



Talent Surge

Playbook for Rebuilding the Federal Workforce



U.S. Office of Personnel Management

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Introduction

Hiring is often cited as an area of challenge both by Federal agencies and members of the public seeking Federal employment.¹ Successful recruitment and hiring, however, is critical to the success of government and, accordingly, is one of the most important responsibilities of any supervisor or manager. Over the last few years, many Federal agencies have lost highly skilled workers in a variety of mission critical areas, which has made it more difficult for the Federal Government to accomplish its mission. These workers include, among others, scientists, climate professionals, mine inspectors, civil rights attorneys, housing professionals, and personnel with acquisitions, human capital, and cybersecurity expertise.

As the chief human resources agency, OPM is committed to providing Federal agencies with the tools and support to attract and hire the best and the brightest. This Playbook is intended as reference material for agency leaders, hiring managers, and human resources (HR) professionals responsible for the planning, recruiting, and hiring of a diverse, dynamic, and well-qualified Federal workforce.

This Playbook also contains information on HR flexibilities, authorities, actions, and other resources that will assist agencies to strategically plan, recruit and hire staff needed to rebuild their workforce to deliver on diverse and complex agency missions and offering improved customer services for the American people.

¹ General Accountability Office, [GAO-19-696T](#), “Improving Federal Recruiting and Hiring Efforts”

Connecting with Top Talent

Overview of the Playbook

In issuing this playbook, OPM's goal is to assist agencies with rebuilding the workforce by:

- Advancing multiple initiatives using existing hiring authorities and compensation/retention flexibilities to enhance the pipeline at the entry, mid, and senior levels;
- Reengaging with colleges and universities and other post-secondary institutions of higher learning to compete for students and recent graduates with relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities, as part of a comprehensive recruitment program;
- Incorporating effective assessments to improve the quality of candidates who are within reach certificates;
- Implementing regulatory flexibilities, as appropriate;
- Enhancing systems capabilities, certificate sharing under the Competitive Service Act of 2015 and its implementing regulations, and skills matching to leverage flexibilities across agencies; and,
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies.



“We are the largest employer in the nation with an incredible mission. Let’s continue to hire **great people** and equip them to **do amazing things in public service.**”

—Kiran Ahuja, Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Plan

Plan before a hiring need is identified by developing workforce, succession, and staff acquisition plans that detail the number of new hires required, as well as the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary in the workforce to fulfill the mission. Identify how the agency will find, attract, develop, and retain the required workforce, and make budgetary and resource decisions to support these efforts.

Things to Consider:

- Workforce planning is the systematic process for identifying and addressing the gaps between the workforce of today and the human capital needs of tomorrow.
- Review workforce succession and staff acquisition plans; identify resources available and sources for recruitment.
- Identify knowledge, skills, and abilities required and on hand, and identify gaps and/or imbalances that need to be addressed.
- Promote active participation by hiring managers in the hiring process. (For more information about this, see the Mythbuster on the next page.)
- Create a job analysis to develop this understanding by examining the tasks performed in a job, the competencies required to perform those tasks, and the connection between the tasks and competencies.
- Periodically review workforce competencies to assess gaps.



Promote **active participation**
by hiring managers
in the hiring process

Hiring Mythbuster



Myth: Hiring managers should refrain from becoming too involved in their hiring actions to avoid any appearance of impropriety in the hiring process.

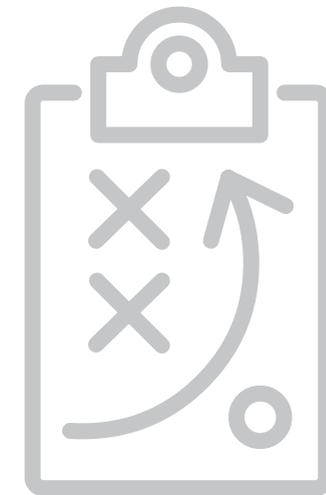
Fact: There are many ways that hiring managers can and should be involved in the hiring process to help ensure a superior outcome. This includes working closely with HR before the job opportunity announcement (JOA) is posted to:

- Ensure the position description is accurate and up to date;
- Complete a job analysis to identify the critical competencies needed in the position;
- Participate in identifying/developing the assessment tool (e.g., structured interviews, writing samples, tests) that will be used to screen for a passing grade and evaluate candidates' relative level of knowledge, skills, and abilities;
- Develop a recruiting strategy; and
- Ensure that the JOA accurately describes the duties of the position and competencies and experience required in an easy-to-understand and appealing manner.

After the applicants are assessed and the referral list is issued, the hiring manager should actively engage in considering top candidates and making the selection.

Plays for Hiring Planning:

- Update existing and/or develop new hiring materials — especially if the agency has not advertised this kind of position recently — to include position descriptions, job analysis, competencies, and assessment tools.
- Identify occupations that are experiencing particular hiring challenges and focus on root cause analysis and problem-solving in those areas.
- Consider the available work/life balance flexibilities, which may include telework and remote work.



