



Suitability Executive
Agent Programs

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

Suitability and Credentialing Executive Agent Notice

Notice No. 26-01

September 9, 2026

Subject: Revised Suitability Adjudicator National Training Standards

OPM has issued revised Suitability Adjudicator National Training Standards (NTS), effective September 9, 2026. These revisions align the NTS with the updated regulations at 5 CFR part 731. As a reminder, the NTS consist of three components: 1) the Training and Enabling Objectives for Suitability Adjudicators; 2) the Suitability Adjudicator Basic Skill Standards; and 3) the Suitability Adjudicator Core Competencies. The attached documents replace all earlier versions of the NTS.

The September 2026 revisions reflect the following substantive changes to the Training and Enabling Objectives:

Elimination of the Introduction section. The overall Introduction Training Objective and its 12 Introduction Enabling Objectives have been removed as a standalone section. The content has been absorbed and redistributed into the Fundamentals course, eliminating the need for a separate prerequisite module.

Expanded post-appointment conduct objective. Fundamentals Enabling Objective (FEO) 17 (formerly FEO 14) has been substantially expanded to require adjudicators to identify the areas where post-appointment conduct may arise; to understand the agency's role in reporting; to recognize OPM's authority to take suitability actions based on post-appointment conduct under 5 CFR part 731; and to recognize the self-reporting requirements that apply to trusted insiders.

Expanded scope of the investigative tiers and vetting scenarios objective. FEO 10 (formerly FEO 8) has been expanded. It now incorporates the position designation system and all five vetting scenarios — content previously addressed in Introduction Enabling Objectives 6 and 7 are consolidated into a single, comprehensive Fundamentals-level objective.

New and consolidated Fundamentals objectives. Three new FEOs have been added (FEOs 1, 2, and 3), absorbing content from the former Introduction section. A revised FEO 16 consolidates the standards for reciprocal acceptance of investigations and trust determinations in Transfer of Trust and Re-establishment of Trust scenarios.

Advanced objectives unchanged. The Advanced Training Objective and all 12 Advanced Enabling Objectives, the Suitability Adjudicator Basic Skill Standards, and the Suitability Adjudicator Core Competencies all remain unchanged.

Departments and agencies (D/As) continue to be responsible for ensuring that all persons responsible for suitability screening, reviewing, or making suitability determinations are trained in accordance with these National Training Standards, as required by 5 CFR 731.202(d). D/As that use training providers other than OPM should review the revised objectives, skill standards, and core competencies against their current training curriculum to ensure compliance.

OPM offers Government-wide suitability adjudicator training compliant with these revised standards. OPM's Fundamentals of Suitability for Suitability and Fitness Adjudicators course has been updated to account for these changes, including the content absorbed from the retired Introduction to Suitability Review and Adjudication course. D/As may elect to send adjudicative personnel to OPM-offered courses to meet the training requirement. Information and registration related to OPM's training courses can be found on its [training page](#).

Please direct questions regarding the revised National Training Standards to SuitEA@opm.gov.

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Attachments:

1. Training and Enabling Objectives for Suitability Adjudicators
2. Suitability Adjudicator Basic Skill Standards
3. Suitability Adjudicator Core Competencies

NATIONAL TRAINING STANDARDS (NTS) | SEPTEMBER 2026

Suitability Adjudicator Training and Enabling Objectives

Training Objectives (TO) – Intended measurable outcome that learners will achieve.

Enabling Objectives (EO) – Supporting objectives that break down the training objective in a manner that states the expectations of the learner's performance.

FUNDAMENTALS

Fundamentals Training Objective (FTO)

FTO 1. Make suitability and fitness determinations in accordance with title 5 Code of Federal Regulations part 731.

FUNDAMENTALS ENABLING OBJECTIVES (FEO)

FEO 1. Recognize the purpose and elements of Federal personnel vetting and define related terminology.

FEO 2. Identify the principles established by Executive Orders and other authorities that govern Federal personnel vetting.

