



Guidance on Agency Leadership Involvement in Implementing the Merit Hiring Plan

This guidance provides direction to Federal Departments and Agencies on implementing the [Merit Hiring Plan](#) (MHP), issued jointly by the Domestic Policy Council and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on May 29, 2025, pursuant to [Executive Order \(E.O.\) 14170](#), *Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service*. The MHP introduces comprehensive reforms to Federal hiring practices to restore accountability, ensure merit-based recruitment, and attract top talent to public service. E.O. 14170 directs Department and Agency leadership, or their designees, to serve as active participants throughout the hiring lifecycle. Consistent with this mandate, Goal #7 of the MHP states: “Ensure Department and Agency leadership, or their designees, are active participants in implementing the new processes and throughout the full hiring process.”

Applicability

This guidance applies to all Executive Branch Departments and Agencies covered under Title 5 authorities, unless otherwise specified.

Leadership Responsibilities

Agency leadership includes the agency’s political leadership (including Department and Agency Heads, Deputy Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Undersecretaries, Chiefs of Staff, and Senior Advisors), its Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), and its Chief Operating Officer (COO). Agency leadership, or their designees, must actively participate in all phases of the hiring process as outlined below.

A. Strategic Hiring Committee Review and Selection Approval

E.O. 14170 directs agencies to establish a Strategic Hiring Committee (SHC) and a process in which their leadership, or designees, review and approve the creation or filling of each vacancy within an agency. This includes a front-end review of the agency’s staffing plan as well as review of a candidate selection package (containing the two-page resume, responses to the optional four essay questions, interview notes, position description, and other relevant materials) and approval of the selection before a tentative job offer is issued. Agencies may establish a headquarters SHC and component SHC and should encourage hiring from cross-government shared certificates, whenever possible. Given its visibility into agency-wide hiring plans, the SHC is also well positioned to recommend the use of shared certificates across the agency and to help ensure that hiring actions incorporate skills-based assessments to identify qualified candidates.

SHC review and selection approval must comply with merit-system principles and lawful personnel practices.

B. Strategic Workforce and Hiring Planning

At the beginning of the fiscal year, and on a quarterly basis thereafter, agency leadership must develop a data-driven hiring plan that targets high-need mission areas. The plan must be informed by agency strategic plans and integrated with agency budget planning. The plan must ensure that resources, billets, and work needs align with agency strategic priorities, authorized headcount, and the MHP.

New career appointments (including individuals entering or returning to Federal service) must conform to the agency's authorized headcount targets and workforce priorities. Workforce planning should also emphasize recruitment of early-career professionals, veterans, to include military spouse hiring, and STEM talent, in accordance with the MHP. Agencies should incorporate early-career talent into their hiring strategies, with a goal of filling one-third of new hires with early-career professionals, consistent with the MHP and mission needs.

Workforce and hiring plans should include projected time-to-hire targets for high-need mission roles, as well as strategies to reduce delays through process improvements, pooled hiring via shared certificates within and between agencies, and early leadership engagement.

Agencies should expand the use of shared certificates to streamline hiring, improve efficiency, and measurably reduce time-to-hire, consistent with the MHP and OPM's guidance.

Additionally, agencies should consider use of shared certificates within the agency or with other agencies as part of their pooled hiring strategy. The agency who makes the selection is the decisionmaker with regards to any appointment or non-appointment to Federal service.

C. Approval of New Positions

Agency leadership must approve the creation and opening of new positions to ensure alignment with mission priorities, evolving operational needs, and to promote accountability in the use of budgetary and staffing resources.

D. Candidate Assessment and Selection

Leadership or designees may participate in the candidate ranking process and selection, including helping to determine pre-certificate assessment strategies and tools (e.g., technical skills tests, structured interviews, writing samples, structured resume reviews, situational judgment tests, and other relevant assessments). All hiring actions must incorporate at least

one validated technical or alternative assessment before issuance of the certificate to evaluate skills and competencies. Self-assessments (e.g., occupational questionnaires) may not be used for ranking candidates except as authorized by OPM.

