

MODULE 1 OF 5

RIF Overview

What changed in the reduction in force rules, when the changes apply, and how a RIF works from start to finish

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Workforce Policy & Innovation

91 FR 49178 (Aug. 3, 2026) | RIN 3206-AO86 | Effective September 2, 2026

As corrected by 91 FR 54794 (Aug. 25, 2026) — non-substantive; effective date unchanged



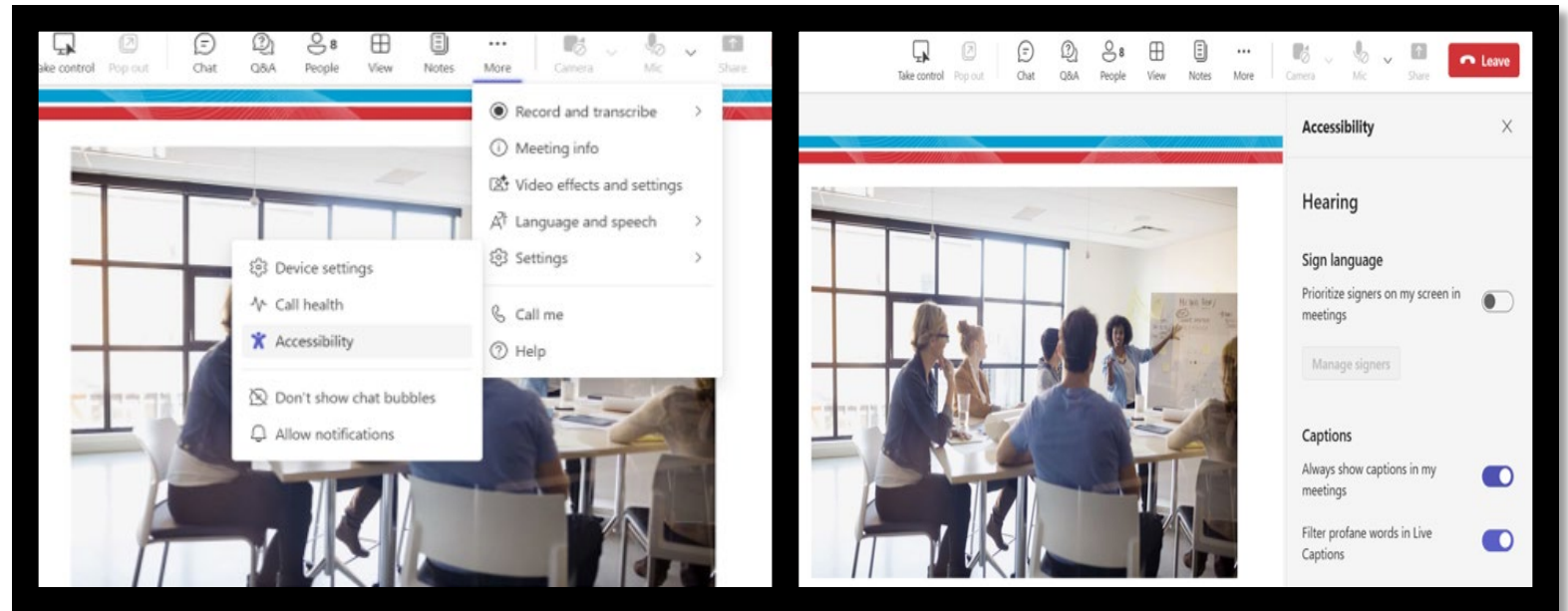
Housekeeping items

- A copy of this presentation is posted on OPM's Reductions in Force (RIF) page: opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/workforce-restructuring/reductions-in-force-RIF
- Ask questions in the Q&A, but please wait until a topic is covered so you are not posting a question that has already been answered.
- Time is built in at appropriate points to take questions.

Enabling live captions

During the meeting

1. In the meeting controls at the top of the screen, select More actions
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3. Select Always show captions in my meetings
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What you will take away

Five outcomes from this module. The mechanics come in Modules 2 through 5.

1 Explain what changed

Describe the new retention order in plain language to a manager, an employee, or a union representative.

2 Say when it applies

Identify which set of rules governs a given RIF, and why the notice date is the deciding fact.

3 Walk the process

Name the nine steps in order and say who is responsible for each one.

4 Do the basic math

Convert three ratings of record into a performance credit and add preference points.

5 Know where to look

Find the right module - and the right regulation - for the question in front of you.

! One ground rule

A RIF is a position action, not a people action. Every step is driven by positions, position descriptions and records.

