



## HIRING FLEXIBILITIES GUIDE

[Overview](#)

[Internal Hiring Options](#)

[External Hiring Options](#)

[Students](#)

[Veterans](#)

[Disabled](#)

[Volunteers](#)

### **OVERVIEW**

Hiring managers have a significant impact on their organizations and play an important part in developing the kind of culture that encourages employee loyalty and influences the types of candidates the agency attracts. Both the hiring manager and the human resources consultant should strive to build the organization's reputation as an "employer of choice."

Hiring the wrong person is costly, time-consuming, and counterproductive. In addition to the cost of recruiting and training new employees, consider the additional demands on managers and coworkers when someone leaves, as well as missed opportunities or poor service due to unqualified or inadequate staff.

An integral part of USDA's cultural transformation requires our agency's recruitment goal to build a workforce equipped to meet the demanding needs of its increasingly diverse customer base. Diversity is not viewed as a political ideal, but rather as a business necessity at all levels of the organization. Please keep USDA targeted recruitment and outreach efforts in mind when you select your recruitment strategy and focus efforts on attracting candidates to overcome specific areas of under-representation, such as Hispanics, Asian Americans, veterans, and persons with targeted disabilities.

Hiring options, or hiring authorities, are regulatory requirements under which certain individuals are eligible to be hired. These options may enable hiring managers to set aside more traditional hiring procedures to select the best person for the job. Your HR consultant will help you determine what the options are and which are appropriate for your situation.

---

### **INTERNAL HIRING OPTIONS**

*Applies to Current Federal Employees*

# PLANNING YOUR RECRUITMENT

---

The following pages provide a brief description of various ways that a vacant position can be filled within your organization with current Federal employees. There may be additional requirements for positions subject to local bargaining agreements. Contact your HR professional for more information on these options.

## **Detail**

A detail is a temporary assignment to an unclassified set of duties (no established job series or grade level) or to a position at the same, lower or higher grade. When employees serve on a detail, there is no change in their pay, and they do not need to meet the full qualification requirements of the position to which they are detailed.

However, they must meet positive education requirements, professional certification, and licensure requirements where applicable.

Under the General Schedule (GS) and the Federal Wage System (FWS), details may be made in 120-day increments.

Details to higher-graded duties may be made without competition up to 120 days (under GS and FWS). Certain rules may apply pertaining to your local collective bargaining agreement and/or merit promotion plan for details to a position at a higher grade.

## **Reassignment**

A reassignment is a permanent assignment of an employee to another position at the same grade. When an employee is reassigned to a position with *promotion potential* to a higher grade level, competition is usually required.

## **Change to Lower Grade**

An employee can accept a permanent reassignment to a position at a lower grade level. Competition is usually required if the position has promotion potential to a higher grade level.

## **Transfer**

A transfer is the movement of an employee to your organization from a Federal agency outside of USDA. Under GS or FWS, the transfer may or may not involve a grade change. Competition is usually required if the position has promotion potential to a higher grade level.

## **Promotion**

A promotion is a time limited or permanent assignment of an employee to a position at a higher grade level. Employees may receive temporary promotions up to 120 days in a 12-month period without competition.

## **Noncompetitive Promotion**

An employee who has previously held a position on a permanent basis under career or career-conditional appointment at or above the grade level of the position to be filled may be noncompetitively promoted. Since the employee previously served in a permanent position at the higher grade, he/she must only meet the qualification requirements of the position.

## **Career Ladder Promotion**

A “career ladder” is the term used to describe a position that is filled at an entry level to allow an employee to develop, through training, to the full performance level. The promotion of an employee within a career ladder is made without competition.

# PLANNING YOUR RECRUITMENT

---

## **Merit Promotion**

Merit Promotion refers to the placement, promotion, transfer, reassignment and other movement of competitive service employees. One of the primary objectives is to staff our mission areas and staff offices with the best qualified candidates while enhancing employees' careers by giving all employees a fair chance to compete for advancement.