Recruit

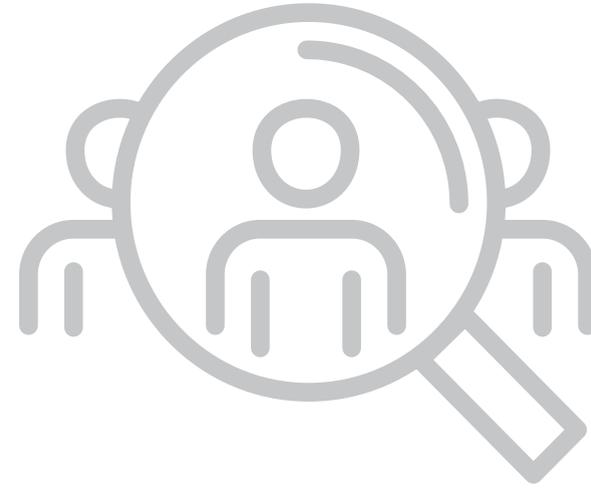
As a partnership between HR and the hiring manager, develop a recruitment strategy to identify sources for recruitment taking into consideration the skills required for the position, skills on hand, and any skills gaps and imbalances. Recruitment is an ongoing process requiring attention even at times when the agency is not “actively” seeking to fill jobs. Posting a job opportunity announcement is not a substitute for the broader and more persistent recruiting that agencies must undertake to be in a position to fill positions with the best possible applicants, once a vacancy arises. It is essential that agencies use the appropriate hiring tools available to produce a sufficient pool of qualified and diverse applicants.

Things to Consider:

- Develop a recruitment strategy that will support your agency talent acquisition process from initial job seeker interest through onboarding.
- Use USAJOBS’ Agency Talent Portal to search for job seekers and invite them to apply to job opportunities.
- As part of an overall recruitment strategy, engage and partner with diverse organizations, including, but not limited to educational institutions, as potential sources of talent.
- Once the appointment process is complete, review applicant flow data for mission critical occupations to evaluate recruitment effectiveness and talent pool diversity.



Recruitment is an ongoing process
even when not actively seeking to fill jobs



Plays for Recruitment:

- Utilize non-competitive [special hiring authorities](#) such as Veterans Recruiting Authority, the hiring authority for 30% or more disabled Veterans, the military spouse hiring authority, and the Schedule A authority for individuals with certain disabilities.
- Enhance recruitment and branding efforts by producing videos of agency employees, providing a realistic preview for advertised positions.
- Market potential workplace flexibilities such as telework, remote work, and flexible and compressed work schedules.
- Market comprehensive [compensation and benefits package](#).
- Use Resume Mining on USAJOBS to reach active job seekers for specialized needs and special hiring authorities.
- Expand use of applicant flow data and analytics about the use of data to inform future outreach and recruitment decisions.
- Utilize available recruitment flexibilities such as recruitment and relocation incentives strategically to attract new hires.

Recruitment and Branding

Develop an agency “brand” and branding strategies to build credibility with employees and potential applicants. Large agencies may want to develop an agency brand in addition to brands for bureaus and component agencies. Generally, the brand showcases the agency mission. Create recruitment materials that reflect the brand.



Plays for Outreach:

- Develop an agency outreach and recruitment plan with appropriate resources to enable agencies to reach underserved and under-represented communities, as part of a comprehensive recruitment program.
- Conduct outreach to specific communities (e.g., Veterans and Military Spouses, students, persons with disabilities), utilizing data-driven methods and incorporating promising practices.
- Leverage opportunities to recruit in the local commuting areas, including attending or hosting virtual information events, conducting campus recruitment, and conducting outreach to relevant communities.
- Use Department of Defense – Operation Warfighter (OWF) and Skill-bridge Program, as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs – Non-paid Work Experience Program (NPWE) and Disabled Veterans in a Training Program (OJT), as appropriate, to help meet mission critical occupations need.

Assess

The partnership among human resources, hiring managers, and subject matter experts is essential. The group should collaborate to identify and validate critical duties and competencies and determine best assessment methods. Effective applicant assessments are critical to identifying genuinely qualified candidates (not candidates who merely meet minimum qualifications) who are capable of effectively performing the duties of the position. This means including a mechanism for establishing and determining who meets a passing grade. Using the appropriate assessment will reduce the degree of error in making hiring decisions. Well-developed assessment tools allow agencies to specifically target and reliably identify candidates who possess the competencies and skills they seek.