Performance now comes first

Same four factors required by law. New order, and new arithmetic.

2

Tenure groups, each with its own retention register

3

Ratings of record used, from a four-year window

21

Maximum performance credit before preference points

60

Minimum days of written notice before the action

1

Performance is the primary ranking factor

Each employee gets a numerical performance credit from their three most recent ratings of record. Higher credit means higher retention standing.

2

Veterans preference is added as points

Preference eligibles get 3 points, or 5 with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more, added onto performance credit.

3

Tenure and length of service break ties

Tenure group decides which register you are on. Within a register, tenure subgroup and then service computation date matter only when total scores are equal.

How the ranking changed

Under the previous rules

- Three tenure groups (I, II, III), plus a group 0 designation for temporary appointments
- Veterans preference expressed through three subgroups (AD, A, B) within each tenure group
- Length of service ranked employees through the service computation date
- Performance came last, as extra retention service credit added to the service date
- Placement worked through "bump" and "retreat" rights
- Erosion-of-duties reclassifications required RIF procedures

Under the new rules

- Two tenure groups - competitive service and excepted service - on separate registers, each with subgroups I and II
- Performance credit is the primary ranking factor within each register
- Veterans preference is added as 3 or 5 points on top of performance credit
- Tenure subgroup breaks the first tie; service computation date breaks the second
- One consolidated right of assignment to a position held by a lower-standing employee
- Erosion reclassifications sit outside RIF procedures, with a safeguard once a RIF is announced

Which rules apply to your RIF

The date you issue the notice decides everything - not the effective date of the action.

Notice issued before September 2, 2026

- Process the whole RIF under the prior regulations
- Three tenure groups and three veterans preference subgroups
- Performance as additional retention service credit on the service date
- Bump and retreat placement rights
- Appeal to MSPB, or the negotiated grievance procedure where it is exclusive

Notice issued on or after September 2, 2026

- Apply the amended provisions in full - no mixing, no election
- Two tenure groups, performance credit first
- Preference as 3 or 5 points added to credit
- One consolidated assignment right
- Appeal to OPM, under the separate RIF appeals rule at 91 FR 49230

Who does what

The most common failure in a RIF is HR making management decisions, or management making technical ones.

Management decides

- Reviews and prioritizes mission requirements before anything else
- Decides which functions and positions are no longer needed
- Chooses whether to reorganize, and how the surviving organization is structured
- Decides whether to use voluntary tools first, and whether to fill vacancies
- Decides whether a RIF is necessary at all
- Owns communication with the workforce and stakeholders

Human resources executes

- Stands up the RIF team and inventories the skills it needs
- Defines competitive areas and builds competitive levels from position descriptions
- Verifies records: ratings of record, service computation dates, preference documentation
- Builds retention registers and determines release order
- Determines assignment rights and prepares offers
- Issues notices, counsels employees, and administers RPL, CTAP and ICTAP

Reduce the size of the problem first

Every employee placed or separated voluntarily is one fewer competing employee on a register.

1 Hiring controls

Freeze or restrict external hiring in the affected areas so vacancies stay available for placement.

2 Reassignment and retraining

Move employees into continuing work where they qualify, or where short training closes the gap.

3 VERA

Voluntary early retirement authority, approved by OPM, opens retirement to employees not otherwise eligible.

4 VSIP

Voluntary separation incentive payments, approved by OPM, buy out positions the agency will not backfill.

5 Deferred Resignation Program (DRP)

A voluntary option for eligible federal employees to agree to separate from government service at a later date, with the potential to continue receiving pay and benefits during the intervening period.

6 Attrition and time

Normal turnover during the planning period can absorb part of the reduction if the timeline allows.

7 Shorter furloughs

A furlough of 30 days or less, or 22 discontinuous workdays or less in a 1-year period, is not a RIF furlough.

DOCUMENT IT

Document what you considered and why you rejected it. Managers are routinely asked what alternatives the agency weighed before deciding a RIF was necessary.

Questions

How a RIF works

The nine steps, and where each one is covered in the rest of the training series

Nine steps

1 Define the competitive area

Organizational unit or units from the official organizational chart, approved at headquarters level. Module 2.

2 Build competitive levels

Group interchangeable positions by grade, series and similarity of duties and conditions. Module 2.

3 Identify who competes

Separate competing employees from those excluded and note restoration rights. Module 2.

4 Calculate performance credit

Score the three most recent ratings of record from the four-year window. Module 2.

5 Add preference points

Plus 5, plus 3, or zero, and label the subgroup on the register. Module 2.

