USA Staffing

Subject Matter Expert Evaluation
HR User Guide

September 2023

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What Is a Subject Matter Expert Evaluation?

A Subject Matter Expert (SME) Evaluation is one of four **Assessment Types** available in USA Staffing, the other three being Questionnaire, Manual, and External (i.e., USA Hire). An SME Evaluation allows HR Users to interact directly with the SMEs who will evaluate applicants using different **Assessment Methods**.

This guide will illustrate several best practices for creating and using an SME Evaluation in accordance with the recent Executive Order, but the functionality itself is very flexible. Agencies can use it in several different ways depending on the job analysis, consultation with the selecting official, and agency internal guidance. If you are considering a new assessment process using this functionality, we recommend trying it out in the USA Staffing Training environment first, so you can gain some hands-on experience with each piece of the process before using it in a live vacancy.

What Different Assessment Methods are available?

> The only assessment method currently available under the SME Evaluation assessment type is the Structured Resume Review. We will add additional assessment methods as we continue to refine system functionality.

Structured Resume Review

OPM defines a Structured Resume Review as a screening (pass/fail) assessment whereby a trained panel of two or more SMEs follows a systematic process to review an applicant's resume and come to agreement on whether the applicant has the required specialized experience necessary to successfully perform the job. The Structured Resume Review is intended to screen out individuals who do not have the specialized experience required. This method does not identify best qualified applicants, provide a numerical score, or determine a category rating placement.

In USA Staffing this assessment method presents applicants' resumes to each of the SMEs, one at a time, along with the specialized experience requirements (i.e., SME Evaluation Items), collects the SMEs' evaluations and justifications, sends applicant resumes to a tiebreaker SME if there are discrepancies, and presents the information in an organized way to the HR User.

A self-paced online training course (approximately 3 to 4 hours) is available to all Federal agencies at no charge through the USA Staffing Online Course Portal at https://usastaffing.usalearning.net/login/index.php.

HR users should also reference the SME Evaluation Assessment Methods Guide located at https://help.usastaffing.gov/ResourceCenter/index.php/Resources for additional information regarding SME Evaluation Assessment Methodology and the Structured Resume Review Assessment Method.

> The SME Evaluation assessment type **cannot** be used in vacancies that have multiple grades, multiple series, or multiple specialties.

The SME Evaluation

As stated in the beginning of this guide, an **SME Evaluation** is the *Assessment Type* that provides the ability to use a *Structured Resume Review Assessment Method* to carry out a Structured Resume Review in USA Staffing.

The system defaults in USA Staffing are designed for compliance with the requirements of Executive Order 13932. At a high level, a Structured Resume Review that meets the Executive Order involves the following steps:

- Two SMEs independently review an applicant's resume against each specialized experience requirement targeted for the resume review.

- Each SME independently determines whether or not the applicant meets each specialized experience requirement based on the content of the applicant's resume.

- Each SME provides a justification for each Yes/No rating.

    - When rating 'Yes' (resume reflects the required experience), SMEs indicate where in the resume they found support for their rating (i.e., year(s) experience gained, as well as position title as needed for clarity).

    - When rating 'No' (resume does not reflect the required experience), SMEs indicate that the resume reflects insufficient evidence of the required experience, providing justification needed to help others to retrace their decision.

- If the two SMEs disagree on one or more specialized experience requirement(s), a third tiebreaker SME reviews documentation from the two SMEs to make a final determination.

Important to note, although the steps outlined above reflect the system defaults and are consistent with Executive Order 13932 requirements, USA Staffing functionality offers flexibilities. The system will permit a single SME to carry out a resume review. The system also does not require SMEs to provide justifications for each rating. However, deviating from the system defaults may result in an assessment process that is not compliant with EO 13932 resulting in the need for an additional assessment prior to certification.

SME Evaluations can be added to an Assessment Package Template or an individual vacancy. Assessments of any type must be added to your vacancy before it is released and opened on USAJOBS. Additionally, to use the SME Evaluation functionality, your vacancy must accept and require resumes. You should also place language in the *How You Will Be Evaluated* section of the announcement that explains to the applicant any additional assessment steps that will occur after they submit their application (see sample wording in the SME Evaluation Assessment Methods Guide).

SME Evaluations can also be combined with other types of assessments in the same assessment package, including other SME Evaluations, if needed. The settings for each assessment are independent of each other and can be configured on their respective Assessment Information pages according to your agency's needs and internal business rules.

