

**Research and Development Classification Process Survey Results  
for Session 1 through Session 3 Participants**

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The Research and Development Classification Process (RDCP) was established in 2001 as the process by which the work and qualifications of high-grade scientists and engineers employed by NASA Langley Research Center are classified and any subsequent personnel actions are effected. The key characteristic of this process is application of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) classification guides and standards through a consensus decision-making process of peer scientists and engineers. A panel of such peers is convened to provide technical review of the assignment, impact, and qualifications that the employee brings to the position. RDCP panel chairs and members are non-supervisory Langley employees. The Office of Human Resources (OHR) effects the recommendations of the panels in terms of updating the employee's position classification and any resulting promotion. The selection of employees for review in each session was determined by random weighted assignment and some limited management requests for those already identified as ready for review or needing deferral. All of the approximately 800 employees initially assigned to a session will be reviewed between the summer of 2001 and the summer of 2004. Three sessions have been conducted to date (starting in August 2001), reviewing a total of 260 employees in about 48 branches over 25 panels involving a total of 175 employees as panel members. The process has resulted in 108 employees' jobs classified at their current grade, 121 classified at the next highest grade, one classified below grade, with the remainder to be reviewed again due to either insufficient information or appropriate Guide not applied. This paper describes the results of a survey conducted with participants of the third RDCP session and compares it with results of an earlier survey of sessions 1 and 2 participants. The purpose of the survey was to provide information about how well the process is working and where it may need improvement.

A simple survey (see copy in Appendix A) was posted on the internal LaRC web for three weeks (February 4 through February 22, 2002) in order to obtain feedback from RDCP participants in Session 1 and 2, and again from June 21 through July 5, 2002 for Session 3 participants. Responses to the 18 items were anonymous and voluntary.

### **Session 3 Survey Results**

Ninety-two out of the approximately 180 Session 3 participants responded to the survey: 17 out of 31 Branch Heads, 31 out of 63 panel members, and 44 out of 86 reviewees. Table 1 is a summary of the responses for all of the questionnaire items. (Items 5 through 16 were ratings from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with 0 meaning no opinion or not applicable.)

**Table 1. Summary of Responses to Questionnaire Items 1 through 17 for Session 3**

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Item Name</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
1	Session participated	92	na	3.0	na	na
2	Guide used	92	1.0	2.0	na	na
3	Hours spent	92	4.0	160	56.58	32.25
4	RDCP Role	92	1.0	3.0	na	na
5	Fair selection	77	1.0	5.0	3.12	1.17
6	Adequate training	89	1.0	5.0	3.46	.95
7	Adequate handbook	92	1.0	5.0	3.39	.94
8	Understandable process	92	1.0	5.0	3.55	1.00
9	Clear criteria	90	1.0	5.0	3.0	1.10
10	Conducted consistently	84	1.0	5.0	2.90	1.18
11	Improved classification process	81	1.0	5.0	3.02	1.33
12	Improved promotion process	87	1.0	5.0	3.11	1.44
13	Improved morale	91	1.0	5.0	2.69	1.33
14	Adequate time	88	1.0	5.0	4.10	.80
15	Agree with panel	89	1.0	5.0	3.55	1.25
16	Report adequate	88	1.0	5.0	3.24	1.31
17	Reviewee decision category	44	1.0	4.0	na	na

The average number of hours spent on the RDCP was about 57 with little difference among reviewees (56.6 hours), panel members (57.6 hours), or branch heads (59 hours). And, however, all three had large standard deviations, between 28 and 32 hours.

In general, the average rating scores are between 2.7 and 4.10. The average rating score of at least 3.0 (neither disagree nor agree) is used here as an arbitrary criteria for areas which are doing well. All items, except Conducted Consistently (item 10), and Improved Morale (item 13), had average ratings greater than or equal to 3.0. The two noted items had average scores of 2.9 and 2.69, respectively. For both items, it was the panel members' average score that was lowest, 2.45 and 2.35, respectively. The branch head and reviewees' scores were close, between 2.7 to 2.9 for both items.

The fact that almost 60 percent of all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the panel results is a very good indicator that RDCP is a process that provides valid results. Of the reviewees, about half of the 44 respondents had been evaluated as above grade. They gave an average rating of 4.17 for item 15, indicating agreement with the panel results. But, the 14 respondents who had been evaluated at grade had an average rating of 2.21, which indicated they disagreed with the panel results. The 7 respondents for whom the panel gave an "other" decision also disagreed, but with a higher rating, with

the panel results (average rating was 2.86). Furthermore, the 17 responding Branch Heads had an average rating of 3.47 for item 15, indicating that they did not disagree with the panel results.

When Improved Morale (item 13) average ratings within reviewees were compared with the actual panel decision results, there was a significant difference by panel decision category. Not surprisingly, those reviewees who received promotions gave an average rating of 3.39 to the question about improved morale, whereas those who remained in their current grade gave an average rating of 1.93 for this item.