6 Rank and set release order

Credit, then tenure subgroup, then service date. Release runs from the bottom up. Module 2.

7 Exceptions, then assignment

Exceptions to the order of release, then one offer of assignment. Module 3.

8 Issue notices

At least 60 days, with all required content and simultaneous notice to the union. Module 4.

9 Counsel, place, and handle appeals

Severance, retirement, RPL, CTAP, ICTAP, WIOA - and any appeal. Modules 4 and 5.

The math you will be doing

Score three ratings, add them, then add preference points.

Summary level	Common descriptor	Points per rating
Level 5	Outstanding or equivalent	7
Level 4	Exceeds Fully Successful or equivalent	5
Level 3	Fully Successful or equivalent	3
Level 2	Minimally Satisfactory or equivalent	0
Level 1	Unacceptable	0

DO THE MATH

Worked example: ratings of Level 5, Level 4 and Level 3 give $7 + 5 + 3 = 15$ points of performance credit. Run your own numbers before the register is built - a single miscoded rating moves an employee a full retention level.

Then you add veterans' preference

Add preference points to the performance credit, then rank.

Vets subgroup	Who is in it	Points added
AD	Preference eligible with a 30 percent or more compensable disability	+5
A	Every other preference eligible employee	+3
B	Employees who are not preference eligible	0

DO THE MATH

Worked example: a performance credit of 15 becomes 20 for a 30 percent disabled preference eligible (AD, +5) and 18 for any other preference eligible (A, +3). Preference augments the performance credit - it does not replace it, and it is applied before any tie-breaker.

Questions

What a register looks like

Ranked by total credit, then tenure subgroup, then service date. Release runs from the bottom.

Rank	Name	Vets subgroup	Ratings	Transmuted score	Total credit	Tenure subgroup	Service date
1	Rivera	B	5 / 5 / 4	$7 + 7 + 5 = 19$	19	I	2018-04-02
2	Singh	A	5 / 4 / 3	$7 + 5 + 3 = 15$	18	I	2013-08-15
3	Morgan	A	5 / 4 / 3	$7 + 5 + 3 = 15$	18	I	2020-01-27
4	Taylor	AD	4 / 4 / 3	$5 + 5 + 3 = 13$	18	II	2023-07-10
5	Nguyen	A	4 / 4 / 4	$5 + 5 + 5 = 15$	18	II	2023-11-06
6	Owens	B	5 / 5 / 3	$7 + 7 + 3 = 17$	17	I	2016-05-12

1

Notice what happens to Owens

Owens has stronger raw ratings than Taylor or Nguyen and seven more years of service than either, but no preference points - and is released first.

2

Expect to explain this repeatedly

Longer service no longer protects an employee with mid-range ratings. Managers and employees will both need to hear this before notices go out, not after.

Three things to remember

1

Positions, not people

Competitive areas and levels are built from organizational units and official position descriptions. Retention standing comes from records. Nothing turns on who anyone would prefer to keep.

2

Performance first, then tenure and service

Total credit - performance plus preference - is the primary factor. Tenure subgroup and service computation date break ties.

3

Document as you go

Advance criteria, calculations, exception justifications, assessment design, offer records. A RIF is defended on its paper trail, and the paper trail cannot be reconstructed afterward.

NEXT MODULE

Next: Module 2, RIF Coverage and Retention Standing - competitive areas, competitive levels, and the four retention factors.

What's next

A short look at what Modules 2, 3, 4 and 5 cover.

2

Coverage and retention standing

Competitive areas and levels, who competes, performance credit, preference points, and reading the register.

3

Release and assignment

Who is released first, and what the single offer of assignment must look like - including the new skills assessment.

4

RIF notices

The 60-day notice and everything it must contain, plus modified notices and the separation package.

5

RIF appeals

Where an appeal goes and by when, what the agency must produce, and the other routes - EEO, OSC, RPL.

THE COMMON THREAD

One thread runs through all four: the notice now discloses the ranking data, so an employee can check your arithmetic. Build the register as though it will be read line by line, because it will be.

Questions

Contact & Resources

Workforce Policy and Innovation (WPI)

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

RIF policy questions and technical assistance: WPIntake@opm.gov

Key Resources

- RIF Resources and Templates — opm.gov/workforce-restructuring
- RIF Quick Reference Guide — 5 U.S.C. Chapter 35 and 5 CFR Part 351
- CHCO Council memoranda — chcoc.gov

Thank You

Please take a moment to complete a short survey to provide your feedback on today's session:

<https://surveys.opm.gov/se/5B5534D40ECFB2F4>

