contribute greatly to the professional development of the applicant. Allied, relevant fields include the following:

- Aquatic Biology
- Biochemistry
- Biometrics
- Biophysics
- Chemistry
- City or Regional Planning
- Engineering Administration
- Engineering Physics
- Entomology
- Epidemiology
- Industrial Hygiene
- Mathematics
- Meteorology
- Microbiology
- Oceanography
- Physics
- Physiology
- Public Health
- Statistics

If the graduate degree is not received, it must be established that each year of graduate work is at the level required of degree applicants.

Graduate training which has not been designated as, or is not comparable to, the allied, relevant fields listed above, is not creditable.

1.a.iv Work Experience

Work experience in any field of engineering or in an allied, relevant field that may be substituted for engineering is fully creditable. All work experience must be at the professional level and must come after obtaining the bachelor's degree. Examples of fully creditable work experience include the following:

- College or university teaching, research, consultation or practice, administration, professional editing or writing in any area of engineering or a closely allied science such as engineering physics, industrial hygiene, public health, sanitary science, computer systems, etc.;

- Experience in the following, or in comparable fields, is creditable provided that engineering at the post-bachelor's professional level is a major component of the work: engineering design of structures, research instruments, etc.; public health administration, supervision, or instrumentation work involved in construction; or sales engineering.

The following are examples of non-creditable work experience:

- Teaching any subject below the college or university level;

- Skilled craftsman;

- Mechanic;

- Administrative position in a non-professional field;

- Sales (except engineering as noted above);

- Fiscal activities in a non-professional field;

- Routine duties in laboratory work, equipment care, and engineering aide or assistant types of work.

1.b Regular Corps

The Regular Corps is the career component of the overall Commissioned Corps. Assimilation is the appointment of Reserve Corps officers into the Regular Corps. If you are considering the corps as a career, you should strongly consider assimilation into the Regular Corps. Advantages to joining the Regular Corps include:

- Increased job security during times of manpower reductions;
- Increased promotion potential;
- The possibility of promotion beyond the O-6 grade level.

1.b.i Professional Registration and or Training

Appointment standards as a Regular Corps commissioned officer in the engineering category are much stricter than for the Reserve Corps. In addition to the basic requirements for all officers (see *CCPM, CC23.3, Instruction 7, Regular Corps Assimilation Program*), an applicant for the Regular Corps must have **one** of the following:

- A bachelor's degree in engineering **plus** a master's degree from an approved school in engineering, public health, or another field of clear potential value in PHS engineering activities; or

- A bachelor's degree in engineering from an approved school **plus** registration or board certification, by examination, as a Professional Engineer, a Health Physicist, or an Industrial Hygienist; or

- An acceptable bachelor's degree in engineering-related science, **plus** a master's degree in engineering from an approved school. Course work taken by the applicant in the Bachelor of Science curriculum must be carefully examined to determine its acceptability to serve as a firm foundation for the advanced degree in engineering. The bachelor's curriculum must have the same or greater breadth and depth of course work in mathematics, physical and biological sciences, engineering mechanics, and liberal arts as are found in an approved engineering curriculum. Lesser requirements for engineering design courses will be allowed.

If you meet the specified appointment standards, you may apply to the Regular Corps after two years of continuous active duty in your current tour of duty (applications will be reviewed by a board after the officer has three years of service). The assimilation time period is somewhat limited, and your chance is significantly reduced after you reach the permanent O-4 grade. Because the size of the Regular Corps is set by Congress, there is generally a waiting list. You should therefore apply as soon as you are qualified. For more instructions on assimilation and for an application, refer to the Regular Corps Assimilation Program.

2. Billets

The function of the commissioned officer billet is to describe the relative level of responsibility of a particular role or position. This is not the same as the civil service position description.

The billet system is based on a series of standard categorical billets designed to facilitate career progression. All billets are scored. The score determines the grade of the billet. Because the Commissioned Corps is a rank-in-officer system, rather than a rank-in-job system like the Civil Service, a billet does not have to be filled by an officer who is at the billet grade. For example, an O-6 Branch Chief billet can be permanently filled by a qualified O-5 officer who could supervise other O-5 officers or, possibly, some O-6 officers.