The underlying principle of Merit Promotion Programs is the identification, qualification, evaluation, and selection of candidates based solely on job-related criteria with legitimate position requirements.

Positions filled through merit promotion may use an automated application and referral tool. When an individual job opportunity announcement is used, applicants apply under the specific announcement.

## **EXTERNAL HIRING OPTIONS**

### ***Applies to General Public, Former Military Members, Former Federal Employees, or Spouses of Relocating Military Members***

The following provides a brief description of various ways that a vacant position can be filled from outside the current Federal work force. Each section addresses a different category of external hiring options. Contact your HR consultant for more information on these options.

#### **Former Overseas Employees**

##### **Hired Under Executive Order 12721**

Appointments may be made to eligible employees returning to the United States. In order to be eligible, the employee must have received a fully successful performance rating and must have worked overseas for a total of 52 weeks in an appropriated fund position(s) under a local hire appointment(s) while accompanying a family member who was officially assigned overseas. The qualifying family member may have been:

- a Federal civilian employee;
- a non-appropriated fund employee; or
- a uniformed service member.

Eligibility is limited to three years following the date of return from overseas to the United States to resume residence.

#### **Noncompetitive Appointment of Certain Military Spouses**

A military spouse may be noncompetitively appointed to a temporary, term or permanent position. Eligibility for this noncompetitive hiring option falls into these major categories:

- A spouse of a U.S. Armed Forces service member serving on active duty (not for training) for more than 180 days provided the spouse relocates to the member's new permanent duty station.
- A spouse of a U.S. Armed Forces service member who is retired from active duty with a documented service-connected disability rating of 100%.
- A spouse of a U.S. Armed Forces service member who retired or was released or discharged from active duty and has a disability rating of 100% as documented by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- A spouse of a U.S. Armed Forces service member killed while on active duty. In this case, the spouse must be the un-remarried widow/widower of the deceased service member to meet eligibility.

## PLANNING YOUR RECRUITMENT

---

Eligibility is limited to a maximum of two years from the date of documented eligibility and the geographical area indicated on the service member's permanent change of station (PCS) orders.

Similarly, but without regard to the duty location of the position, the spouse of a 100% disabled veteran and the unmarried widow or widower of a military member who was killed while on active duty may also apply through job opportunity announcements.

Additionally, the spouse must have been married to the service member at the time the service member received their orders to relocate, became 100% disabled, or was killed.

Supporting documentation required may include:

- a copy of the marriage or death certificate
- a copy of the PCS Orders
- a copy of the member's DD-214
- Veterans Administration (VA) documentation

### **Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Mobility Program**

The Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Mobility Program provides for the temporary assignment of personnel between the federal government and state and local governments, colleges and universities, Indian tribal governments, federally funded research and development centers, and other eligible organizations. The goal is to facilitate the movement of employees for short periods of time that serves a sound public purpose. Mobility assignments may be used to achieve objectives such as:

- assisting the transfer and use of new technologies and approaches to solving governmental problems;
- facilitating an effective means of involving state and local officials in developing and implementing federal policies and programs; and,
- providing program and developmental experience which will enhance the assignee's performance in his or her regular job.

IPA assignees are usually detailed to or from USDA and remain on their home organization's payroll in an active pay status while on assignment. Salary and benefits continue to be administered by the home organization. IPA assignments are subject to the following provisions:

- The initial IPA assignment may be approved for up to two (2) years with extensions for an additional two (2) years, not to exceed four continuous years.
- Employees, both federal and non-federal, serving under an IPA for four (4) continuous years must take a 12-month break before being eligible for further assignments.

NOTE: Breaks in assignments of at least 60 days require a new agreement and are not considered in calculating time limits for purposes of defining "continuous".

### **Delegated Examining**

- This hiring option allows you to fill temporary, term or permanent vacancies where the source of applicants is generally candidates who are non-federal or cannot be appointed under any other method.
- Some servicing HR offices have Delegated Examining Authority for GS and FWS positions to issue individual announcements that are open to the general public.
- Candidates are certified under Category Rating procedures, with veterans receiving preference within a quality category. Generally, all veterans in the same quality category as nonveterans must be selected

## PLANNING YOUR RECRUITMENT

---

before consideration may be given to a nonveteran. Provisions are available for valid requests for passing over of veterans.