Things to Consider:

An assessment strategy will help HR professionals tailor the assessment to the specific hiring situation by identifying what to assess (e.g., tasks, competencies):

- describe the hiring situation (e.g., budget, time frame, volume of applicants);
- determine how to assess (e.g., which competencies to include and which assessment tool to use); and
- determine the assessment process (e.g., passing grade plus relative scoring options or order of administered assessments)



Collaboration among human resources, hiring managers, and subject matter experts **is essential**

OPM's Roadmap to Improving the Use of Assessments in Federal Hiring Processes

Plays for Assessments:

- Leverage governmentwide competency data ([Multipurpose Occupational Systems Analysis Inventory — Close-Ended \(MOSAIC\) Competencies](#))
- Expand the use of better assessment options to improve the quality of hires.
- Use the resources provided in the [Assessment and Selection](#) section of OPM.gov to improve the assessment of technical skills.
- Target key job series or competency areas driven by agency mission for the development of assessments.
- Leverage assessment experts to develop professional assessments.
- Reduce reliance on self-rated questionnaires solely and promote the use of a variety of assessments and/or multiple hurdles, which may include:
 - Assessment processes such as [Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessment \(SME-QA\)](#)
 - Assessment types such as Structured Interviews and Writing Samples (e.g., written prompt exercises)
 - Assessment vendors such as [USA HireSM](#)



Create a Climate of Change

- Encourage and promote the use of assessments
- Raise awareness of the full range of hiring authorities and assessment options
- Supporting Activities and Resources:
 - [OPM Memo 9/13/2019](#)
 - [EO 13932](#)
 - [OPM Memo 7/31/2020](#)
 - [OPM Memo 5/7/2021](#)
 - [OPM HRS Assessment Viewcast](#)
 - Agency Engagement



Engage and Enable

- Governmentwide policy, educational initiatives, and assessment tools to facilitate the implementation of assessments
- Improve skills of HR Professionals to effectively advise managers on all available hiring options
- Supporting Activities and Resources:
 - [USAHire and USAHire Expansion](#)
 - [SME-QA](#)
 - [Federal Workforce Competency Initiative](#)
 - [Shared Certificates](#)
 - [Qualifications Operating Manual](#)
 - [Qualifications Group Standards](#)
 - [Assessment Decision Guide \(ADG\)](#)
 - [Assessment Decision Tool \(ADT\)](#)



Implement and Sustain

- Review and analyze the use of educational initiatives, assessment tools, and policy guidance to increase quality hires governmentwide
- Provide evidence-based data to support the use of assessment policy, practices, and tools for flexible staffing options
- Supporting Activities and Resources:
 - Agency Reviews
 - [New USAHire System and Assessments](#)
 - [HRStat](#)
 - [Human Capital Reviews](#)
 - Cut Score Analysis

Hire

Review and utilize the full range of existing hiring authorities available to support specific hiring needs. Some hiring authorities are available only for certain circumstances, others only to reach certain populations, and still others only to certain agencies. These authorities include Competitive, Non-Competitive, and Excepted Service hiring authorities, which may be used to provide alternatives when regular competitive hiring procedures are impractical (for example, an emergency short-term hiring need) or to address particular populations (for example, special appointment authorities to hire certain Veterans and Military Spouses, people with certain disabilities, or students and recent graduates).

Things to Consider:

- Prepare for future workforce needs via succession planning that may include the use of hiring flexibilities to fill mission critical positions.
- Incorporate the use of hiring flexibilities to meet agency strategic plans and Human Capital Plans.
- Identify opportunities to share certificates across your agency or interagency, under the Competitive Service Act of 2015 and its implementing regulations.



Utilize the full range of **existing hiring authorities** to support specific hiring needs

Plays for Hiring:

- Use existing hiring authorities to evaluate staffing needs and the most effective means of meeting those needs.
- Educate HR staff and hiring managers about the use of better assessments and the full range of hiring authorities available.

Plays for Student Hiring:

- Use the [Pathways Program](#) to hire Recent Graduates, Presidential Management Fellows (PMF), and Interns to develop talent.
- Use newly issued authorities for Hiring Authority for Post-Secondary Students and Hiring Authority for College Graduates.
- Leverage partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, including Historically Black Graduate Institutions; Hispanic-Serving Institutions; Tribal Colleges and Universities; Native American-serving, nontribal institutions; Asian American and Pacific Islander-serving institutions; Alaska Native-serving and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions; community colleges and technical schools; and community-based organizations that are dedicated to serving and working with underserved communities as part of a comprehensive scheme to reach all segments of society.
- Leverage partnerships with Veterans Service Organizations, including Student Veterans of America and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and other resources including Syracuse University's Institute of Veterans and Military Families.

Plays for Reinstating Talent:

- Use the recently amended reinstatement regulation which permits re-appointment to a permanent position at a higher grade where appropriate.
- Develop processes to determine if former employees are reinstatement eligible (e.g., ensure performance was at least fully successful; separation was not due to adverse action procedures).
- Develop an outreach plan for reaching eligible former employees.