**Table 2. Practically Significant Correlation Coefficients ( $r \geq .45$ ,  $p = .00$ ) for Session 3 participants**

Item	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16
Q3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q4		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q5			1	-	-	.51	.50	.49	-	.51	.46	-	-	-
Q6				1	.69	.51	.45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q7					1	.58	.52	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q8						1	.70	.57	.60	.57	.54	-	-	.46
Q9							1	.68	.63	.62	.60	-	.48	-
Q10								1	.65	.76	.71	-	.68	.57
Q11									1	.80	.75	-	.47	.46
Q12										1	.84	-	.52	-
Q13											1	-	.54	-
Q14												1	-	-
Q15													1	.67
Q16														1

Responses were examined in terms of correlations among items. A statistically significant correlation coefficient equal to or greater than  $r = .45$  was considered to be of practical or meaningful significance. From Table 2, above, items 6(Training), 7 (Handbook), and 8(RDCP understandable process) are highly correlated, which is to be expected as they are all related to training and understanding the process. Similarly, responses to item 5 (Fair reviewee selection) was correlated with several items and probably also hinged on a person’s understanding of the process. Item 8 (RDCP understandable process) correlates with the most items. Correlations of item 10(RDCP conducted consistently) were found with items dealing with RDCP being an improvement over the old classification and promotion processes, but were also found to correlate with improved morale and agreeing with the panel’s decision with adequate explanation by the panel report (items 11, 12, 13, 15 and 16, respectively). And, some of these items were correlated with each other. However, the neither the time spent working on RDCP (item 3) nor the role of the survey respondent (item 4) significantly correlated with any other item.

In a further analysis, the items were examined according to the role of the survey

respondent. For Branch Heads, in Table 2a., fewer significant correlations were found. In general, those correlations that were significant were also significant across all roles. The exceptions are that correlations were found between item 5 (Fair reviewee selection) and items 6 and 7 (adequate training and Handbook) that were not found overall. Also, item 5 was correlated with item 14 (allowed adequate time to work on RDCP). And, item 7 (Adequate handbook) was correlated with item 11(RDCP an improvement over the old classification process) that was not the case over all participants. (Other non-manager participants may not have been aware of what the old classification process was.) Most surprising, however, is that there were no significant correlations of any other item with item 15 (agreeing with panel decision) although the average response for Branch Heads on this item was 3.55 and there were significant correlations with five other items over all participants.

**Table 2a. Practically Significant Correlation Coefficients ( $r \geq .45, p \leq .05$ ) for Session 3 participants as Branch Heads**

Item	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16
Q5	1	.61	.62	-	-	-	-	-	-	.63	-	-
Q6		1	.66	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q7			1	.50	-	-	.63	-	-	-	-	-
Q8				1	.52	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q9					1	.51	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q10						1	.65	.53	.58	-	-	.53
Q11							1	.74	.69	-	-	.52
Q12								1	.83	-	-	-
Q13									1	-	-	-
Q14										1	-	-
Q15											1	-
Q16												1

There were more significant correlations among the Panel Members' responses (see Table 2b) to the survey questions than there were for the Branch Heads, but the most significant correlations were found for the Reviewees' responses (see Table 2c).

For the Panel Members, item 9 (RDCP provides clear criteria for classification of duties) had the most correlations. It was correlated with eight other items (items 6 through 13 and item 15). Panel members probably know most about the RDCP so that the high intercorrelations could be explained by their good understanding of the process. Item 5 (Fair reviewee selection) was only significantly correlated with item 13 (improved morale).

**Table 2b. Practically Significant Correlation Coefficients ( $r \geq .45, p \leq .05$ ) for Session 3 participants as Panel Members**

Item	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16
Q5	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.53	-	-	-
Q6		1	.73	.52	.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q7			1	.50	.53	-	.56	-	-	-	-	-
Q8				1	.66	-	.69	.56	.61	-	-	.56
Q9					1	.69	.73	.74	.67	-	.53	-
Q10						1	.59	.75	.59	-	.62	-
Q11							1	.77	.73	-	.53	-
Q12								1	.79	-	.60	-
Q13									1	-	.52	-
Q14										1	-	-
Q15											1	.68
Q16												1

**Table 2c. Practically Significant Correlation Coefficients ( $r \geq .45, p \leq .05$ ) for Session 3 participants as Reviewees**

Item	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17
Q5	1	-	-	.67	.66	.62	.46	.63	.49	-	-	-	-
Q6		1	.66	.53	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q7			1	.64	.54	-	-	.46	-	-	-	-	-
Q8				1	.76	.71	.67	.73	.62	-	.57	.49	-
Q9					1	.71	.69	.66	.67	-	.58	.57	-
Q10						1	.73	.84	.79	-	.78	.77	-
Q11							1	.85	.80	-	.51	.52	-
Q12								1	.86	-	.63	.56	-
Q13									1	-	.63	.53	-
Q14										1	-	-	-
Q15											1	.77	-
Q16												1	-
Q17													1

For the Reviewees, item 8 (RDCP process is understandable) had the most correlations although other items had several as well. Item 8 was correlated with nine other items, including item 5 (Fair reviewee selection) and item 13(improved morale). The highest correlations were for item 12 (RDCP is an improvement over old promotion process) with item 11(improved classification process) and with item 13(improved morale). There was no correlation between the panel decision (item 17) for the reviewee and the reviewee's response for any item. However, item 15 (agreement with panel decision) and item 16 (adequate panel report) were correlated with items 8 through 13, and may be due

to the reviewee's good understanding of the process.