FEO 3. Recognize the adjudicative process framework for determining suitability and fitness.

FEO 4. Identify the role and responsibilities of the Adjudicator.

FEO 5. Differentiate between agency and OPM suitability authorities and responsibilities under 5 CFR part 731.

FEO 6. Describe what may constitute a suitability or fitness issue.

FEO 7. Identify and apply the specific factors.

FEO 8. Determine if falsification is both material and intentional.

FEO 9. Decide the potential impact of the additional considerations on an issue.

FEO 10. Identify the position designation system, the Federal personnel vetting investigative tiers, and the five vetting scenarios, including the coverage and trigger requirements for each tier, the purpose of information categories, high-yield checks, and information seriousness categorization, and recognize when reporting is required for quality oversight purposes.

FEO 11.	Compare and analyze documentation (i.e., OF 306, resume, application material, investigative results, etc.) to identify issues/discrepancies, find inconsistencies, or highlight incomplete information that may affect the adjudicative decision.
FEO 12.	Identify behaviors and conduct that may be indicative of potential counterintelligence or terrorism concerns, indicators of insider threat, or that may be illegal in nature and determine appropriate actions to take.
FEO 13.	Identify need for additional information to substantiate or resolve an issue.
FEO 14.	Recognize the screening process.
FEO 15.	Demonstrate an understanding of making suitability or fitness adjudicative determinations in the five vetting scenarios (Initial Vetting, Continuous Vetting, Upgrades, Transfer of Trust, and Re-establishment of Trust).
FEO 16.	Identify the standards for reciprocal acceptance of investigations and of suitability/fitness trust determinations in Transfer of Trust or Re-establishment of Trust scenarios.
FEO 17.	Identify the areas where post-appointment conduct may arise, such as Continuous Vetting alerts, OIG investigations, supervisor reports, and self-reporting by trusted insiders, describe the agency's role in reporting, what actions may be taken, and OPM's authority to take suitability actions regarding post-appointment conduct, and recognize the self-reporting requirements that apply to trusted insiders.
FEO 18.	Demonstrate an understanding of the different types of suitability or fitness trust determinations (i.e., favorable, unfavorable, exceptions).
FEO 19.	Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of critical thinking when making trust determinations in personnel vetting.
FEO 20.	Evaluate the severity of issues in order to make a suitability or fitness trust determination.
FEO 21.	Recognize the importance of trust determination reporting requirements, information sharing, safeguarding, retention, and records destruction requirements including steps necessary to protect the privacy of individuals.
FEO 22.	Recognize procedures required for suitability actions in cases involving competitive service and career Senior Executive Service positions.

ADVANCED

Advanced Training Objectives (ATO)

ATO 1. Take suitability actions in cases involving the competitive service and career Senior Executive Service positions in accordance with the requirements specified in title 5, Code of Federal Regulations part 731 and 1201 and specified in case law.

ADVANCED ENABLING OBJECTIVES (AEO)

AEO 1. Demonstrate an understanding of the process for taking suitability actions.

AEO 2. Evaluate the weight of evidence necessary to support a suitability action.

AEO 3. Determine if there are any restrictions related to use of certain information.

AEO 4. Make a recommendation to take a suitability action by outlining issues by relevant suitability factor, listing the evidence that supports each issue, showing the additional considerations that were deemed pertinent, and the actions to be taken.

AEO 5. Recognize the importance of proper grammar, organization, accuracy, and inclusion of sufficient details to establish why the conduct is in question in the proposed action letter.

AEO 6. Apply appropriate procedures to write a proposed action letter in accordance with 5 CFR 731.

AEO 7. Determine information to be released in response to a "materials relied upon" request.

AEO 8. Evaluate answers to proposed action letters.

AEO 9. Determine when questions or concerns need to be resolved before a decision can be made.

AEO 10. Determine appropriate action(s).

AEO 11. Apply appropriate procedures to write a final action letter in accordance with 5 CFR 731.

AEO 12. Recognize appeal procedures.