Plays for Staffing Systems and Support:

- Provide training for staff on the use of talent acquisition systems to provide an improved user experience and leverage new tools to search for talent.
- Take advantage of OPM surge examining and onboarding support for agencies whose hiring demands exceed their internal HR capacity. This service is available through OPM Human Resources Solutions.



Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Recruitment and retention strategies both play a role in the competition for top talent. Many organizational strategies focus primarily on monetary benefits to retain and motivate quality employees. However, employees cite multiple reasons for job and employer satisfaction. By developing the Federal workforce and fully leveraging capabilities, we can maximize the talents of Federal employees, which translates into more fulfilling public service careers.



Things to Consider:

- Agencies should assess (including how successfully they were used and how important they turned out to be) the use of non-monetary strategies and factors, such as the following:
 - Offer opportunities for career growth and improvement in skills, including formal training and on-the-job learning and development. Such opportunities could encompass short-term learning experiences, projects, details, and mentoring opportunities through [USAJOBS Open Opportunities](#);
 - Mentor employees to help advance their careers and build networks;
 - Develop policies and programs that promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace;
 - Communicate to employees how their work fits in and contributes to the agency's goals and priorities;
 - As appropriate, consider offering workplace flexibilities such as alternative work schedules (e.g., flexible work hours/days), telework and remote work; and
 - Offer leave options that promote work-life balance.
- Agencies should develop a strong onboarding process that fosters a sense of community within the agency.
- Many compensation flexibilities can be combined to maximize their effectiveness to recruit and retain employees throughout their careers. Compensation flexibilities include:
 - Recruitment Incentives
 - Retention Incentives
 - Relocation Incentives
 - Federal Student Loan Repayment Program
 - Special Rates
 - Superior Qualifications and Special Needs Pay-Setting Authority
 - Creditable Service for Annual Leave Accrual
 - Critical Pay

Plays for Leave and Compensation:

- Support employees' ability to effectively manage their work and personal responsibilities with leave policies and programs and workplace flexibilities that promote work-life balance.
- Use discretionary authorities to provide additional direct compensation in certain circumstances to support recruitment, relocation, and retention efforts.
- Ensure any compensation flexibilities are used judiciously and in accordance with applicable law, regulations, agency policy, and budgetary limitations.



Plays for Employee Experience:

- Demonstrate the value of learning and development by providing time, support, and resources for employees and managers to participate in these activities.
- Utilize the full range of development options including low-cost or no-cost options such as rotations, lessons learned sessions, brown bag lunches, and on-the-job learning opportunities.
- Encourage employees to work with their managers to enhance their learning and growth by approving their participation in training courses within the Learning Management Systems and putting knowledge into practice through [USAJOBS Open Opportunities](#) short-term projects, details, and mentoring connections.
- Actively engage in building a strong, diverse group of future leaders.
- Encourage and leverage participation in various employee resource groups (ERGs).
- Create feedback mechanisms for communication between employees and leadership.

Resources

Below is a list of data and resources available to agencies to assist with the strategic planning for and the development of talent management.

Human Capital Framework Policy, Data, Oversight

- [Talent Management](#)

Human Capital Management

- [Human Capital Management](#)

Recruitment and Outreach

- [FedsHireVets](#)
- For employment outreach support contact Outreach@opm.gov
- For Pathways Programs information and guidance contact Pathways@opm.gov
- For agency recruitment technical assistance contact Recruitment@opm.gov

Assessments

- [Assessment and Selection](#)

Hiring Information

- [Hiring Authorities](#)
- [Delegated Examining Operations Handbook](#)
- [Vet Guide](#)

Pay and Leave Flexibilities

- [Pay and Leave Flexibilities](#)



Training for Federal Human Resources Staff

Training specifically for Federal HR practitioners is available to provide them with the technical human resources expertise, communication techniques and consulting skills to guide hiring managers through the hiring process.

OPM Training and Development Policy Wiki

[OPM Sponsored Courses for Federal Employees](#) are available to access at no cost.

Federal Human Resources Institute (FHRI)

[FHRI](#) is a government-wide initiative to close skills gaps and enable the Federal HR workforce's capability. Utilizing a standardized, competency-based development approach, employees can take 22 staffing and 2 classification courses via a virtual instructor-led delivery approach. Additional courses are being designed and will lead to a HR Certification certifying HR proficiency in a broad range of disciplines.

Delegated Examining (DE) Certification Program

OPM delegates the authority to fill competitive civil service jobs to agencies, which is known as Delegated Examining. The [DE Certification program](#) prepares HR Specialists to ensure that applicants will be recruited from all segments of society, participate in a fair and open competition, and be selected on the basis of their competencies and merit. Successful completion of the Certification Assessment is required for staff involved in competitive hiring appointments.



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