- Your HR consultant can advise you of your selection options when the certificate is issued from the servicing HR office.

### **Term Appointment**

- Term appointments are usually for work of a project nature where there is uncertainty of future funding or where a function is scheduled for abolishment.
- An individual may be hired to perform work that is expected to last for more than one year, but no longer than four years (under GS and FWS).

### **Temporary Appointment**

- Temporary appointments are usually for meeting a temporary workload peak, completing a project, or meeting a staffing need that is going to be terminated by abolishment.
- An individual may be hired to perform work that is expected to be up to one year, but no longer than two years (under GS and FWS). The initial appointment may be no longer than one year, but may be extended one additional year.
- Temporary appointments extended beyond a total of two years must be approved by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

### **Reinstatement Eligibles**

- Reinstatement is the re-employment of former Federal government employees. Individuals with reinstatement rights may be noncompetitively placed in positions at grades equal to or lower than the grade they previously held on a permanent basis.
- Filling a position with a reinstatement eligible can be a quick method of filling a position, especially when the supervisor is able to *name request* an individual with previous experience.
- Reinstatement eligibles may also compete under merit promotion procedures for positions at higher grades or with higher promotion potential than they previously held.

### **Re-employed Annuitants**

- An annuitant (retired federal employee) under either the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) or Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) may be employed in any position for which he or she is qualified. Re-employed annuitants may be hired on a temporary or indefinite basis.
- Employment of annuitants is beneficial to management in that it provides a readily available source of highly qualified candidates to meet critical mission needs (e.g., for a position that is hard to fill, a position that is critical to accomplish the organization's mission, or when the annuitant has unique or specialized skills or unusual qualifications).
- Some restrictions apply to rehiring civilian employees who received voluntary separation incentives.
- As part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2009, OPM authorized on January 8, 2010, Federal agencies to grant dual compensation (salary offset) waivers on a *temporary basis*. The use of the authority must adhere to specified circumstances. For example, use of the authority may be warranted to fill a function critical to the mission of the agency or responding to emergency situations. Appointments are limited to one year or less, and the hours worked by any annuitant employed under these provisions are limited to 520 hours during the first six (6) months of retirement, 1,040 during any 12-month period, and 3,120 total hours worked during any period.

# PLANNING YOUR RECRUITMENT

---

## **Interchange Agreements**

Agreements exist between agencies to allow employees to move from the excepted service to the competitive service. Interchange agreements exist with:

- Department of Defense Non-Appropriated Fund *effective 9/20/91; extended indefinitely*
- Department of Homeland Security, Transportation and Security Administration *effective 2/1/05; expires 1/31/13*
- Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs *effective 10/16/57; extended indefinitely*
- Tennessee Valley Authority *effective 10/16/57; extended indefinitely*
- Nuclear Regulatory Commission *effective 5/12/87; extended indefinitely*
- Corporation for National and Community Service *effective 7/29/05; expires 7/28/12*

## **Expert or Consultant Appointments**

- Agencies may appoint experts and consultants to excepted service appointments in positions that primarily require performance of advisory services, rather than performance of operating functions, without regard to competitive civil service requirements.
- A manager may use expert and consultant appointments for individuals who have been nominated by the President, but not yet confirmed. In addition, a manager may use this authority to appoint individuals whose permanent excepted appointment is pending. The individual and the work assigned must comply with the expert or consultant requirements in 5 CFR, part 304.
- Agencies may not use expert and consultant appointments to avoid employment procedures or solely in anticipation of a competitive appointment.
- An expert and consultant appointment authority may not be used to fill positions in the Senior Executive Service (SES). However, if a position meets the criteria for placement in the SES, OPM may authorize a limited appointment authority to appoint an individual during the transition period.