### **Summary of Comments**

Summary of comments received by the respondents are in Appendix B. In general the comments dealt with comparison of the RDCP to perceptions of the old promotion process, concerns about the time involved, concerns about consistency, and requests for clear criteria and more examples. (Also mentioned was displeasure with the delay imposed by the Center management on all promotions about the time the RDCP packages were due which affected the RDCP schedule even more than the one week slip, due to upcoming Holidays.) Both positive and negative comments were received. As a result of this feedback, some changes were made for Session 4, especially with respect to more examples being provided in the training for all participants, and greater consistency within and across panels by the RDCP manager attending all panel meetings, and reviewing all panel reports. In addition, the panel reports were written in real time by the panels to make sure the reports were consensus comments as well as a consensus decision.

### **Comparison of Session 3 Survey Responses with Session 1 and 2**

Overall, there is an improvement in RDCP ratings as indicated by the responses to the Session 3 survey compared to those for Sessions 1 and 2. (A full description of the survey results for Session 1 and 2 is in Appendices C and D.)

In general, the average rating scores for Session 3 survey responses were between 2.7 and 4.1 which is a little higher on the scale than the range of average rating scores for Sessions 1 and 2 (2.48 to 3.64). For Session 3, all items, except Conducted Consistently (item 10), and Improved Morale (item 13), had average ratings greater than or equal to 3.0. This is an improvement over Sessions 1 and 2, which had only five items with ratings greater than or equal to 3.0.

Even the two noted items with ratings less than 3.0 in Session 3 (items 10 and 13) had higher average scores of 2.9 and 2.69, respectively than the corresponding items in Sessions 1 and 2, with 2.55 and 2.48, respectively.

There were only five items for which the average scores varied significantly among the three RDCP sessions, according to an analysis of variance (ANOVA). These five items were Adequate Training (item 6), Adequate Handbook (item 7), Clear Criteria (item 9), Adequate Time (item 14), and Report Adequate (item 16).

**Table 3. Average rating scores for Items which Differed Significantly by Sessions**

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Item Name</b>	<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Session 3</b>	<b>Total Score</b>
6	Adequate training	3.15	3.11	3.46	3.22
7	Adequate handbook	2.97	3.24	3.39	3.19
9	Clear criteria	2.63	3.02	3.00	2.88
14	Adequate time	3.63	3.72	4.10	3.80
16	Report adequate	2.58	3.06	3.24	2.95

From observing the average scores shown in Table 3, generally, an improvement for each of these items is shown from Session 1 to Session 2 to Session 3. In other words, these items are improving with time and the changes being made for each session with respect to these items. Note the exceptions, in that Adequate Training did not change from Session 1 to Session 2 and Clear Criteria did not change from Session 2 to Session 3. Training, in fact, was not conducted differently from Session 1 to Session 2 so that the lack of difference here would be expected. Clear Criteria is an area that still needs improvement. Future training will place an increased emphasis on the classification criteria.

Across all three RDCP sessions, there also were only five items for which the average scores varied significantly among branch heads, panel members, and reviewees, according to an analysis of variance (ANOVA). (See Table 4.) Three of these five items were different than the items that differed by session and were Hours Spent (item 3), Fair Selection (item 5), Understandable Process (item 8), and Adequate Time (item 14). Clear Criteria (item 9) and Report Adequate (item 16) were the two items that were also different by session. (See Table 5.)

**Table 4. Average rating scores for Items which Differed Significantly by RDCP Role**

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Item Name</b>	<b>Branch Head</b>	<b>Panel Member</b>	<b>Reviewee</b>	<b>Total Score</b>
3	Hours spent	34.5	64.2	60.7	57.9
5	Fair selection	3.61	2.94	3.31	3.23
8	Understandable process	3.67	3.52	3.27	3.19
9	Clear criteria	3.27	2.71	2.87	2.88
16	Report adequate	2.69	3.38	2.76	2.95

**Table 5. Average rating scores for Items which Differed Significantly by RDCP Role and Session**

Item No.	Item Name	Branch Head Session			Panel Member Session			Reviewee Session			Total Score
		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
9	Clear criteria	3.12	3.00	3.47	2.54	2.92	2.52	2.40	2.98	3.02	2.88
16	Report adequate	2.29	2.40	3.18	2.61	2.95	3.29	2.17	2.79	2.93	2.95

For the RDCP providing clear criteria to classify positions, the ratings were highest in session 3 for branch heads and reviewees, but were highest in session 2 for panel members. This pinpoints the need for more attention to the criteria for the panel members. However, the panel reports received increasingly higher ratings for adequacy across all three types of participants or roles across the three sessions, with reviewees giving the lowest scores. Additional attention will continue to be given in this area as well.

