

Guide For Federal Attorney Recruiting and Hiring



GUIDE FOR FEDERAL ATTORNEY RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

In alignment with Executive Order 14170, *Reforming Federal Hiring and Restoring Merit to Government Service*, and the [Merit Hiring Plan](#), the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is providing this guidance to assist agencies in strengthening merit-based attorney recruitment practices while operating within the regulatory framework governing attorney appointments. This guide is intended for federal recruiters hiring attorney positions and should be applied in conjunction with applicable statutes, regulations, merit system principles, and agency-specific policies and procedures, as appropriate.

Attorney positions are filled using Schedule A of the excepted service under [5 CFR . 213.3102\(d\)](#). These positions are excepted from the competitive service because it is not practicable to conduct competitive examinations for these occupations. Agencies must follow their own internal policies, procedures, and the merit system principles when filling attorney positions under Schedule A. OPM encourages agencies to implement efficient hiring processes that reduce time-to-hire while maintaining fair and open competition.

Value Proposition for Federal Attorney Positions

Agencies may incorporate the following messaging in their recruitment and outreach materials.

MISSION AND SERVICE ORIENTED MESSAGING

- Uphold and defend the Constitution and the rule of law
- Answer the call—Now is your chance to serve the American people
- Represent the Federal Government on significant and complex legal matters
- Make a meaningful impact through public service
- Contribute directly to agency mission accomplishment

PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER BENEFITS

- Meaningful responsibility, including advisory experience
- Exposure to nationally significant legal matters
- Many practice areas, including litigation, investigation, advisory, regulatory and policy work
- Opportunities for subject-matter specialization (e.g., patent and intellectual property, labor and employment, banking, drug enforcement) and leadership engagement
- Opportunities available nationwide, including regional offices that offer substantial responsibility and impact
- Career advancement
- Competitive compensation and great benefits

Schedule A Hiring Authority

Schedule A ([5 CFR . 213.3102\(d\)](#)) hiring authority allows agencies to appoint attorneys in the excepted service:

- 0905 occupational series
- Can be used for permanent or time-limited appointments
- Allows agencies to establish qualification requirements
- Can apply to senior level (SL) where appropriate (e.g., non-supervisory attorney positions classified above GS-15)

ELIGIBLE POSITIONS

Any 0905 series attorney position at the GS-15 or SL level and below (or equivalent) can be filled under Schedule A authority. Job titles in this series may include:

- Trial Attorney
- General Attorney
- Agency Counsel
- Attorney Advisor

QUALIFICATIONS

Agencies establish qualifications for attorney positions, which may include:

- *Juris doctor* (JD) degree (or equivalent)
- Active bar membership in good standing of any U.S. jurisdiction
- Meeting agency-specific experience and subject matter expertise

Generally, bar membership may be in *any state*, regardless of the duty station of the job.

VETERANS PREFERENCE

Attorney positions are not subject to the appointment procedures of 5 CFR part 302. When filling attorney positions, agencies must follow the principle of veterans' preference as far as administratively feasible (5 CFR 302.101(c)(8)).

Recruiting and Hiring

Establishing and cultivating strong relationships with universities is essential to building a robust pipeline of talented future federal attorneys. Law schools serve as primary sources of emerging legal talent and innovation. By engaging early with students, faculty, and career services professionals, federal agencies can increase awareness of public service opportunities, identify high-quality candidates, and ensure that students are informed and prepared to compete for federal job opportunities. At the same time, strategic outreach and recruiting

efforts should extend beyond active applicants to include passive candidates — including practicing attorneys who may not be actively seeking federal employment but are open to mission-driven work. Strategic engagement through networking events, professional associations, alumni networks, and targeted communications broadens the talent pool and strengthens the government’s ability to attract experienced attorneys committed to public service.

Recruiters should identify agency attorneys who can highlight the nature and impact of their work and engage directly with interested candidates to answer questions, share experiences, and encourage strong applicants to apply.