Assessment Package Tab

Click the Assessment Package tab.

If there aren't any assessments in the vacancy's Assessment Package, you'll be prompted to choose an Assessment Path. Click the *Create Assessment* button. This will open the Create Assessment tab.
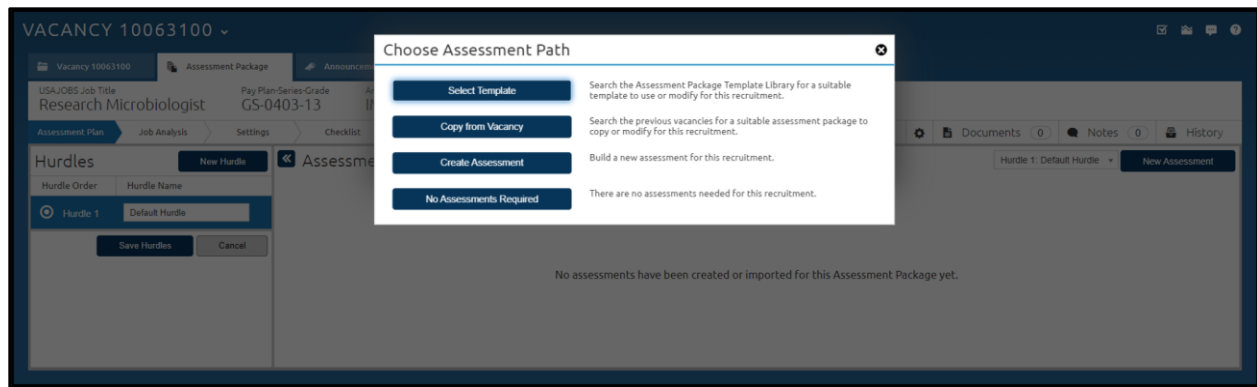
If there's already an assessment in the vacancy's Assessment Package, click the *New Assessment* button. This will open the Create Assessment tab.
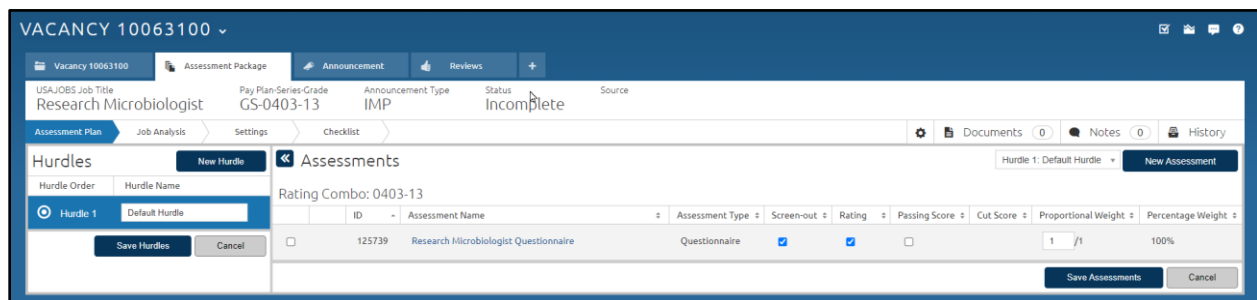
Assessment Information

1. Enter the assessment name in the Assessment Name textbox.

2. Select *SME Evaluation* from the Assessment Type dropdown. **PLEASE NOTE:** The *SME Evaluation* assessment type is available as an option only if the vacancy contains a single rating combination, such as GS-0403-13. *SME Evaluation* will **not** appear as an option if the vacancy has multiple grades, series, or specialties. If additional rating combinations are added after the Assessment Package is completed, USA Staffing will automatically mark the Assessment Package as incomplete and prevent HR Users from completing the Assessment Package until the additional rating combinations *or* the SME Evaluation assessment is removed.

3. Select either *Structured Resume Review (EO Compliant)* or *Structured Resume Review* from the Assessment Method dropdown.

   a. When you select *Structured Resume Review (EO Compliant)*, USA Staffing will set the number of SME evaluations required to 2 and require evaluation justification notes for all responses. These defaults help the HR User ensure the assessment meets the intent of Executive Order 13932 (EO). Selecting this option doesn't guarantee the assessment meets the EO's intent but rather ensures the HR User is meeting minimum requirements to do so.

   b. When you select *Structured Resume Review*, USA Staffing allows the HR User the flexibility to set the number of SME evaluations to 1 or 2, and require evaluation justification notes only for disqualifying responses, only for qualifying responses, or for all responses, according to the agency's needs. Keep in mind, however, that an assessment requiring fewer than 2 SME evaluations and not requiring justification notes for all responses will not meet the requirements of EO 13932.