**Conclusions**

The RDCP is a peer review process to determine the appropriate grade level for person-in-the-job positions. Three review sessions have been conducted to date (starting in August 2001), reviewing a total of 260 employees in about 48 branches over 25 panels involving a total of 175 employees as panel members. The process has resulted in 108 employees' jobs classified at their current grade, 121 classified at the next highest grade, one classified below grade, with the remainder to be reviewed again due to either insufficient information or appropriate Guide not applied. This paper described the results of a survey conducted with participants of the third RDCP session and compared it with results of an earlier survey of sessions 1 and 2 participants. The survey responses indicate increasingly greater understanding and satisfaction among RDCP participants. However, future changes will address improved training in the area of classification criteria for all participants. Improving morale and agreement with panel decisions among those who did not get a promotion continue to be of concern. Hopefully, education about the classification criteria will help in this area as well. With knowledge that the panels are correctly classifying individuals (and agreement with panel decisions by Branch Heads are validating this) and better understanding of the criteria, people evaluated at their current grade may better accept the results.

## APPENDIX A

### Research and Classification Process Questionnaire

In order to improve the Research and Development Classification Process, feedback from all the participants is critical, whether you are a reviewee, a panel member, or a Branch Head. The survey below was designed to gather that feedback yet be quick and easy to do. While your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, your response would help form a more accurate picture of how the RDCP is progressing. Your responses are completely anonymous. The data will be analyzed and presented as representative of the entire sample, such as ranges, averages, variances, and percentages. This survey will close July 5 at 5:00pm. The results, but not the data, of the survey will be made available to all RDCP participants and will be posted on the RDCP website: <http://ohr.larc.nasa.gov/RDCP.html>. This survey, or one similar to it, will be repeated for each Session. Please respond to all items by clicking on the appropriate answer or by typing in the information requested. If you have participated in the RDCP in more than one role, such as a reviewee one session and a panel member another session, please fill out the survey twice, once for each role. Thank you for your help in improving the RDCP!

#### Section I

1. In which Session did you participate in the RDCP?  
Session 1  
Session 2
2. Please indicate which Guide you used for the RDCP.  
Research Grade Evaluation Guide  
Equipment Development Grade Evaluation Guide  
Other
3. Please estimate the amount of time, in hours, you spent working on the RDCP.
4. Please indicate your participant role.  
Branch Head/Supervisor  
Panel Member  
Reviewee

#### Section II

Scale (0=No Opinion or Don't Know, 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree):

5. The method used to select the Session for a person's review is fair to most RDCP AST researchers and developers :
6. Your RDCP training was adequate :
7. The RDCP Handbook was adequate :
8. The RDCP process is understandable :

9. The RDCP process provides clear criteria for classification of job duties :
10. The RDCP process is conducted consistently for most researchers, to your knowledge
11. The RDCP process is an improvement over the old classification process
12. The RDCP process is an improvement over the old promotion process :
13. Your morale has improved due to implementation of the RDCP process :
14. You were allowed adequate time to work on the RDCP :
15. You agree with the panel's decision(s) (regardless of role):
16. The panel evaluation report was adequate to explain the scores received:
  
17. If you were a reviewee, please indicate the panel's decision.
  - Above Grade
  - At Grade
  - Below Grade
  - Other
  
18. Please provide any general comments or explanations of above responses here.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Summary of RDCP Survey Comments from Session 3 RDCP Participants**

Eleven pages of text comments were received as part of the survey responses. Many respondents made one or more comments. The comments seemed to cover both ends of the same spectra, that is, for every point someone made a negative comment about, at least one or more positive comment was made, and vice versa. Some of the comments are general dissatisfaction with having a RDCP type process versus a different system. However, many comments were about the RDCP itself. Most of the comments were of the same general categories as those from session 1 and 2, except that for session 3 there was little reference to the adequacy or appropriateness of the classification guide itself.

Below is a listing representative of all the comments received. (The RDCP Advisory Committee received a copy of the complete, unedited comments.) Similar comments were received regardless of role of participant. Some of these concerns have already been addressed as of this writing, but plans are being made to address as many more as possible.

#### **General –**

- Old promotion process just as good or better as long as have adequate number of allowed promotions.
- Morale effects should correlate well with role - person being promoted should see morale boost.
- RDCP enables more promotions.
- Facilitates education about what others are doing
- Will encourage more research to be done and less use of "free" NASA CS for supporting activities.
- Without the RDCP process, all of the well-deserved promotions that we are having would not have happened at all.
- Problem with old promotion system was lack of visibility and knowledge or criteria and use of quota system. Can address this with or without RDCP.
- Call RDCP a grade evaluation process; this would be consistent with the titles of the guides.
- Overall, the system is well implemented and a vast improvement on the past.
- The combination of availability of more slots with mandated review periods with the old process would be better than the new process.
- Everyone should be briefed on the guidelines regardless of when getting reviewed.
- The process was a good one and forces one to think about what he or she does here and where his or her energy is expended.

#### **Managerial Responsibility-**

- Managers, not researchers, should be the ones deciding on classifications and promotions.
- Branch heads ought to be the ones creating the packages.

- RDCP process necessary because of the inability of first-line supervisors to assess their workers' abilities.
- Branch head was willing to work very hard with the employee to complete the write-up.
- Doubt that any employee was looking for management to totally abdicate their responsibility and burden them with a very time intensive process instead.