Although many engineer officer billets are in the standard categorical billet series, many are also in agency-specific billet series; for instance, job series that are unique to a specific agency mission, or in nonstandard billet series, i.e., unique individual jobs. Engineer officers may also qualify for multi-disciplinary billets. These can be filled with non-engineers, such as scientists, sanitarians, or physicists.

Study the standard categorical billet series. By examining the progressive requirements and responsibilities, you will be better prepared to acquire these billets in the future. In effect, you can start working on those requirements now. For example, most senior officer billets require licensure and/or graduate level degrees.

Since this information is subject to change, you may wish to contact your agency Commissioned Corps Liaison Officer and the DCP Engineer Staffing Officer for copies of the standard billets and for the most current agency specific data.

3. Promotion / Compensation

Commissioned officer pay consists of two parts: pay and allowances. The Basic Pay portion is based on grade/rank and the base pay entry date (BPED). Pay increases when the officer is promoted, and usually when the officer reaches longevity milestones at 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, and 26 years after the BPED is established. The BPED is usually the date military service, COSTEP, or PHS service began. In addition to basic pay, a commissioned officer may also be eligible for various monthly allowances, such as subsistence, housing, cost of living, etc.

As a commissioned officer, you are automatically eligible for promotion "in your own right" based on training and experience (T&E) as established from records in your Official Personnel Folder (OPF). Typically, officers are eligible for temporary grade promotions after they have accumulated 8 years of T&E (for O-3); 12 years of T&E (O-4); 17 years of T&E (O-5); and 24 years of T&E (O-6). Officers are also eligible for exceptional capability promotions (ECPs). ECPs are temporary grade promotions given before T&E eligibility is reached. Because they are initiated by supervisors and require agency head recommendation for consideration, ECPs are limited and extremely competitive.

Promotions to O-4 through O-6 are also highly competitive. Engineer promotion boards consist of at least five O-6 officers from most agencies, but may include O-6 officers from another category. The boards also include minority representatives as well as other professionals from outside the Washington, D.C. area. A promotion board assesses each engineer based on agency recommendations and the documentation in his or her OPF. Each engineer is scored and rank-ordered against other engineers at the same grade level. Except in the case of ECPs, engineers do not compete directly with other categories. Current precepts or weighted criteria used by the promotion board include:

- Career potential,
- Documented performance (as reflected in the COER),
- Career progression (increasingly responsible positions),
- Geographic and/or assignment mobility,
- Awards and other forms of recognition, and
- Agency Recommendation.

For updated information on the precepts and more detailed information on the length of service requirements for promotion, refer to the*http://dcp.psc.gov/PDF_docs/CCPM_P62/pdf Commissioned Officer's Handbook*.

Your OPF contains the information that forms the basis for all decisions about your career progression as an officer. Competitiveness for job selection, temporary and permanent promotions, and assimilation into the Regular Corps are just a few examples of the information in your OPF. Clearly, it is critical that this information be complete and accurate. Review your OPF regularly, but particularly before making any major career decisions. OPFs are stored in the Parklawn Building in Rockville, Maryland. The EPAC and Office of the Chief Engineer will help you make arrangements for either a face to face or telephonic review of your OPF with a

knowledgeable counselor. Additionally, officers can now access their OPFs online through DCP. Under the privacy act (not the Freedom of Information Act), you may submit a written request for a copy of your OPF, which will be supplied to you on a CD. These requests are handled through the DCP Privacy Act Coordinator.

You should also review your Promotion Information Report (PIR) report periodically to ensure that the information is accurate. The PIR report is based on a computerized data base maintained by the DCP. The report contains information such as a summarized Commissioned Officer Effectiveness Report (COER), transfers, awards, etc. You may review the PIR online. The link is found in the Secure Area of the DCP website at: https://dcp.psc.gov/InsideDCP/DCPLoginForm.asp.

Unlike Civil Service engineers, promotions for Commissioned Corps engineers are not directly tied to obtaining new positions. Commissioned officers are informed of their eligibility for promotion which provides some lead time to prepare for the promotion process. This gives them a great deal of time to prepare. Here are a few tips for preparing for promotion.

- Ensure that you are in a billet graded higher than or at your current grade. Be sure that you are in this position far enough in advance so that at least two annual COERs can be completed while you are in this position prior to promotion consideration.