4. The Screen-out and Rating toggles are automatically set and disabled since SME Evaluation assessment types are pass/fail and cannot be rated.

5. The HR User who created the assessment is auto populated as the Owner. If needed, change the Owner to a different HR User.

6. Select the hurdle in which you want to put this assessment.

7. Click *Save*.

Once you save the assessment, USA Staffing will change the tab's title to the Assessment Name, enable the remaining tabs, and lock the Assessment Type dropdown.

Competencies

SME Evaluation type assessments do not require the use of Competencies. If you do choose to use them, you can add them on the Competencies tab by selecting them from an existing competency network, or if you have the proper permissions, by creating them manually.

> Any competencies you add to your SME Evaluation type assessment will be displayed in USAJOBS if you include a *Competencies List* or *Competencies Bullets* data insert in your announcement. If you're assessing the same competency between multiple assessments, make sure you use the same Competency ID in each of those assessments, so they aren't duplicated in the data insert list.

SME Evaluation Items

The SME Evaluation Items page is where you add the specialized experience requirements the SMEs will use when reviewing each resume to evaluate if an applicant possesses the required specialized experience. These items are based on the specialized experience requirements defined in the Job Analysis. Generally, applicants must have at least one year (52 weeks) of full-time experience equivalent to the next lower grade level in the Federal service (or comparable level of experience from outside the Federal service) to meet the specialized experience requirements.

These specialized experience requirements are not the same as the Individual Occupation Requirements (IORs) or other basic requirements for the advertised position. These may include education requirements or selective placement factors which are typically confirmed through supporting documentation such as transcripts, certifications, and licenses. HR Users should conduct this review prior to sending the SME Review. The SME will only have access to the applicants' resumes when conducting the SME Review.

Each SME Evaluation Item requires a header and a stem. The header may be the competency associated with, or an abbreviated version of, the specialized experience requirement. The stem is the specialized experience requirement phrased in a way that prompts a "yes/no" response from the SME. For example:

(Header) Microbiology

(Stem) Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level planning microbiological field and laboratory investigations involving novel or difficult-to-identify pathogens.

Serotyping

Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level serotyping immune-based and/or molecular assays to detect emerging threats such as viruses, bacteria, proteins and/or peptides.

Encapsulation

Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level utilizing nanoparticle and/or microparticle production processes for encapsulation and/or characterization of encapsulated material.

Aerosolization

Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level aerosolizing nano and/or microencapsulated material.

SME Evaluation Items can be added by importing them from the SME Evaluation Items Library or by creating them manually.

To Import an Item from the SME Evaluation Items Library:

1. Select *Add from Library* from the Add SME Evaluation Items dropdown menu. This will open the SME Evaluation Item Library search dialog box.

2. The series and grade filters are set by default. Enter any other search criteria as needed.

3. Click *Search*.

4. Select the item(s) you would like to import.

5. Click *Add & Close* to import the items and continue creating the SME Evaluation or *Add & Continue* to search for additional SME Evaluation Items to import.

To Create an Item Manually:

1. Select *New Item* from the Add SME Evaluation Items dropdown menu. This will open the Add SME Evaluation Item dialog box.

2. Enter text for the Header.

3. Enter text for the Item stem.

4. Both the Screen-out Question and Response Required toggles are toggled on by default.

5. The response type is set to Multiple Choice – Single Select by default.

6. The scale is set to Resume Reflects Experience by default.

7. Click *Save & New* to add additional SME Evaluation Items or *Save & Close* if there are no additional items to add.

Screen-Out Criteria

Each SME Evaluation Item is a Screen-out Question, so each one will need its own Screen-out Criteria. The HR User adds these on the Screen-Out Criteria page. To add a Screen-out Criteria:

1. Click the *Add Screen-Out Criteria* button. This opens the Add Screen-Out Criteria dialog box.

2. Enter the name of the screen-out. (Helpful tip: to keep things organized, use the SME Evaluation Item Header as the name for the screen-out.)