#### **Time -**

- Process consumes too much time, leading to neglect of other critical Branch Head responsibilities.
- HR and competent branch head can classify as well as RDCP with vastly fewer FTE hours.
- People spending 40 to 50 hours to review will likely not be happy campers.
- The amount of time required to perform the evaluations is considerable, and no one should be asked to serve on a panel more frequently than once a year.
- The calendar time allowed was adequate. But, could not find sufficient time away from job duties and did most of the review work at home, effectively volunteering time.
- Much time was spent in organizing the order of subsections of the package. Need better software to do this automatically.
- The process could be streamlined and still accomplish the same.

#### **Consistency -**

- There seems to be uneven application of standards from panel to panel. This is to be expected to some degree and will probably equilibrate over time.
- Find inconsistency within a single panel. More subtle and revolves around the IDRs, their outlook and their relative styles and capabilities.
- Do not believe that the process can be consistently applied from panel to panel due to the degree of subjectivity involved and the "luck of the draw", so to speak, in terms of the panel composition.
- Concerned about consistency in interpreting and applying criteria: publications versus conferences, admin work advantageous or waste of time.
- A different group of people would not necessarily have reached the same decision as the panel and thus the process is too subjective.
- The panel dealt uniformly once it set a groove for itself (in defining levels and standards for how it viewed the reviewees)
- Do not believe at all that the standards for different grades were applied uniformly across the field in different research areas (nor from panel to panel of the same field). Something is missing that would establish uniformity (a role for management?).

#### **Training-**

- Examples incorporated with grades into handbook would be helpful.
- RDCP training was adequate but it did not and cannot cover all the issues that arose in the panel. Some experience is required.

- Either more training or guidelines are needed in package preparation or more instruction given to panel members on the role of the IDR to influence or add to information provided in the write-up.
- Better definition of what is required to be rated at specific levels.
- Perhaps more specific examples (tailored for LaRC) for each grade level could be given for grade evaluation when using Part II of the EDGEG.
- Panel member training should focus more on the actual mechanics of performing an evaluation.
- Have each candidate serve on a panel before being evaluated; this helps tremendously in understanding the process.
- Received conflicting inputs from everybody talked to about what things should be emphasized in the package.

**Process –**

- Big improvement in the quality of the evaluation reports in sessions 3 versus earlier sessions.
- Noticed that statements in report not always correlated with numerical score received, appears to be some subjectivity that is hard to capture.
- The entire review team should approve the final reports.
- The panel reports are not helpful.
- The peer groups are in many cases too small to guarantee objective, impartial reviews.
- Did not feel that the panel consisted of peers of the people being reviewed.
- IDR not always provided with pertinent negative information, even from the Branch Head. Skeptical that IDR interviews provide complete information.
- Within a panel, negative comments about packages were discouraged and largely ignored.
- GS-14s should be reviewed only by GS-15s, and that GS-13s be reviewed only by GS-14s and/or GS-15s.
- Review of persons already classified as GS-15 was unnecessarily agonizing. Only purpose was to verify that they deserved their current grade.
- Considerable difference between writing styles of the different packages. The packages that followed the recommended format from the RDCP training were easier to follow.
- Factor II was not clearly stated in several of the packages.
- Only the panel members familiar with the job that the employee performs can decide fairly what classification should be given.
- Would much prefer a live, upfront, candid discussion of employee's abilities (or lack thereof) before a panel of peers to get better feedback.
- Package requires a lot of information, probably more than the committee members or even the in-depth reviewer can take in and appreciate.
- Panelists believe they know the job situation based on stale knowledge and assume the current write-up is inflated.

- The review packages do not capture the true capabilities of the reviewees. Most review packages paraphrase the standards and come close to overstating the qualifications.
- Fellow employees should be the best ones to represent our R&T colleagues to the RDCP.

## Appendix C Sessions 1 and 2 Survey Results

From Session 1 and 2, two hundred twenty-four responses were recorded: 32 Branch Heads out of 41, 79 out of a possible 125 panel members, and 113 out a possible 174 reviewees, all split fairly evenly between Session 1 and Session 2 (111 and 113, respectively). This was an excellent response rate. Table C-1 summarizes responses for all of the questionnaire items.

**Table C-1. Summary of Responses to Questionnaire Items 1 through 17 for Sessions 1 and 2**

Item No.	Item Name	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Session participated	224	1.0	2.0	na	na
2	Guide used	224	1.0	3.0	na	na
3	Hours spent	224	2.0	200	58.44	29.98
4	RDCP Role	224	1.0	3.0	na	na
5	Fair selection	224	0	5.0	2.83	1.56
6	Adequate training	224	0	5.0	3.10	1.16
7	Adequate handbook	224	1.0	5.0	3.11	1.03
8	Understandable process	224	0	5.0	3.36	1.06
9	Clear criteria	224	0	5.0	2.76	1.12
10	Conducted consistently	224	0	5.0	2.55	1.47
11	Improved classification process	224	0	5.0	2.56	1.59
12	Improved promotion process	224	0	5.0	2.80	1.60
13	Improved morale	224	0	5.0	2.48	1.20
14	Adequate time	224	0	5.0	3.59	1.29
15	Agree with panel	224	0	5.0	3.64	1.27
16	Report adequate	224	0	5.0	2.58	1.51
17	Reviewee decision category	113	1.0	4.0	na	na

The average number of hours spent on the RDCP was about 58; panel members and reviewees spent a little more than that (60 and 63 hours, respectively), and supervisors spent a significantly less (41 hours). There was no difference in time between the two sessions.

