



JO VOICE

Exceptional Proficiency Promotion (EPP) and Regular Promotions

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The information below, developed by CAPT Brian LaPlant in collaboration with the Junior Officers Advisory Group (JOAG), is designed to serve as an unofficial guide. Please refer to USPHS websites for changes or updates to any of the below information.

Questions/Responses

1. Please explain the Exceptional Proficiency Promotion (EPP) process and when an officer is eligible for EPP?

Exceptional Proficiency Promotions are an opportunity for an agency to reward those officers who have shown the highest levels of training, performance, or have unique qualifications to be recognized for early promotion in temporary rank. Temporary promotion eligibility is based on three criteria: T&E Credit, Time in Service (TIS), and Time in Grade (TIG). When an officer meets all three criteria, they are up for the next level promotion.

Eligible Grade	T&E Credit Required	Time in service requirement	Time in grade requirement during current tour with the Corps
O-2	4 years	None	None
O-3	8 years	None	None
O-4	12 years	6 months on current tour as officer in the PHS Commissioned Corps (as of March 1 st of the year reviewed by prom board)	None
O-5	17 years	5 years (2 years must be as officer in the PHS Commissioned Corps)	2 years as O-4
O-6	24 years	9 years (3 years must be as officer in the PHS Commissioned Corps)	3 years as O-5

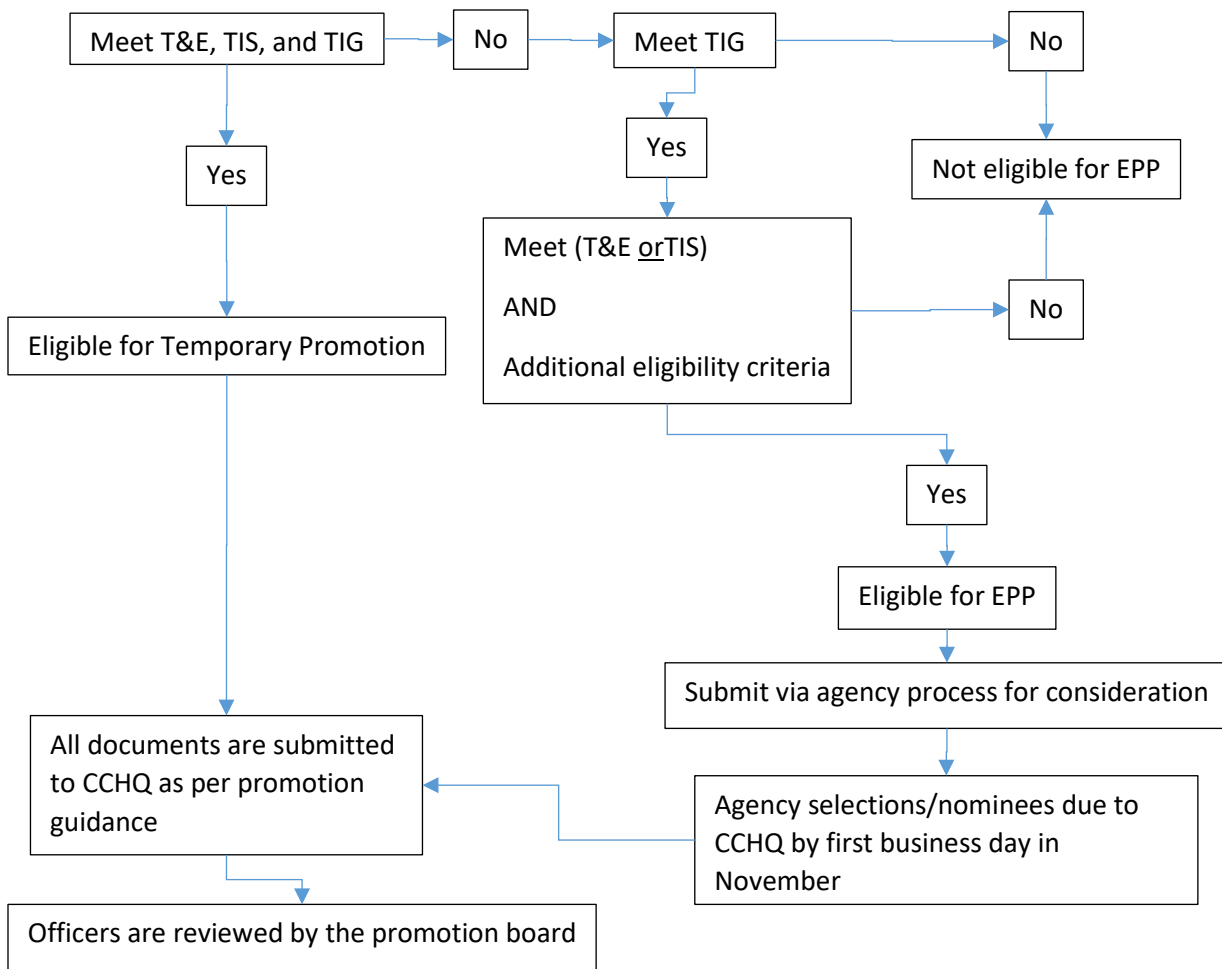
To be eligible for EPP, officers must meet the time in grade requirement. Additionally, they must meet either the T&E or the Time in service requirement. As an example, an officer that has 10 years time in service and 3 years as an O5 would be eligible for consideration for EPP to O6.