Agencies are encouraged to recruit in a manner that:

- Attracts a sufficient pool of qualified candidates
- Avoids overly narrow sourcing methods
- Promotes awareness of opportunities beyond informal networks
- Supports fair and open competition consistent with merit system principles

The following effective practices for recruitment and hiring are examples that agencies may consider when recruiting for attorney positions under Schedule A (5 CFR § 213.3102(d)). Agencies are responsible for applying merit system principles, applicable regulations and their own internal policies. Recruiting should attract a sufficient pool of qualified applicants consistent with merit principles ([5 U.S.C. § 2301](#)).

- **Identify** the positions for recruitment
 - Position classified as GS-0905
 - Position approved by the agency Strategic Hiring Committee and included in the Agency Staffing Plan.
- **Source** candidates
 - Consider aligning recruiting and outreach materials with the value proposition and messaging contained in this guide
 - Use agency career websites and USAJOBS (posting not required but may broaden outreach)
 - Use the USAJOBS Agency Talent Portal (ATP) résumé search to directly engage with promising candidates
 - Leverage USAJOBS’ Attorney Talent Network
 - Recruit directly from talent pools using events and/or other sourcing methods
 - Accept 1 to 2-page résumés directly from applicants, if allowed by agency policy
 - Use sourcing tools such as LinkedIn, Handshake, Indeed, or other platforms to directly engage candidates, validate qualifications, and schedule interviews

- **Screen** candidates for eligibility
 - Verify the candidate meets the agency qualification requirements¹.
 - Verify JD and bar membership².
 - Check and document education and experience against the grade level requirements for the position being filled

- **Assess** eligible candidates:
 - Use at least one validated technical or alternative assessment to evaluate skills and competencies (e.g., writing samples, structured interviews, accomplishment record)
 - Use panel or individual interviews in accordance with agency policy
 - Document and retain interview notes, veterans' consideration, and selection rationale

- **Select** candidate(s):
 - Agency leadership, or their designee(s), may conduct a final interview to confirm organizational fit and alignment consistent with agency policy and merit principles. (The official conducting this interview should be commensurate with the level of the position being filled).
 - The Human Resources (HR) Office should collaborate with the hiring manager and agency leadership to ensure tentative job offers comply with agency policy and regulations.

Recruiting Frameworks

The following frameworks are suggested workflows for executing attorney recruiting with minimal costs and effective time-to-hire. The speed and cost effectiveness of these approaches rely on the following practices:

- Using proactive sourcing
- Screening applicants early for bar status and specialized experience
- Conducting rolling interviews of candidates, where appropriate

¹ OPM does not establish qualification standards for Attorney (0905) and Law Clerk (0904) positions and delegates this responsibility to agencies.

² To verify a bar membership, use the official online directory of the state bar association where the attorney claims to practice. Search by the attorney's name or bar number to confirm their license status, contact information, and any public disciplinary history. Where circumstances warrant (e.g., incomplete online records, discrepancies in reported status, multi-jurisdictional issues, or other risk indicators), agencies may conduct secondary verification, such as direct confirmation with the licensing authority or requesting supplemental documentation from the candidate. Agencies should document and retain verification results in accordance with internal policies and procedures.

- Discussing compensation flexibility for negotiation and budget considerations in advance

OPTION 1: DIGITAL SOURCING

This approach is best for experienced candidates and external recruiting (e.g., applicants coming from a law firm, state government, or industry) as well as finding attorneys with niche expertise or experience.