In general, the average rating scores are all below 3.7 with slightly higher ratings in Session 2 compared to Session 1. This may indicate a slight improvement from Session 1 to Session 2 in all areas except item 5 and 6, selection and training. These remained the

same for both sessions.

The average rating score of 3.0 (neither disagree nor agree) is used here as an arbitrary criteria for areas which are doing well. The following items had average ratings greater than or equal to 3.0: (item 6) Adequate Training; (item 7) Adequate Handbook; (item 8) Process understandable; (item 14) Adequate time allowed; (item 15) Agreed with panel's results. While there is room for improvement in these items, indications are that reasonable or satisfactory conditions exist in these areas. In other words, respondents generally felt that they had enough training and information from the Handbook to understand the process. They thought they had enough time to participate and generally agreed with the panel's results.

The fact that 70 percent of all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with panel results is a very good indicator that RDCP is a process that provides valid results. For the reviewees only, a significant negative correlation of .59 indicates that there is a relationship between agreeing with the panel and the panel results, i.e., if a person was not found to be above grade, they were less likely to agree with the panel. (See Table C-2 for Correlation Coefficients. A statistically significant correlation coefficient equal to or greater than  $r = .45$  was considered to be of practical or meaningful significance.) Of the reviewees, about half of the respondents (58) had been evaluated as above grade. They gave an average rating of 4.19 for item 15, indicating agreement with the panel results. But, even the 42 respondents who had been evaluated at grade had an average rating of 3.12, which indicated they did not disagree with the panel results. Fifty percent of those at grade either agreed or strongly agreed with panel results. Only the 13 respondents for whom the panel gave an "other" decision strongly disagreed with the panel results (average rating was 1.62). Furthermore, the 32 responding Branch Heads had an average rating of 3.64 for item 15, indicating that they did not disagree with the panel results.

Items that had average rating scores less than 3.0 may benefit from even more attention from the RDCP manager and the Advisory Committee. These items were: (5) Fair selection method; (9) Clear job criteria; (10) Process consistent; (11) Improved classification process; (12) Improved promotion process; (13) Morale improved; (16) Report adequate.

Lack of understanding or knowledge may be reflected as the low ratings for Items 11 and 12 (Improved classification and promotion process, respectively). We already know from the results of the 2000 LaRC Center Survey for questions 82 and 87 that most employees did not understand what these processes were to begin with. And, 16% and 7% of the RDCP survey respondents admitted that they either did not know or had no opinion about an improvement over the classification or promotion processes, respectively. Therefore, it may have been difficult for them to accurately compare the RDCP with the actual old processes. And, 25% and 37% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the RDCP was an improvement over the old classification and promotion processes, respectively. However, 33% and 42% of the people either agreed or strongly agreed that the RDCP was an improvement over the old

classification and promotion processes, respectively. There was little correlation with responses to items 11 and 12 and whether or not a respondent agreed with the panel's results (item 15) or the actual panel decisions (item 17). The latter was true even though 60% of those found to be above grade agreed or strongly agreed that the RDCP was an improved promotion process. (There was too much spread over all other responses by all others to show a significant correlation.) Therefore, whether or not the RDCP is seen as an improvement wasn't related to whether or not the respondent agreed with the panel's decisions or to the panel's actual evaluations of reviewees. In any event, the RDCP itself is at least somewhat understandable as indicated earlier by the average rating of 3.36 to item 8.

**Table C-2. Practically Significant Correlation Coefficients ( $r \geq .45, p = .00$ )**

Item	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17
Q4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q5		1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q6			1	.64	.47	.45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q7				1	.63	.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Q8					1	.50	-	-	-	.48	-	-	-	-
Q9						1	.48	-	.50	.57	-	-	-	-.50
Q10							1	-	.46	.47	-	-	.46	-
Q11								1	.66	.53	-	-	-	-
Q12									1	.63	-	-	-	-
Q13										1	-	-	-	-
Q14											1	-	-	-
Q15												1	.50	-.59
Q16													1	-
Q17														1

Lack of understanding or knowledge also may be reflected as the low ratings for Item 5 (Fair selection) and Item 10 (Process conducted consistently). The respondents may have not known what the actual selection process was nor have a way to judge if the RDCP was conducted consistently across all participants. In fact, 14% and 12% of the respondents indicated they had no opinion or didn't know about the fairness of the selection or if the process was conducted consistently, respectively. Nevertheless, these low ratings do indicate a level of dissatisfaction in these areas.

The finding that 43% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the RDCP provides clear criteria for the classification of job duties may be due to lack of understanding about the Guides themselves. RDCP relies upon the application of the Guides to the job so that if the criteria contained in the Guides are not clear, RDCP may not be seen as providing clear classification criteria. On the other hand, 32% either agreed or strongly agreed that the RDCP does provide clear criteria for classification of job duties. There was no significant difference in average ratings for Branch Heads, panel members, or reviewees, so that the role of the respondent didn't matter. None of

them had a better or worse understanding of the Guides than the others.