In addition to the criteria above, they must meet the following criteria as well:

- a. Must meet the criteria outlined in Section 6-8 of CCI 332.01;
- b. Must have 5 and 9 years of active duty service as an officer in the Corps for a nomination to the O-5 and O-6 grades, respectively;
- c. In compliance with the licensure requirement(s) for his/her discipline and/or category;
- d. In compliance with the force readiness standards of the Corps for each check in the previous year [e.g., for promotion year (PY) 2019, must have met the readiness standard for each quarter in 2017 and monthly beginning January 1, 2018 through October 1, 2018];
- e. Most recent annual Commissioned Officers' Effectiveness Reports (COER) is rated as satisfactory (e.g., for PY2019, the 2018 annual COER is rated as satisfactory);
- f. All required COERs for the past five (5) years are in the officer's electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF); and
- g. Must not have any outstanding adverse action(s).

Agencies receive a list from Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) that includes the officers that meet eligibility requirements. Each agency is given a quota of officers that they are allowed to submit. That quota is set at 5% of the total number of officers that are eligible. This number is a total number and not set for any one rank or category. As an example: agency A may have 1000 total officers, 100 may be eligible for EPP, 5% of 100 is 5 officers. Agency A may select any combination of eligible ranks, and categories to forward to CCHQ as long as the grand total is not more than 5 officers.

The following page includes a general diagram of the process.



Officers should also be aware that they can submit packets to the agency to be considered for EPP more than one time per rank, if their agency does not forward their packet to CCHQ. In contrast, if an officer is selected for EPP and forwarded by the agency to CCHQ and the promotion board does not promote the officer, the officer may not resubmit their packet in future years for EPP consideration for the same temporary rank.

2. (A). Please discuss the application/recommendation process for EPP consideration?

This application process is unique to each agency. Each agency has their own mechanism that is communicated through the liaisons on how to apply. Questions about your agency’s EPP process should be directed to your Agency Liaison.

(B). Is there a deadline or certain time of year to submit for EPP?

The exact timing will be dependent on the agency, and the time it takes to navigate the process; however, the process must be ultimately completed to have the names to CCHQ by the first business day in November deadline.

(C). What sorts of things are being looked for when EPP is being considered?

In general, and in its simplest form, agencies are looking for those officers who stand the best chance to be promoted to the next temporary rank, and best exemplify the highest levels of performance. The items that are being looked for are how well the officer meets/addresses the benchmarks for their respective discipline.

(D). What are some examples of standout achievements?

This is a great question, but is actually a very difficult question. There is no “one way” to standout. As the simplest example, if you are a TO4 that performs at a high level in an O6 billet meeting O6 benchmarks, you might be a strong candidate for EPP to TO5. I recommend thinking about it this way: All officers are trying to get promoted – what is it about your packet that makes you stand out, that makes you unique, and how is that information presented so that reviewers look at the documentation and say: “This is the officer we want to promote.” I would also caution you against the “checkbox” approach. Those packets that have segregated accomplishments that appear to be simply benchmark chasing do not show as strongly as those that are coordinated. A good example from pharmacy looking at the performance/education component would be an officer that has an advanced degree in mental health, a board certification in mental health, and that runs a telehealth clinic with documented outcomes and awards for their clinic.

3. Are officers called to active duty as a TO-4 not eligible for EPP due to the timing parameters, i.e. by the time they have the mandatory required 5 years in the Corps (POM 821.64 Section 2a), they also have the required time in grade and T&E for temporary promotion?