SUGGESTED ATTORNEY RECRUITMENT WORKFLOW

Phase & Timeline	Key Actions	Compliance & Documentation
Week 0 – Workforce Planning and Staffing Strategy Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm grade level and pay range available • Develop a compensation strategy • Identify incentive eligibility (e.g., Federal Student Loan Repayment) • Align with hiring manager • Brief Strategic Hiring Committee (SHC), if applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm position is GS-0905 • Ensure position is approved in Agency Staffing Plan
Week 1 – Targeted Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use agency website or USAJOBS (optional but recommended for transparency) • Use USAJOBS Agency Talent Portal (ATP) résumé search • Leverage Attorney Talent Network • Use tools such as job boards, social media platforms, professional associations, etc. • Target specific practice areas and geographic markets • Professional association directories • Legal society contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merit system principles apply (5 U.S.C. § 2301) • Inform potential applicants broadly enough to attract a sufficient qualified pool • Avoid overly restrictive outreach <p>NOTE: There is no requirement to post a job announcement on USAJOBS when using Schedule A hiring authority for attorneys. However, agencies should be mindful that the merit system principles apply to excepted service as well as to competitive service recruiting. Agencies should uphold these principles by informing potential applicants about the job opportunity and by conducting recruitment in a manner to attract a sufficient pool of highly qualified applicants.</p>
Weeks 1-3 – Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify JD and active bar membership • Review education and experience for grade alignment • Discuss compensation expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document qualification determinations • Retain screening notes • Agencies must apply veterans' preference as administratively feasible

Phase & Timeline	Key Actions	Compliance & Documentation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send résumés of qualified candidates to hiring manager 	
Weeks 2–4 – Rolling Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct structured interview(s). As a best practice, limit interview rounds to no more than three. Schedule interviews within one week of screening Use panel or individual interviews as permitted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply consistent evaluation criteria Document interview notes and scoring (if used) Record veterans’ consideration
Weeks 3–6 – Selection and Tentative Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document selection rationale Confirm and document veterans’ consideration Submit package to SHC / leadership (if required) Schedule leadership interview (if applicable) Issue tentative job offer upon approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure selection decision is based on job-related factors and defensible Confirm selection aligns with strategic staffing plan Retain documentation consistent with agency policy Confirm pay-setting authority and approvals

Key Efficiency Principles

- Use proactive sourcing rather than waiting for applications
- Screen early for bar status and specialized experience
- Conduct rolling interviews where appropriate
- Align salary flexibility and budget considerations in advance
- Document selection rationale and veterans’ consideration throughout

OPTION 2: HIRING EVENTS

This approach is ideal for early career, geography-specific, or high-volume hiring. The goal is to source, screen, interview, and extend a tentative job offer at or immediately after a hiring event.

SUGGESTED ATTORNEY RECRUITMENT WORKFLOW

Phase & Timeline	Key Actions	Compliance & Documentation
Weeks 2–4 Before Event – Digital Pipeline and Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use tools such as job boards, social media platforms, professional listservs, and USAJOBS to invite candidates within target geography • Post event on USAJOBS (optional but recommended for transparency) • Share event details with OPM’s Attorney Talent Network and Recruitment@opm.gov 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure outreach attracts a sufficient pool of qualified applicants • Merit system principles apply • Avoid overly restrictive or exclusive invitations to hiring event
Weeks 1–2 Before Event – Pre-Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly communicate eligibility criteria and pre-screening process • Conduct screening calls • Verify JD and active bar membership • Discuss compensation expectations • Schedule interview time slots with hiring manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document qualification determinations • Apply veterans’ preference under excepted service procedures • Retain screening notes
Week 1 Before Event – Event Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create interview schedule/calendar • Confirm hiring managers/interviewers • Develop/Use tentative offer templates • Reserve approximately 25% of interview slots for day-of scheduling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure evaluation criteria are job-related and documented • Ensure compliance with Schedule A authority for attorney hiring • Align with Agency Staffing Plan approvals

Phase & Timeline	Key Actions	Compliance & Documentation
Event Day – Interviews and Debrief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in candidates (photo ID & bar verification, copy of transcripts) • Conduct structured interviews • Hold same-day debrief with hiring managers • Follow your agency policy to refer candidates to hiring manager based on documented, job-related criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rankings must be applied consistently in accordance with agency policy • Document interview notes and veterans’ consideration • Retain evaluation materials per agency policy
Week of Event – Executive Interviews and Tentative Offers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct executive interviews for top candidates • Issue tentative offers to selected candidates upon approval • Continue interviews for remaining candidates • Issue additional tentative offers after initial responses received 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm veterans’ consideration before offer issuance • Ensure selection decisions are job-related and defensible • Obtain required agency approvals prior to extending tentative offer