E. Executive Interview

Agency leadership, or their designee(s), should conduct a final “executive interview” to confirm organizational fit, alignment with agency values, and commitment to public service. The official conducting this interview should be commensurate with the level of the position being filled.

F. Agency Talent Teams

The CHCO must establish and head the agency’s Talent Team. Agency leadership must support their Talent Teams to drive on-the-ground implementation of the recruitment and hiring process reforms outlined in the MHP. The agency Talent Team should expand the use of shared certificates within the agency and cross-government shared certificates to streamline hiring and increase efficiencies.

Agency Talent Teams should routinely analyze time-to-hire data, identify bottlenecks, and elevate recommended process improvements to leadership.

G. Hiring Managers

Hiring Manager Role	Merit Hiring Plan (MHP)/ EO 14170/Laws
Serve as active and accountable participant throughout the full hiring lifecycle.	Goal 7 – Ensures Department and Agency leadership, or their designees, are active participants throughout the full hiring process. EO 14170 – Establishes leadership accountability for hiring outcomes.
Collaborate with Human Resources, agency leadership, and agency Talent Team to define position requirements and support workforce planning.	MHP Goal 7 – Promotes coordinated leadership engagement across hiring roles. MHP Workforce Planning Provisions – Require hiring to be aligned with mission needs, workforce analysis, and authorized headcount.
Support the development and implementation of job-related, validated assessment strategies.	MHP Goal 3 – Expands skills-based hiring and requires the use of validated technical or alternative assessments. MHP Assessment Requirements – Must use at least one technical or alternative assessment before issuance of certificate. Use of self-assessments for rating and ranking is not allowed except as authorized by OPM.
Participate in recruitment efforts, such as hiring events and OPM’s governmentwide recruitment events.	MHP Section I. C. Recruiting Patriotic Americans for Federal Service.

Review available shared certificates and OPM-led cross government shared certificates before initiating hiring action(s).	MHP Section I. D. Expanding the Use of Standardized Position Descriptions, Candidate Inventories, Talent Pools, and Shared Certificates.
Evaluate candidates based solely on merit, qualifications, and job-related criteria and document selection decisions.	Merit System Principles (Section 2301(b) of title 5, U.S.C.)– Core values that must be followed in every human resources decision. Reinforces merit-based, job-related selection. Lawful Personnel Practices (Section 2302 (b) of title 5, U.S.C.)– Ensure fair, objective, and lawful hiring decisions.
Participate in structured interviews and selection activities in coordination with agency leadership.	MHP Goal 7 – Requires leadership engagement throughout the hiring process, including candidate evaluation and selection stages.
Help ensure hiring actions are efficient and aligned with MHP outcome metrics. Reduce time-to-hire to under 80 days by using talent pools, OPM’s cross-government shared certificates, and shared certificates, as applicable.	MHP Goal 4 – Decrease governmentwide time-to-hire to under 80 days. Focuses on improving hiring efficiency and reducing time-to-hire. MHP emphasizes front-end engagement to streamline hiring and improve outcomes.

Implementation and Accountability

Agency leadership must champion the implementation of the MHP by promoting accountability, efficiency, and merit-based recruitment practices across all mission areas. All hiring, recruitment, and advancement actions must be conducted strictly on the basis of merit, qualifications, and job-related criteria, without regard to race, sex, color, religion, or national origin, consistent with Executive Orders [14173](#) and [14151](#).

To ensure accountability, OPM will manage a federal dashboard to track agency compliance with merit reform efforts. The Executive Director of the CHCO Council in consultation with OPM’s Talent Team and Merit System Accountability and Compliance, will prepare a monthly report on governmentwide implementation of the MHP.

OPM will additionally monitor implementation of Merit Hiring implementation through Annual Staffing Plans, quarterly updates, briefings, and trainings. Agencies should coordinate recruitment strategies with OPM, especially as they relate to early career, veterans and STEM.

Questions

For questions regarding this guidance, please contact HX@opm.gov.