

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Guidance on Time-to-Hire Under the Merit Hiring Plan

Purpose

This guidance document clarifies agency responsibilities for managing and improving time to hire while maintaining compliance with merit system principles and applicable law. It also outlines practical strategies, accountability expectations, and reporting requirements to support efficient, merit-based hiring.

Background

[Executive Order 14170](#) establishes a government-wide expectation to reduce time-to-hire to under 80 days. The [Merit Hiring Plan](#) reinforces that priority through its focus on hiring efficiency. OPM's End-to-End Hiring Roadmap remains the baseline framework for planning, executing, and evaluating hiring actions. Agencies should read this guidance alongside OPM memoranda issued in March 2026 on [personnel vetting](#) and [streamlining vetting](#) processes for additional information on solutions that can be adopted to improve their personnel vetting processes in support of the Merit Hiring Plan.

Reducing time-to-hire is a shared responsibility among agency leadership, Human Resources offices, hiring managers, personnel vetting offices, and program offices. Agencies should use workforce planning, early coordination, and disciplined process management to improve timeliness without sacrificing quality, fairness, or legal compliance.

This guidance helps agencies operationalize these requirements through clear milestones and recommended practices.

Governmentwide Time-to-Hire Standard

Agencies should manage hiring actions toward an overall 80-calendar-day timeframe. Agencies should integrate personnel vetting into hiring timeline management as part of a unified hiring process. Under the End-to-End framework, the standard period from validated hiring need to tentative job offer is 66 days, followed by tentative job offer acceptance within 2 days and Entry on Duty within 14 days.

Hiring Milestone	Target Timeline
Validated hiring need to tentative job offer	66 days
Tentative job offer acceptance	Within 2 days
Tentative job offer acceptance to Entry on Duty	Within 14 days
Total time-to-hire	80 days

Agencies should notify the vetting office, provide required candidate and position information, initiate OF-306 review, determine applicable vetting requirements, and launch required vetting actions within 2 days of tentative job offer acceptance.

Agencies should continuously monitor performance against these milestones and identify avoidable delays at each stage of the hiring process.

Roles and Responsibilities

Agency Leadership

Agency leadership must establish accountability for timely and effective hiring outcomes and elevate effective hiring within set timelines as a management priority. Consistent with the MHP's emphasis on reducing time-to-hire to under 80 days, agency leaders should use the Strategic Hiring Committee to provide senior-level oversight of hiring priorities, monitor progress against hiring timelines, and address barriers that prevent timely hiring decisions. Agency leaders should set clear goals, support proactive workforce planning, ensure coordination across Human Resources and program offices, and remove organizational barriers that slow hiring and are not designed to improve hiring outcomes or ensure merit-based hiring processes. Human Resources Offices

Human Resources (HR) offices should conduct operational planning activities at least annually, in coordination with the Strategic Hiring Committee's approval, to proactively plan for upcoming hiring actions (e.g., ensuring updated job analytic and assessment strategies across workforce populations). HR should engage early with hiring managers, advise on hiring authorities and assessment strategies, leverage existing Governmentwide data and resources to promote efficiency and reduce duplication (e.g., Federal Workforce Competency Initiative job analytic results, cross-government hiring actions), monitor hiring timelines, and identify process inefficiencies. Human Resources offices are also responsible for ensuring hiring actions remain consistent with merit system principles and applicable law and regulation.

Hiring Managers and Program Offices

Hiring managers and program offices should participate early in workforce planning, define requirements and assessment needs in advance, and engage promptly in applicant review and interviews. Close coordination with HR throughout the hiring process is essential to meeting time-to-hire expectations.

Personnel Vetting Offices

Personnel vetting offices should be engaged early in the hiring process to identify position risk and sensitivity levels, required investigation types, reciprocity opportunities, preliminary determination options, and any agency-specific suitability or fitness requirements that may affect entry-on-duty timelines. Vetting officials should coordinate with Human Resources

offices and hiring managers to ensure that vetting requirements are understood before recruitment begins and that avoidable delays between tentative job offer, vetting initiation, and entry on duty are minimized.

Oversight and Accountability

Agencies should designate an office or official responsible for tracking time-to-hire performance, effective hiring outcomes (e.g., retention, job performance), analyzing trends, and driving continuous improvement. Agencies should include personnel vetting representatives in regular reviews of agency performance against the time-to-hire goals. Results should be reviewed regularly with leadership.