This ultimately depends on the timing noted above. If they meet the time in grade and T&E requirements, as well as the other criteria from above, they would be eligible. The officer would also have to be having a significant impact and accomplishments to be competitive with all disciplines and ranks from within the agency to be nominated.

4. (A.) Is modernizing the promotion process part of the plan to modernize the USPHS Commissioned Corps overall? I have often heard the average promotion board member spends less than 10 minutes per candidate. In that amount of time we assume they review our PIR, eOPF, last 5 COERs, CV, ROS, and OS and repeat this process for hours (and potentially hundreds of candidates for larger categories). It would seem difficult to actually review these documents/resources in sufficient detail in such a short amount of time and come to a rational decision regarding a promotion score. Considering the pool of candidates seems to grow and the number of spots at the new

rank remains fairly constant or dwindles every year, could less documentation for promotions be considered to reduce the administrative burden on the promotion boards and candidates?

I cannot speak to the plans for changes to the promotion process. My understanding is that they are always evaluating ways to ensure the process is working and that the integrity of the process is maintained. It is true that board members have a limited amount of time to read through a packet. That being said, the setup of having 5 board members that work independently helps to ensure all impacts are noted. Additionally, it highlights the importance of articulating how you as an individual meet the benchmarks. I have always heard that the best packets take some of the least amount of time to review, because all the information is presented in such a way it is easy to see how they meet the benchmarks and why they are deserving of being promoted to the next rank. The hardest are those where the board has to dig to find accomplishments in all the documents you noted above.

(B). I suspect the current promotion process explains why we still use COER scoring plus narrative instead of only a narrative. Has the current COER scoring process improved score inflation over the old system?

I cannot speak to comparative information regarding the inflation. As with other benchmarks, it is not an all or nothing component. The scoring gives a jumping off point, but the narrative is where the agency impact can be outlined. As noted above, those with the strongest packets have the strongest narratives showing the agency impact.

5. I have been told that agency liaisons are only allowed to submit a certain number of candidates per agency. How are the EPP candidates vetted and what are the criteria used to rank them for submission at the agency level?

This is similar to previous questions above. This is going to be unique at the agency level, but the ultimate criteria is for reviewing officers to see an officer's competitiveness for promotion, how the officer meets discipline benchmarks, and evaluate what the officer's impact in the agency has been. Questions about your agency's EPP process should be directed to your Agency Liaison.

6. I heard EPP Promotions would soon be dissolved. Can you please comment on this?

Unfortunately, I do not have insight on this.

7. Please provide a more informative statistical information breakdown on promotions. Prior to 2017 there was a breakdown showing high, low, and average scores and how many officers were up for promotion in each category?

While this is not information that I have available, it is important to note that board members change every year and an individual must not have served for the previous 3 years. Because of this difference, scores cannot be compared from year-to-year.

8. (A). Can you share any statistics on promotion by region or department or similar? What are the rates of promotion over the past few years for field officers vs HQ, or for IHS vs FDA, etc.?

This is information that I do not have available.

- (B). How does a residency affect promotion probability?

Because board scoring falls into only the four core areas (performance, education, career progression and potential, professional contributions and services to the Corps [officership]), it would be difficult to point to one component's impact on promotion. It goes back to: there is no one way to promotion, but it relates more to how all the parts of the officer's career go together to reflect promotion readiness to the next rank based on the benchmarks.

- (C). How do scores from the promotion review board differ before lunch and after lunch?

This is a very interesting question, and I think it is worth looking at the board process. The entire structure is created in a way to maintain the integrity of the process and minimize the impact of any potential confounding factors. Promotion boards consist of five T06 officers, each who reviews the officer files individually. Because of this, Board Member #1 may review a packet at 0700 and Board Member #2 may review it at 1300. Boards also consist of O6 officers who understand the importance of promotion, the future of the Corps, and that the first review that is completed for a given grade is just as important as the last one. As an additional mechanism, the board has a quality assurance process to identify and address scoring outliers that may exist for an individual board member.

- (D). If nobody currently looks into these statistics is it possible to make the data available for volunteers to analyze?

Promotion board information is held in the strictest of confidence, with board members taking an oath to hold in confidence everything that is seen, read, or discussed. However, it is important to note the quality assurance process noted above.

- (E). Are there any plans to modernize this process so human biases are less impactful?

My understanding is that the process is always being evaluated for ways to improve; however, as I noted above, there are a number of processes already in place to limit the impact of human bias.