Some of these items, which had low rating scores, have already been addressed in Session 3. For example, training was enhanced for Branch Heads and Panel members. This training also included guidelines and examples for improved panel evaluation reports. This should help address any low ratings for Item 16 (Adequate reports). And, more explanation for applying the Guides and examples were included in this training.

Improvement of morale due to RDCP implementation was asked in item 13. The overall average rating for this item of 2.48 indicates the respondents' morale was not improved by the implementation of the RDCP. Only 26% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that RDCP implementation improved morale. There was no significant difference in average ratings among the participant roles. There was, however, a significant positive correlation between improved morale and the RDCP being conducted consistently. There was also a positive correlation between improved morale and RDCP as an improved classification process and an even greater positive correlation between RDCP as an improved promotion process with improved morale.

There was also a positive correlation between agreeing with panel results and improved morale. This may be explained by looking at the reviewees' responses. Within reviewees, of those who were evaluated above grade, 26 (or 45%) agreed or strongly agreed that their morale had been improved, but, not surprisingly, only 4 (or 10%) of those evaluated at grade agreed or strongly agreed that their morale had been improved.

Therefore, implementation of the RDCP has improved morale of some employees, especially those found to be above grade. RDCP implementation does correlate positively with improved morale in terms of being seen as improved classification and promotion process, which is done consistently. Although improvement in each of these areas is possible, the results of this survey indicate that having the RDCP is beneficial.

Time spent working on RDCP was *not* a factor in not seeing morale improvement. Even though everyone involved spent at least 40 hours and usually more, time spent on this activity had no correlation with any other survey item, including improved morale. Although RDCP may have been seen as time taken away from other, more interesting activities based on comments, time spent on the RDCP had no relationship with any other aspect measured by the survey.

More explanation of the lower rating scores may be gained by examining the comments submitted by the respondents. The comments are summarized in Appendix C. Twenty-eight pages of text comments were received as part of the survey responses. Almost every respondent made one or more comments. The comments seemed to cover both ends of the same spectra, that is, for every point someone made a negative comment about, at least one or more positive comment was made, and vice versa. Appendix D contains a listing of representative comments received. Similar comments were received regardless of role of participant. Some of these concerns have already been addressed as of this writing, but plans are being made to address as many more as possible. Some of

the comments and RDCP responses to them are described below.

The RDCP was often cited as being a good thing, fair, and a general improvement. However, even with good things, there are areas that could be better. Many people noted the need to reduce the amount of time spent on the RDCP. However, people did realize that the first time through probably took the longest. This time is expected to reduce as more people get through the process the first time. But, Branch Heads will always have to spend time on RDCP, and their duties need to be adjusted accordingly.

From the comments received, there is still some confusion about the purpose of the RDCP although the majority of comments seemed to indicate understanding of its purpose. A few people confused the RDCP with a performance review. It is not. Performance reviews are still conducted annually by the Branch Heads. The purpose of the RDCP is to make sure there are an accurate description of researcher and developer's work and an appropriate assignment of grade level for that work. The RDCP uses peer reviews as a way to establish the stature or impact of the incumbent's contributions to the technical community. This is a heavily weighted element in determining the grade level of all the RGEG and EDGEG type positions even though it may take various forms.

The necessity of even having the RDCP was brought up by some people. They felt that the Branch Heads should be doing the reviewing, or at least, participate in the reviewing. Currently, Branch Heads are responsible for assisting with the package write-ups and for insuring the accuracy of the write-ups. They are asked to score the packages for themselves as a way to judge the package and to be able to compare it with the panel's results. They select which Guide is applicable for their employees. They defer reviews when they do not feel the employee is ready or if the employee has critical work according to established guidelines in the RDCP Handbook. They nominate employees for early review. For them to be in the peer review process itself would be redundant. The peer review is an impartial check on the Branch Head's judgment. It is a way to validate what the Branch Head already thinks is true. The peer review together with using the OPM Guide is what justifies the grade level for the research and development positions. It adds weight, so to speak. It is not just the Branch Head's opinion anymore.

Some people expressed concern over In Depth Reviewer and other panel member performance as panel members. They think that there should be some way to assess this performance and to hold them accountable. Currently, in order to maintain confidentiality, the only way to do this is by general reports from the panel chair. However, through training, we hope that we are imparting the seriousness of the panel responsibility to the panel members and continue to strive to provide the necessary tools and information to do the reviews efficiently but fairly. Sometimes, the panel members feel like this is too much burden to put on them and that it should not be their responsibility. This leads to comments about the Branch Head roles discussed above.

Consistency of the process continues to be a concern. The RDCP has and will change in some ways until it reaches steady state. Training has been and will continue to be improved to provide more consistent direction to all involved parties. Examples of

sections of write-ups were included in this training for Session 3 Branch Heads and panel members. This will be expanded to include reviewees for the next RDCP session. Peer Groups are being realigned for Session 4 to provide a better fit of peers. Examples of how criteria are met are being provided but will continue to evolve for a while longer until everyone is more experienced in using the Guides. Grade and promotion history information is no longer required in the write-ups. Panel member names are no longer officially released. Even though some things may change, fundamentally, the process will remain consistent in that peer groups and the established OPM guides are used and panel deliberations are always confidential.