Key Efficiency Principles

- Build a qualified pipeline before the event
- Verify bar status and eligibility early
- Use structured interviews and same day debriefs
- Apply documented, job-related ranking criteria
- Confirm veterans’ consideration before issuing offers
- Coordinate HR approvals in advance to enable same week offers

Effective attorney recruitment under Schedule A requires balancing flexibility with adherence to merit system principles, lawful personnel practices, and sound workforce planning. OPM remains committed to supporting agencies in advancing merit-based attorney recruitment practices consistent with Executive Order 14170 and the Merit Hiring Plan.

Questions

Component-level human resources offices must contact their agency headquarters for assistance. For additional information or questions regarding this guidance, please contact OPM at HX@opm.gov or Recruitment@opm.gov.

Appendix A: Assessments For Attorney Hiring

Well-designed assessments ensure candidates have the right skills, improve hiring quality, support merit-based selection, and reduce turnover. OPM is not authorized to develop assessments for attorneys. However, OPM encourages agencies to use appropriate assessments when hiring attorneys. OPM's USA Hire assessments offer standard, off-the-shelf assessments that can be used as an additional assessment.

- USA Hire Standard batteries and/or the Writing Skills Assessment can be used to assess general competencies required of attorneys such as Reasoning, Reading, and Written Communication.
- Accomplishment Records or Structured Interviews are effective methods to assess attorney-related technical competencies, including technical knowledge.

For more information, contact Assessment_Information@opm.gov.

Appendix B: USAJOBS and Attorney Talent Network

USAJOBS RÉSUMÉ SEARCH

Recruiters can search résumés that users have uploaded to USAJOBS via OPM's [Agency Talent Portal](#) (ATP) to find potential attorney job candidates. Use the ATP to identify potential candidates and invite them to apply for job postings, to attend job fairs, and/or to interview.

ATP is free to use with your agency's USAJOBS agreement and offers strategic recruitment tools and services to help federal recruiters, HR specialists and hiring managers. Résumés appear in the ATP résumé search feature when a job seeker makes their résumé searchable in their USAJOBS profile. Currently, there are over a thousand attorney job seekers with shared résumés in ATP.

How to search for résumés across USAJOBS:

1. Obtain access to the [ATP](#) by emailing recruiter-help@usajobs.gov with an attached email from a supervisor stating your need for access ATP (e.g., you are recruiting for Attorney positions).
2. Sign into ATP.
3. Click “Résumé search” from the homepage.
4. Type keywords (skills, certifications or work experiences) and apply filters that relate to your hiring needs.
5. Click on names to view their USAJOBS profile information and résumé.
6. Add job seekers to a campaign and message them about applying to a job posting.

For additional information: <https://atp-help.usajobs.gov/search-résumés>

ATTORNEY TALENT NETWORK

Through the ATP, you can access OPM's government-wide *Attorney Talent Network* feature. This Talent Network contains contact information and résumés for job seekers who have chosen to join the Talent Network due to their current interest in federal attorney jobs. The *Attorney Talent Network* offers a more targeted pool of high-likelihood candidates for attorney positions and is full of users who have converted through OPM marketing and advertising of attorney hiring.

To access the *Attorney Talent Network*:

- Once you can access ATP, email USAJOBSEngagement@opm.gov to get direct access to the Attorney Talent Network in ATP.
- Talent Networks are found by clicking "Talent Search" from the homepage and then clicking "Talent Networks."

Appendix C: Relevant Hyperlinks for Job Seekers

- [Attorney Talent Network](#)
- Link to [Department of Justice Attorney Vacancies Site](#)



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