3. Select the Ineligibility Code. The default code is ***IQSM*** - *You are ineligible for this position because subject matter experts have determined you do not meet the required qualifications as described in the job announcement.*

4. Select the item from the item dropdown.

5. Select the disqualifying response.

6. Click *Save & Close*.

7. Repeat for all SME Evaluation Items.

Add Screen-Out Criteria

Name *
Microbiology

Apply Screen-Out to Rating Combinations
☑ 0403-13

Ineligibility Code *
IQSM - You are ineligible for this position because subject matter experts have determine... ▾

ℹ️ Add all items that should be considered in this Screen-Out. Then, select all Response Options that should disqualify applicants for the selected Rating Combinations. Remember that the selected items and Response Options should be specific to the Rating Combinations selected above.

Add Item

Item
1. Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level planning microbiological field and laboratory investigations involving novel or difficult-to-identify pathogens.

Response Options

☐	✅	A	Resume reflects this experience
☑	❌	B	Resume does not reflect this experience
☑	❌		Failed to respond

✅ Qualifying Response   ❌ Disqualifying Response

Save   Save & Close   Cancel

VACANCY 10063100 ⌄

Vacancy 10063100 | Assessment Package | Announcement | Reviews | ✓ Assessment: Research Microbiologist SME Evaluation | +

USAJOBS Announcement Title
Research Microbiologist

Pay Plan-Series-Grade
GS-0403-13

Assessment ID
125740

Assessment Information ⟩ Competencies ⟩ SME Evaluation Items ⟩ **Screen-Out Criteria** ⟩ Test Plan ⟩ Checklist

⚙️ 🖨 History

Screen-Out Criteria (4)

Add Screen-Out Criteria

	Name ⇕	Rating Combos ⇕	Ineligibility Code ⇕	Items ⇕
☐	Microbiology	0403-13	IQSM	1
☐	Serotyping	0403-13	IQSM	1
☐	Encapsulation	0403-13	IQSM	1
☐	Aerosolization	0403-13	IQSM	1

Test Plan

The Test Plan page is where the HR User ensures the screen-outs are correctly configured through various test scenarios. To create a scenario:

1. Click the *Add Scenario* button. This opens the Add Scenario dialog box.
2. Enter a name for the scenario, such as *ELTE* or *IQSM*, depending on the desired result.
3. Select the expected rating. The options here will be ELTE and all the ineligibility codes you entered when creating your screen-out criteria.
4. For each item, select the response that will result in the Expected Outcome.
5. Click *Save* to preview the Actual Outcome.
6. If the Expected Outcome matches the Actual Outcome (there will be a green checkmark), click *Save & Close*. If they don't match (signified by a red X), adjust the results until they do.

Add Scenario

Scenario *
ELTE

Outcomes

	Rating Combo	Expected Rating	Actual Rating
☐	0403-13 ▾	ELTE ▾	

Item Responses

Item		Response
● 1	Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level planning m...	A
● 2	Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level serotyping...	A
● 3	Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level utilizing ...	A
● 4	Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level aerosolizing nano and/or microencapsulated material.	A

4. Resume reflects at least one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-12 level aerosolizing nano and/or microencapsulated material.

Response Options

- ⦿ A Resume reflects this experience
- ○ B Resume does not reflect this experience
- ○   Failed to respond

Save   Save & Close   Cancel

USA Staffing only requires one passing test scenario to complete the assessment, but a best practice is to create a qualifying (i.e., ELTE) and at least one disqualifying (i.e., IQSM) scenario. Regardless of the number of scenarios you create, all must have green checkmarks.

Checklist

The Checklist page performs some behind-the-scenes validations to make sure the SME Evaluation Assessment is configured correctly. If your assessment passes, you'll see all green checkmarks. If there's something wrong, you'll see a red X. You'll have to fix each issue before you can move on to the rest of the assessment package.

There is also the possibility you'll see an orange exclamation point. If you see this, it's not an error. It just means you've selected an option that OPM doesn't recommend, such as using fewer than two SMEs (as shown here). If it's intentional, you can move forward with the rest of the assessment package.

Once your checklist shows all green checkmarks, click the *Continue* button to return to the assessment package.

Completing the Assessment Package

At this point, you are finished creating the SME Evaluation assessment. You are now free to add additional assessments and hurdles, if needed, or complete the assessment package and continue with the announcement.