Suitability Adjudicator Basic Skill Standards

This document describes the suitability adjudicator function. It presents the work-oriented components (critical work functions, key activities, and performance indicators) and the worker-oriented components (academic/employability knowledge and skills, and specific occupational/technical knowledge and skills) of the skill standards for this function.

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

- Individual has completed all basic training associated with the Suitability Adjudicator function, including the Fundamentals of Suitability Review and Adjudication course.
- Individual has passed the Suitability Adjudication assessments or satisfied the objectives through other methods.
- Individual has received on-the-job training to learn agency-specific procedures for administrative functions.
- Individual will require some supervision in performing the critical work functions and associated key activities.

Work-oriented component

Critical work functions describe the major responsibilities involved in carrying out the adjudicator function. Key activities are the duties and tasks involved. Performance indicators describe how to determine when someone is performing each key activity competently.

CRITICAL WORK FUNCTION 1 (CWF1)

Manage case/workload

KEY ACTIVITY

KA1: Manage adjudicative workload

(Note: training for this function will be primarily on the job since specific procedures vary from agency to agency)

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- PI-1** Case load is appropriately prioritized and managed (e.g., high priority or time-sensitive cases are expedited to support special requirements).
- PI-2** Tasks within individual cases are appropriately prioritized and managed.
- PI-3** Content of case files is safeguarded and protected; accountability is maintained.
- PI-4** Assigned cases are regularly tracked.

CRITICAL WORK FUNCTION 2 (CWF2)**Review case file**

KEY ACTIVITY	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
KA2: Review investigative information for completeness	PI-5 Case file is reviewed to ensure that all necessary paperwork is on file, pertains to the subject, and the appropriate level of investigation has been conducted (requires familiarity with the position designation process).
	PI-6 Case data is reviewed to ensure accuracy and currency of information.
	PI-7 Potential sources of needed information are identified.
KA3: Complete required administrative actions	PI-8 Needed information is requested/obtained through telephone calls and/or letters to potential sources in accordance with the Privacy Act; information to be obtained by the investigation service provider is identified.
	PI-9 Responses to information requests are reviewed to determine if information is adequate for continuing the adjudication process.
	PI-10 Case file is reviewed to determine if further adjudication is warranted based on severity of suitability concern.
	PI-11 Responses to routine inquiries concerning case status are completed in a timely manner.
	PI-12 Case-related telephone calls, correspondence, and any other investigative inquiries are documented to ensure an accurate record of case activity; PII is properly protected.
KA4: Review all information and identify conditions that could raise a suitability concern	PI-13 Case information is reviewed to identify all conditions that could raise a suitability concern and may warrant a negative suitability determination; documentation and evidence of suitability concerns is obtained.
	PI-14 Subject matter experts are consulted, as required.
	PI-15 Unique or complex cases are discussed with a subject matter expert to obtain advice concerning sufficiency, credibility, or authenticity of adjudicative information, and proper application of the suitability factors and additional considerations as outlined in 5 CFR 731.

CRITICAL WORK FUNCTION 3 (CWF3)

Apply adjudication standards

KEY ACTIVITY	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
KA5: Analyze suitability related issues against suitability factors and additional considerations	PI-16 Severity of suitability issues is determined.
	PI-17 Suitability issues are associated with suitability factors listed in 5 CFR 731.
	PI-18 "Additional Considerations" listed in 5 CFR 731 are evaluated to determine if pertinent as aggravating or mitigating to the individual case.
	PI-19 Cases are reviewed to determine which warrant referral to OPM for government-wide debarment consideration and which warrant agency suitability action.
KA6: Determine and document recommendation	PI-20 Cases warranting OPM referral for government-wide debarment consideration are prepared and packaged; cases warranting agency suitability action are reviewed to determine the specific suitability action to be proposed, including the appropriate length of debarment.
	PI-21 Adjudicative process used to render recommendation/determination is properly documented.