Agency Time-to-Hire Targets

Agencies should establish measurable time-to-hire targets as part of workforce planning and staffing strategies, with particular attention to mission-critical occupations, high-volume hiring, and hard-to-fill positions. Agencies should include personnel vetting officials in workforce planning to assess vetting workload, capacity needs, and targets. Targets should be informed by historical data, calibrated to the complexity of the hiring action, and be reviewed at least quarterly to identify trends and improvement opportunities. Clear targets strengthen accountability, enable better resource decisions, and support continuous process improvement.

Strategies to Reduce Time-to-Hire

Agencies are encouraged to adopt practical strategies that improve timeliness while preserving merit-based hiring standards. Recommended strategies include the following:

- Leverage annual staffing planning requirements and quarterly updates to plan HR workload and begin preparing recruitment materials, if possible.
- Streamline job opportunity announcements and standardize position descriptions and hiring materials.
- Develop, review, and/or maintain hiring related materials (e.g., job analysis, assessment strategies, assessments) on a cycle to have those materials ready for when hiring actions are identified
- Leverage existing data or materials to the extent appropriate and feasible (e.g., Governmentwide FWCI job analysis results)
- Assign a designated HR point of contact (POC) for each selectee and commit to responding to all TJO-related questions (salary, locality pay, benefits, next steps) within one business day.

- Use validated, skills-based assessments early in the hiring process, including technical assessments conducted before certificate issuance where appropriate.
- Schedule hiring manager participation in assessments and selection activities as early as possible, before the position is posted.
- Use cross-government or shared certificates of eligibles, where appropriate, to reduce duplicative recruitment steps.
- Apply appropriate hiring authorities, including Direct-Hire Authority, Schedule A, and appointments for individuals with a 30 percent or more service-connected disability.
- Integrate personnel vetting planning into the hiring process at the earliest practicable stage.
- Ensure Human Resource and personnel vetting offices are coordinated on position risk and sensitivity levels. Incorrect assignment levels are a common source of delays.
- Use available vetting flexibilities, including transfer and reestablishment of trust, preliminary determinations, and eVetting, where appropriate and consistent with law, regulation, and agency policy.
- Leverage guidance to infer non-sensitive public trust determinations from national security determinations when not available in the low-side repository to accept transfer of trust instead of having to initiate new background investigations per OPM Suitability & Credentialing Executive Agent guidance.
- Review investigative request rejection data provided by DCSA (currently ~3.4% rate) and seek opportunities to reduce errors. Rejected requests add over a week, on average, to the process.
- Provide candidates with information as early as possible to accelerate their personnel vetting processing. For example, what forms they may be required to fill out so they can begin gathering information.

These approaches can shorten hiring timelines without negatively impacting hiring outcomes by reducing unnecessary steps, improving coordination, and using available flexibilities more effectively.

Hiring Models

OPM provides multiple hiring models to help agencies match assessment rigor to position complexity and mission need while improving time-to-hire performance. Agencies should select models based on occupational requirements, candidate supply, and assessment requirements. The models described in the source materials include single-assessment, multiple-assessment, SME-QA, and pooled or shared certificate approaches.

Hiring Model	Approximate Timeline
Single-assessment (basic)	Approximately 46 days
Multiple-assessment	Approximately 59 days
SME-QA (Subject Matter Expert review)	Approximately 66 days
Pooled/shared certificate	Varies; reduces duplicative hiring steps

Examples of technical and alternative assessment that agencies may use include situational judgement test, reasoning assessment, structured interviews, work sample/simulation, job knowledge test, accomplishment record, and structured writing sample review.

Reporting Requirements

Agencies must continue reporting time-to-hire and Mission Critical Occupation data using existing reporting processes. Reporting should cover all applicable hiring activities, including Delegated Examining, merit promotion and external hires, Direct-Hire Authority actions, pooled or shared certificate hires, open continuous announcements, non-Title 5 actions, and other relevant hiring authorities or flexibilities.

Agencies should ensure that reported data are timely, accurate, and comprehensive enough to support performance monitoring and process improvement.

Contacts

Agency headquarters-level Human Resources offices may direct policy questions to workforce@opm.gov, and questions related to the Merit Hiring Plan may be directed to HXX@opm.gov. Employees should contact their agency Human Resources office for assistance with internal or case-specific questions.