The SME Review

The Reviews page is where you create a review or access an existing review. To create a Subject Matter Expert (SME) Review, select *Subject Matter Expert (SME)* from the Create Review drop down menu:
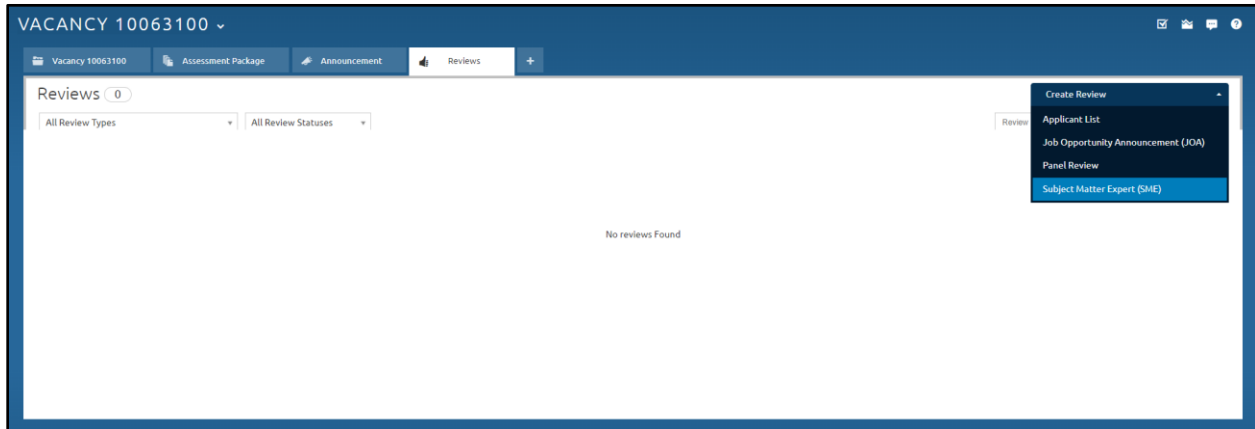
Review Information

The Review Information page is where the HR User adds basic information about the review such as the review's name, due date, and any instructions needed.

1. Enter a name for the review, such as Research Microbiologist SME Review or some other description.
2. Select the SME Assessment that will be used for this review. If there is only one SME Assessment, that assessment will be auto populated.

> ℹ️ Each SME Evaluation Assessment tied to a vacancy can be sent only once on a review. The same SME Evaluation Assessment cannot be sent on more than one review per vacancy.

3. The HR User who created the review is auto populated as the Owner. If necessary, change the Owner to the appropriate HR User responsible for receiving the returned review.
4. Select a Due Date.
5. The Review Instructions are standard and auto populated.
6. Click *Save*.

Review Assignments

The Review Assignments page is where you select the SMEs who will conduct the Structured Resume Review. HR Users should ensure they are only selecting Hiring Manager Users who have received the proper training and are qualified to act as an SME in this context. USA Staffing does not automatically add the requester as one of the reviewers, because they might not be considered an SME. HR users may still manually assign the Requester if they would like the Hiring Manager to be involved in the review process Add as many SMEs, including tiebreakers, as needed. To add a Reviewer:

1. Click the *Add Reviewer* button.

2. In the Add Review popup window:

    a. Select the customer with which the Reviewer's account is associated.

    b. Hiring Manager User is checked by default.

    c. Enter the First Name, Last Name and/or E-mail address used to create the account.

    d. Click *Search*. Search results will appear in the right side of the popup window.

    e. Click the *Add* button to indicate that person should be added as Reviewer.

    > If the individual does not appear in the search results, try adjusting your search criteria. If they still do not appear, you will need to confirm they have an account in USA Staffing before proceeding.

    f. Repeat the above steps as many times to add the necessary number of Reviewers.

    g. Click *Save & Close* after selecting all your Reviewers

3. From the Review Assignments page, indicate if one or more of the Reviewers will act as a Tiebreaker Only by checking the appropriate *checkbox* for that Reviewer. Although they are not required, if a Tiebreaker Only is identified, they will only be presented with an applicant if two SMEs disagree on one or more SME Evaluation Items. If no Tiebreaker Only SME is identified, one of the other SMEs will perform the tiebreaker evaluation provided they were not one of the original two SMEs.