CRITICAL WORK FUNCTION 4 (CWF4)

Document decision/recommendation

KEY ACTIVITY	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
KA7: Notify appropriate personnel of decision/recommendation (within individual authority)	PI-22 Favorable decision is made; appropriate officials within the agency and the subject are notified.
	PI-23 Letter of proposed action is issued (when warranted).
	PI-24 If applicable, materials relied upon are processed and sent.
	PI-25 Answer to proposed action letter is evaluated to determine if the proposed actions are still appropriate.
	PI-26 Final determination letter is written; refer for secondary review, if required.
	PI-27 Final determination letter is issued.
KA8: Close case	PI-28 Final determination is recorded appropriately.
	PI-29 Appropriate retention/destruction action is taken.
	PI-30 Appeal procedures are followed and processed within required timeframes.

Worker-oriented component

Academic and employability knowledge and skills

Describes what a worker needs to know or be able to do to perform the critical work functions of the job.

KNOWLEDGE / SKILL	DEFINITION	CRITICALITY	RELEVANCY	COMPLEXITY
Ability to learn (1)	Recognize and use learning techniques to recall available information; apply and adapt new knowledge and skills in both familiar and changing situations; use multiple approaches; assess own performance; and stay current technically.	Critical	CWF1-4	Requires learning tools such as note-taking, studying manuals/handbooks, learning exams, and performing work samples/simulations to learn a series of tasks or new procedures.
Adaptability (2)	Change behavior or work methods to adjust to other people, changing situations, or work demands; be receptive to new information, ideas, or strategies which help achieve goals.	Critical	CWF1-4	Changes are somewhat ambiguous or unpredictable; somewhat frequent or gradual changes necessitate some degree of openness; some precedents, guidelines, or training resources are available.
Analyzing and solving problems (3)	Identify problems and their causes; develop and analyze potential solutions using rational and logical processes or innovative approaches as needed.	Critical	CWF1-4	Problems are moderately unique with some similarity to prior problems; some new or innovative solutions required alongside solutions guided by existing precedents; some judgment is required to select the best solution.
Building consensus (4)	Build consensus among individuals or groups by facilitating agreements; persuade others to change points of view without losing future support; and resolve conflicts while maintaining productive working relationships.	Critical	CWF2-3	Work is often done in support of a team/work group; debating and defending decisions with peers, senior personnel, and supervisors is likely.

KNOWLEDGE / SKILL	DEFINITION	CRITICALITY	RELEVANCY	COMPLEXITY
Gathering and analyzing information (5)	Obtain, analyze, and evaluate facts in written reports; interpret and apply criteria in policies, regulations, and guidelines impartially; draw sound conclusions; and render consistent, rational, unbiased determinations linked to research and policy.	Extremely Critical	CWF1-4	Moderate amount of information gathered from several different sources; some sources are partially defined, requiring additional research; information is moderately complex or technical; some information is of questionable reliability, requiring vetting.
Initiative/motivation (6)	Exert high effort and perseverance toward goal attainment; set high standards; pay attention to details; maintain high standards of attendance, punctuality, and enthusiasm; and demonstrate willingness to take on responsibilities without being asked.	Critical	CWF1-4	Moderate level of independent effort required to accomplish the task or organizational goal.
Integrity/honesty (7)	Demonstrate dependability, conscientiousness, integrity, and accountability; show commitment to doing the job carefully and correctly; fulfill obligations and be reliable, responsible, and trustworthy; and demonstrate honesty and ethical behavior.	Extremely Critical	CWF1-4	High level of integrity required; involves demonstration of ethics and ethical behavior to others; may require determination of "greater good" when fulfilling work and organizational responsibilities.
Listening (9)	Attend to, receive, and correctly interpret verbal and nonverbal communications through cues such as content, context, tone, gestures, and facial expressions.	Critical	CWF2, CWF4	Subject matter is moderately complex, unfamiliar, or technical; communication is of moderate length; some opportunity to interact with the speaker; some distractions present.