An area that was frequently cited as needing improvement was the panel evaluation reports. This was true even though the average ratings indicated they were adequate. Steps have already been taken in this area via training. However, people must also have a realistic expectation of what this report can provide. The evaluation reports can only provide justification or an explanation for why someone was given the grade level they were given. It is not the role of the panel members to advise someone about what to do to be promoted. This is the Branch Head's role. The criteria are explained in the Guides and the Branch Heads should use these to help develop their employees. The reports can offer comments about the weakness or strengths of the write-up itself in order to foster better communication.

Many opinions were offered about how to establish the session in which each employee would be reviewed. The initial order was established through a weighted, random assignment with some capability by management to add a few people they thought were ready to be reviewed. This order established the session that should be the latest someone is reviewed. However, the actual order changes based on slots opening up or closing up as people decline, retire, or are given an early review. Perhaps the order of assignment may be revisited at a later date using one of the suggested methods, but for now, it will stay as is.

This survey was conducted during a period of time when we had a queue of 53 people awaiting promotion due to Agency level constraints. As of this writing, those constraints have been lifted and everyone in that queue will be promoted very soon. However, many of the comments received were related to the queue, especially its effect on morale. Morale was perceived to be lower due to the queue. It would be interesting to repeat the improvement of morale question now for the same population. It is the intent of the RDCP to effect any resulting promotions as soon as feasible and to not have any queue build-up again. Senior managers at LaRC believe that such person-in-the job promotions should not be subject to any constraints. This belief is held and acted upon by other Centers and Agencies, as well.

There were several good ideas for small changes and improvements to the RDCP. The RDCP manager and Advisory Committee appreciate all the time everyone took to respond to this survey and will endeavor to continue to address as many concerns as possible.

## APPENDIX D

### Summary of RDCP Survey Comments from Session 1 and Session 2 RDCP Participants

Twenty-six pages of text comments were received as part of the survey responses. Almost every respondent made one or more comments. The comments seemed to cover both ends of the same spectra, that is, for every point someone made a negative comment about, at least one or more positive comment was made, and vice versa. Below is a listing representative of all the comments received. Similar comments were received regardless of role of participant. Some of these concerns have already been addressed as of this writing, but plans are being made to address as many more as possible.

- **General –**
  - RDCP is about as fair as any process can be.
  - RDCP process is good in that everyone gets a chance to be reviewed regularly.
  - RDCP not an improvement over old systems if only difference is lifting of slot limits. And, when the queue existed, still had limits.
  - RDCP is an improvement over old system – out of the smoke filled rooms, impartial reviews, clearer criteria.
  - RDCP is a promotion process.
  - RDCP is a performance review or similar to one.
  - RDCP forces thorough review of position descriptions.
  - RDCP queue of people awaiting promotion lowered morale.
- **Managerial Responsibility-**
  - Branch Heads should have a bigger role beyond signing off on the packages.
  - Branch Heads and Competency Directors should be part of, or, in place of, the peer review.
  - Branch Heads doing reviews should have same results as peer panels.
  - Branch Heads should *really* be accountable for the accuracy of the package.
  - Branch Heads should establish order of employee reviews rather than random number; number of wildcards is insufficient.
  - Hold Panel Members accountable for their performance as panel members, especially In-Depth reviewers.
- **Time-**
  - Branch Head duties not reduced to allow time for RDCP.
  - Some Branch Heads had too many reviewees to work on in one session.
  - Time spent on RDCP drains resources – takes time away from research activities.
  - Spent extra time on RDCP because other work couldn't really stop.
- **Consistency -**
  - Need more training of panel members, reviewees, and branch heads to get better consistency. Need more examples.

Same people should do the reviews in order to really be consistent.  
All panels need to be looking at the same things.  
All panels cannot look at the same things because the peer groups are different.  
Some panels are too rigid.  
Some panels are too liberal.  
Some panels more peer-like than others.  
In depth reviewers should contact all important contacts, not just those easiest to reach.  
Definition of “peer” differs across groups. Some think of it as very narrow to their specialty. Others think more broadly.

- **Guides –**

Application of the Guides is not always clear.  
Need examples of how to apply the Guides.  
Development jobs rated lower than research jobs.  
Liberal interpretation difficult to do.  
Some people fall into gray areas.  
Existing Guides need updating.  
Encourages individual rather than group work.  
Packages hard to write to align with Guides.

- **Process –**

Keep panel member names confidential.  
Release panel member names.  
Provide private space for reviewers to work on reviews.  
Evaluation reports need more to provide more information.  
Received very helpful feedback from the evaluation report.  
Drop current employee grade and promotion history from paperwork.  
Limit entire package, excluding work products and contact sheet, to ten pages.  
Should promote as soon as feasible after decision is made.  
Should result in some “below grades.”  
Let employees choose session in which they wish to be reviewed.  
Use time-in-grade to choose session of employee’s review.  
Branch Heads should choose order of employee review.  
Random number assignment for review order was fair.