4. If you need to remove a Reviewer, click the *trashcan icon* on the far-right side of that Reviewer's entry. Once an SME starts an evaluation, you won't be able to remove any SMEs from the review, but you can always add additional SMEs if the need arises.

5. Click *Send Review*.
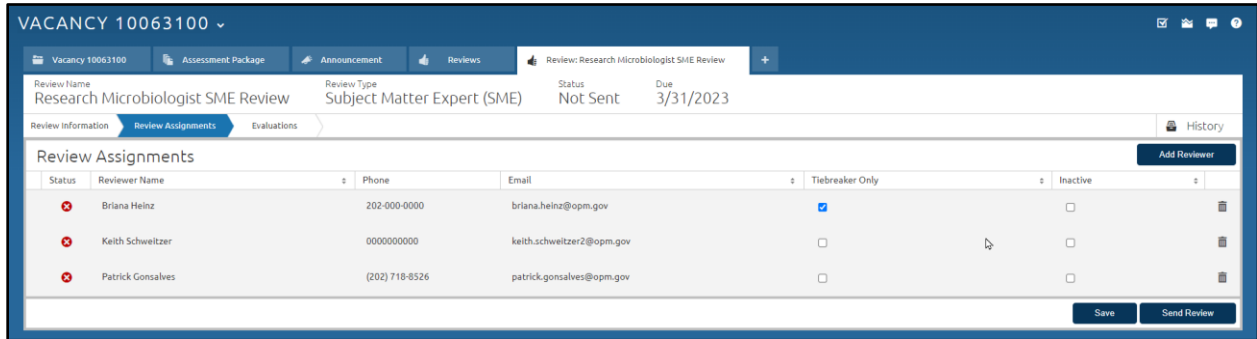
After sending the review, if an SME Reviewer changes roles, leaves the organization, or for any other reason should not be involved in the review, HR users can mark the SME Reviewer as "Inactive". An "Inactive" SME Reviewer will no longer be assigned new evaluations but remain available to correct justifications as needed. It is not recommended that HR mark SME Reviewers as "Inactive" simply because they are unavailable temporarily.

Evaluations

HR Users can monitor the SMEs' progress in the Evaluation Progress and Overview sections of the Evaluations page. These sections display the total number of SME Evaluations tied to the review, how many tiebreaker evaluations are needed, and the ratio of applicant evaluations completed, as well as progress bars showing the number of evaluations in each status.
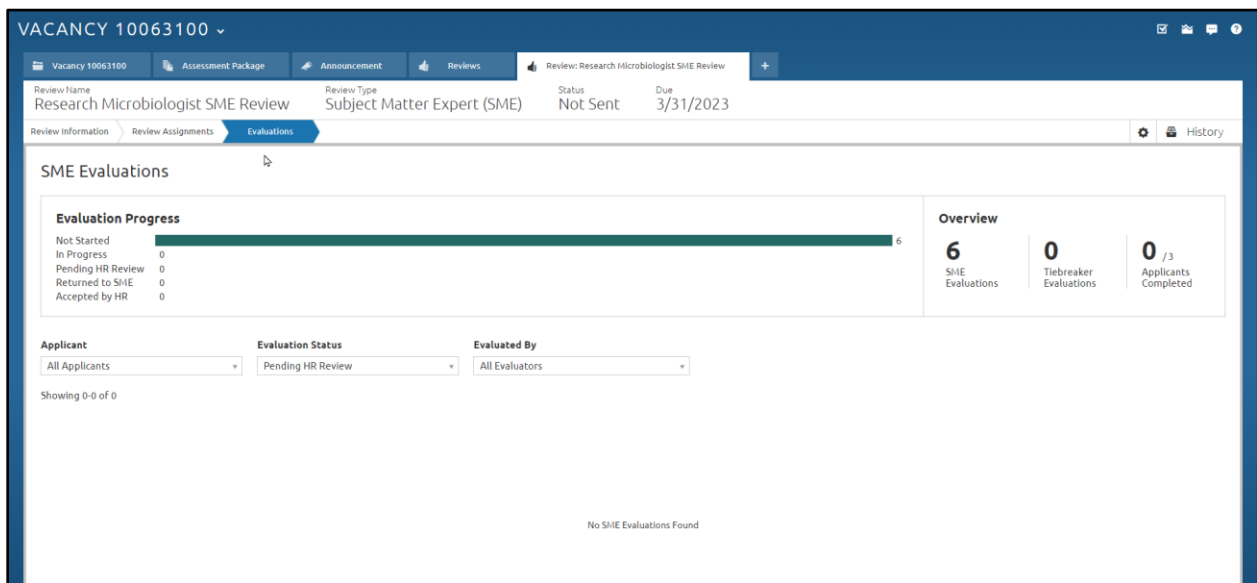
The Evaluation Progress Section

This section tracks SMEs as they progress through the evaluations. The evaluation statuses are defined as:

- **Not started:** an SME Reviewer has not opened the evaluation.