KNOWLEDGE / SKILL	DEFINITION	CRITICALITY	RELEVANCY	COMPLEXITY
Maintain professional demeanor (10)	Demonstrate credibility, consistency, and authority in issuing instructions and making requests; maintain a firm and direct tone of voice, authoritative posture, manner, and bearing.	Critical	CWF2, CWF4	Discussing decisions with internal and external personnel is probable; maintaining constructive working relationships is important; may need to proactively identify problems or opportunities and propose solutions.
Decision making (11)	Make sound, well-informed, and objective decisions; perceive the impact and implications of decisions.	Extremely Critical	CWF1–4	Precedents or informed input aid some decisions; integration of information is moderately difficult; moderate potential risks and consequences; individual has accountability for own decisions; explicit policies constrain latitude for some decisions.
Organizing and planning (13)	Organize and structure work for effective performance and goal attainment; set and balance priorities; anticipate obstacles; formulate plans; and modify plans given changing goals or conditions.	Critical	CWF1–2	General short- and long-term objectives with some variation in clarity; some flexibility required; some guidelines or SOPs available; feedback on progress is of varying clarity and usefulness.
Reading (14)	Identify and assess significant and minor details and correlate them to relevant information across documents; understand and use written information in a variety of formats; select reading strategies appropriate to the purpose.	Extremely Critical	CWF1–3	Moderately complex or technical materials (letters, memos, multi-step directions, reference materials, charts, graphs); reading includes interpretation from multiple sources, integration with prior knowledge, and identification of complexities and discrepancies.

KNOWLEDGE / SKILL	DEFINITION	CRITICALITY	RELEVANCY	COMPLEXITY
Self and career development (15)	Identify own work and career interests, strengths, and limitations; pursue education, training, feedback, or other opportunities for learning; and manage and monitor one's own learning and development.	Critical	CWF2-4	Continuing education and training ensures awareness of changes to processes and procedures and is critical to advancement; feedback from peers, senior personnel, or supervisors is likely.
Speaking (16)	Speak clearly to express ideas, facts, and information in a concise and understandable manner; articulate operational matters with tact and diplomacy; keep supervisors informed of issues; and tailor oral communications to the intended audience.	Critical	CWF2-4	Moderately complex, novel, or technical information; subject matter is moderately sensitive or likely to be challenged; some improvisation required; listeners vary in the degree to which they are skeptical or in disagreement.
Stress tolerance (17)	Demonstrate maturity, poise, and restraint to cope with pressure, stress, and criticism; maintain composure; keep emotions in check; and avoid aggressive behavior even in very difficult situations.	Critical	CWF1-4	Requires moderate level of composure and tolerance of stress; individual's behaviors associated with stress moderately affect others in the work environment.
Using information and communications technology (18)	Select, access, and use necessary information and communications-related technologies such as PC applications, telecommunications equipment, internet/intranet, voice mail, email, and facsimile machines.	Critical	CWF2, CWF4	Equipment or technology is somewhat complex; applications require some advanced features; limited time available to learn before application; some new learning required due to moderately frequent changes or upgrades.
Using interpersonal skills (19)	Interact with others in ways that are friendly, courteous, and tactful; demonstrate respect for individual differences and for the attitudes and feelings of others.	Critical	CWF1-4	Interaction possible with people of varied backgrounds; some interactions are casual or informal; interactions could involve personal, sensitive, or conflict-laden issues requiring tact or diplomacy.

KNOWLEDGE / SKILL	DEFINITION	CRITICALITY	RELEVANCY	COMPLEXITY
Working in teams (20)	Work cooperatively and collaboratively with others to achieve goals by sharing or integrating ideas, knowledge, skills, information, support, resources, responsibility, and recognition.	Critical	CWF1-4	Regular consultation with peers, senior personnel, and supervisors is likely; sharing and gathering new skills and concepts will occur regularly.
Writing (21)	Organize and summarize information in an accurate, concise, and easily understood manner; use English language conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure; and tailor written communication to the intended purpose and audience.	Extremely Critical	CWF2-4	Materials produced are moderately complex; moderate degree of organization and focus; interpretation from multiple sources; identification of complexities and discrepancies; application of precise word choice for clarity.