- Avoid transfers or agency changes just prior to your last annual COER before promotion consideration unless the transfer or change involves a substantial increase in responsibility.

- In your COER, describe your duties and level of responsibility in detail; however, do not exceed one attached typed page. Consider dividing the description into headings such as **Duties, Accomplishments,** and **Goals,** with bullets under each heading.

- Review your OPF to ensure that it contains all information that will adequately represent your career progression, increased levels of responsibility, recognition, and other promotion precepts.

- Include current Curriculum Vitae in your OPF.

- Read and save the monthly DCP *Commissioned Corps Bulletin*.

4. Evaluations

The annual Commissioned Officer Effectiveness Report (COER) is one of the most important documents in the career of PHS officers. The COER is reviewed and consulted whenever an officer is being considered for promotion, assimilation, award, and/or reassignment. As these actions become more competitive, the need for COERs in your OPF that accurately reflect your performance becomes paramount.

Officers who are assigned to non-PHS agencies are frequently rated by persons who are completely unfamiliar with the PHS evaluation system. As a result, an officer could receive a rating lower than his or her peers for comparable performance. Because this could ultimately and unfairly translate into a career penalty, it is vital for officers to ensure that a fair rating is given. They can do this by making certain that the reviewing officials understand the PHS

system, duties, and responsibilities. Here are a few tips that could help especially if you are being reviewed by a non-PHS, Civil Service, or non-engineer supervisor:

- At the beginning of each evaluation period, review the responsibilities of the position and the rater's expectations for the year; established performance standards for Civil Service employees, while not directly applicable, can form the basis for an evaluation;
- Explain the importance of the COER to the rater, and discuss their interpretation of each element of the COER and, if performance standards are used, the relationship of each standard to the components of the COER;
- Keep accurate records of your various activities, difficulties, issues, and accomplishments;
- To avoid surprises at the end of the year, routinely meet with the rater to discuss your performance to date;
- Give the COER to the rater as soon as possible;
- Provide the rater with a completed COER as part of a self-evaluation which emphasizes your strengths and accomplishments over the past year; this can be an excellent basis on which a rater can begin your evaluation;
- Provide standard or average scores for your grade category;
- Give the rater names and telephone numbers of senior PHS officers with whom the rater can discuss the COER and the effects of the various ratings.

These suggestions are not substitutes for frequent, open dialogue with the rater. Good communication between raters and officers ensures fair performance evaluations.

Assignments: Civil Service and Commissioned Corps

In the Civil Service system and to a large extent in the Commissioned Corps as well, the engineer initiates most transfers and reassignments. Typically, job vacancies are advertised under the Civil Service merit promotion plan. Usually qualified Civil Service and Commissioned Corps engineers may apply for these positions.

Because of the large number of vacancies that may exist in the PHS at any one time, most PHS agency personnel offices do not maintain or distribute complete sets of all individual vacancy announcements. At a minimum they have on file a copy of the updated PHS Vacancy Report prepared by OPM in PSC. Filling engineer vacancies in the PHS is not a centrally managed process, which means that specific details on all vacancies are not readily available from any one source. A list of vacancies for which CC and, for the most part, CS, engineers are eligible is held in the DCP's Vacancy Announcement Tracking System (VATS) database. However, the database is not complete because agency participation is voluntary. The USOPM also has a link to a nationwide listing of current jobs.

Commissioned Corps and Civil Service engineers may be assigned to local, state, national and international agencies and organizations. Engineers have been stationed in Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Honduras, American Samoa, Guam, Geneva, and Saipan. There have been long term

assignments with the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization. There have been short term assignments to Africa, the Caribbean, and Indonesia to assist with refugee relief, to provide technical assistance and conduct sanitary surveys, and to assist with disaster relief.

Requests for commissioned officer details to organizations outside of the PHS agencies are usually made by the outside organization to the Office of the Surgeon General. Other details may be suggested, advertised, and filled directly by one of the PHS agencies. For more information on commissioned officer details, contact the DCP Officer Development Branch. Ask for the officer responsible for detail assignments.

Agency Contact List for PHS Engineering Opportunities

The Engineering Professional Advisory Committee maintains a listing of points of contact for PHS engineering opportunities for each agency, including the contact person's name, address, e-mail address, and telephone number.