- **In Progress:** an SME Reviewer has opened the evaluation and is actively working. SME Reviewers are given four hours to complete each applicant's evaluation. A reminder will appear showing the time remaining. If an evaluation is not completed in the allotted time, that applicant will be reassigned to another SME.

- **Returned to SME:** an HR User has returned the evaluation to an SME Reviewer requesting an amendment or clarification. The SME Reviewer can only update their justification notes, they cannot change their overall determination.

- **Pending HR Review:** an SME Reviewer has completed their evaluation of that applicant. The system then adds the evaluation to a queue for the HR User to review. The HR User will review the evaluation to ensure the SME justifications are complete and match the determination. The HR User does not need to perform an additional qualifications review.

- **Accepted by HR:** an HR User has reviewed and accepted the evaluation.

The Overview Section

This section shows the expected number of evaluations and tiebreakers needed to complete the review.

- **SME Evaluations:** the total number of evaluations required for the entire review based on the number of SME Evaluations required per applicant. As an example, if the HR User selects two SME Evaluations are required for each applicant, and there are three applicants, at a minimum six SME Evaluations will be required to complete the review.

- **Tiebreaker Evaluations:** the total number of evaluations where there is disagreement between the SMEs on one or more SME Evaluation Items per applicant. For example, if there are four SME Evaluation Items and the two SMEs disagree on two of those items, a single tiebreaker evaluation will be generated.

- **Applicants Completed:** the total number of Applicants where an HR User has reviewed and accepted all required evaluations and tiebreakers.

Evaluations in a Returned to SME, Pending HR Review, or Accepted by HR status will be shown below the Evaluation Progress and Overview sections. HR Users can filter these results by Applicant Name, Evaluation Status, or SME Reviewer.

Once an SME Reviewer submits an evaluation, the HR User will need to review it and either accept it or return it to the SME so they can amend one or more justification notes. An SME will not be able to change their determination on a returned evaluation, only amend their justification notes. To accept or return an evaluation:

1. Click the + next to the applicant's name to expand the evaluation.

2. To accept the SME's evaluation, click the *Accept* button which will initiate the rating process.

3. To return the evaluation to the SME so they can amend their justification notes to provide more information, click *Return to SME*. This will open the Return to SME Reason pop-up. Enter the reason for returning the evaluation, instructions to the SME, or both, then click *Send*.

Return to SME Reason

Enter a message for the Subject Matter Expert explaining why their justification needs amendment and click "Send". Text entered in this field will be sent to the Subject Matter Expert and saved and added to the review.

Send   Cancel

Once the HR User has accepted all the SME Evaluations, the SME Review is considered complete, and the HR User can move on to the next steps in their recruitment process.

VACANCY 10063100 ∨

| Vacancy 10063100 | Assessment Package | Announcement | Reviews | Applicant Overview | Review: Research Microbiologist SME Review | + |

Review Name
Research Microbiologist SME Review

Review Type
Subject Matter Expert (SME)

Status
Active

Due
3/31/2023

Review Information > Review Assignments > Evaluations   ⚙ 🖨 History

SME Evaluations

Evaluation Progress

Not Started	0
In Progress	0
Pending HR Review	0
Returned to SME	0
Accepted by HR	7

Overview

6	1	3 /3
SME Evaluations	Tiebreaker Evaluations	Applicants Completed

Applicant	Evaluation Status	Evaluated By
All Applicants ▾	Accepted by HR ▾	All Evaluators ▾

Showing 1-7 of 7

Applicant Name	Evaluation Date	Evaluated By	Evaluation Status
+ Jeffrey Lebowski	03/21/2023 01:12 PM	Patrick A. Gonsalves	Pending HR Review
+ Walter Sobchak	03/21/2023 01:13 PM	Patrick A. Gonsalves	Pending HR Review