Occupational and technical knowledge and skills

Describes the occupational/technical knowledge and skills needed to perform the critical work functions of the job.

ID	CRITICALITY	RELEVANCY	SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL
OTKS-1	Need to know	CWF2, CWF4	Knowledge of and skill in applying types and scope of investigations
OTKS-2	Need to know	CWF2	Knowledge of types of sources
OTKS-3	Need to know	CWF2-4	Knowledge of and skill in applying adjudication process using the whole-person concept
OTKS-4	Need to know	CWF2-4	Knowledge of and skill in applying procedures for taking an unfavorable suitability action
OTKS-5	Need to know	CWF3-4	Knowledge of writing Proposed Action Letters (PALs) and Final Action Letters (FALs)
OTKS-6	Need to know	CWF2-4	Knowledge of pertinent regulations governing suitability adjudication
OTKS-7	Need to know	CWF2-4	Knowledge of and skill in applying suitability factors outlined in 5 CFR 731.202(b) and additional considerations outlined in 5 CFR 731.202(c)
OTKS-8	Nice to know	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying designation of position risk
OTKS-9	Need to know	CWF2-4	Knowledge of precedent cases related to suitability as reflected in case law
OTKS-10	Nice to know	CWF2	Knowledge of and skill in applying medical/mental health terminology
OTKS-11	Need to know	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying financial terminology
OTKS-12	Need to know	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying financial analysis
OTKS-13	Need to know	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying alcohol/drug terminology
OTKS-14	Nice to know	CWF2	Knowledge of hostile countries and organizations
OTKS-15	Need to know	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying criminal behavior/legal terminology
OTKS-16	Need to know	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying computer and information systems usage guidelines
OTKS-17	Nice to know	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying immigration and naturalization terminology
OTKS-18	Need to know	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Privacy Act (PA)
OTKS-19	Agency specific	CWF1-4	Knowledge of and skill in applying case processing procedures

ID	CRITICALITY	RELEVANCY	SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL
OTKS-20	Nice to know	CWF2	Knowledge of and skill in applying potential counter-intelligence indicators
OTKS-21	Agency specific	CWF2-3	Knowledge of and skill in applying agency-specific policies, instructions, and regulations
OTKS-22	Agency specific	CWF2-4	Knowledge of and skill in applying agency-specific terminology and structure
OTKS-23	Agency specific	CWF2-4	Knowledge of and skill in applying agency correspondence procedures

Suitability Adjudicator Core Competencies

OPM considers the following five core competencies crucial to the successful performance of critical work functions within the Suitability Adjudicator position. These competencies support the skill standards and were cultivated by personnel supporting the Training Subcommittee of the Security and Suitability Performance Accountability Council, following the skills standards model developed by the Joint Security Training Consortium.

Technical expertise

Uses knowledge acquired through formal training and extensive on-the-job experience to perform the job; works with, understands, and evaluates technical information related to the role.

SUPPORTS: CWF1–4

Information analysis

Obtains, analyzes, and evaluates facts contained in written reports; interprets and applies criteria in policies, regulations, and guidelines impartially; draws sound conclusions; and renders consistent, rational, and objective determinations.

SUPPORTS: CWF2–4

Writing

Organizes and summarizes information in an accurate, concise, and easily understood manner; uses English language conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure; and tailors written communication to the intended purpose and audience.

SUPPORTS: CWF2, CWF4

Integrity

Demonstrates dependability, conscientiousness, integrity, and accountability; shows commitment to doing the job carefully and correctly; fulfills obligations and is reliable, responsible, and trustworthy; and demonstrates honesty and ethical behavior.

SUPPORTS: CWF1–4

Decision making

Makes sound, well-informed, and objective decisions; perceives the impact and implications of decisions.

SUPPORTS: CWF2–4