## **30-Day Critical Needs Appointments**

- Excepted service appointments can be made for a period not to exceed 30 days to meet a short-term, critical need or to fill continuing positions on an interim basis pending completion of competitive examining, clearances, or other procedures required for a longer appointment.
- This type of appointment can be extended for an additional 30 days; however, an individual may not be employed under this authority for more than 60 days in a 12-month period.
- This type of appointment cannot be used to extend another type of temporary appointment.

## **DIRECT-HIRE APPOINTMENT OPTIONS**

- When there is a severe shortage of candidates or a critical hiring need, OPM may approve specific direct-hire options for filling temporary, term, or permanent positions.
- Using a direct-hire option expedites the recruitment process by enabling a job offer to be made to a qualified candidate at a recruitment event, such as a job fair, as long as the servicing HR office has an open vacancy announcement for the occupation and there are no candidates under a mandatory placement program, such as the Priority Placement Program.

## **Government-wide Direct Hire Authorities:**

### **Medical Occupations**

The occupations covered under this direct-hire option are the Medical Officer, GS-602; Nurse, GS-610 and GS-620; Pharmacist, GS-660; and Diagnostic Radiologic Technologist, GS-647. Effective 6/20/03; no expiration date Veterinary Medical Officers at the GS-11 through GS-15 grade levels nationwide to include overseas

## PLANNING YOUR RECRUITMENT

---

territories and commonwealths including Puerto Rico, Guam and Virgin Islands. Effective 2/12/09; no expiration date.

### **Information Technology Management (Information Security) Gs-2210 Positions**

This option is for position at or above the GS-9 level in support of government-wide efforts to carry out the requirements of the Government Information Security Reform Act and the Federal Information Security Management Act. Effective 6/20/03; no expiration date

### **Acquisition Positions**

The positions covered by the USDA direct-hire authority are GS-1102 Contract Specialist positions at the GS-05 through GS-07 grade levels. Effective 9/30/07; expires 9/30/12.

**Positions Involved In Iraqi Reconstruction Efforts** that require fluency in Arabic or other related Middle Eastern languages.

## **STUDENTS**

**Pathways Program** (OPM.Gov/hiringreform/pathways/program/interns)

- **Internship Program for Students**
- **Recent Graduate Program**
- **Presidential Management Fellows Program**

### **Student Volunteer Program**

- Agencies may provide educationally-related work assignments for student volunteers on a non-pay basis.
- The student must be enrolled at least half-time in a high school, trade school, vocational institute, university, or other accredited educational institution.
- The school and the USDA organization sign a work agreement outlining each party's responsibilities; including any academic credit that may be earned.
- No time limits have been established for these appointments, as long as the student continues to meet program requirements.

For additional information go to USDA's Volunteer Service Policy or OPM website.

## **VETERANS**

### **Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA)**

- The VRA is a special option by which agencies can appoint an eligible veteran without competition. The candidate does not have to be on a list of eligibles, but must meet the qualification requirements for the position.
- Most candidate eligible for appointment as a VRA, however, apply under Merit Promotion announcements.
- The VRA is an excepted appointment to a competitive service position up to the GS-11 level (or equivalent). Positions filled through a VRA can have promotion potential higher than GS-11.
- After two years of satisfactory service, the veteran is converted to a career conditional appointment in the competitive service.

## PLANNING YOUR RECRUITMENT

---

### **Veterans' Employment Opportunity Act (VEOA)**

When an agency accepts applications from outside the USDA, the Veterans' Employment Opportunity Act of 1998 (VEOA) allows eligible veterans to compete for these vacancies under merit promotion procedures. Veteran's who are selected may be appointed at any level and are given career or career conditional appointments in the competitive service.

### **30% or More Disabled Veterans**

- Veterans who have a current notice of a service connected compensable disability of 30% or more from the Veterans Administration may be appointed at any level and without competition.
- The disabled veteran is appointed to a temporary position lasting longer than 60 days or to a term position. The employee may then be converted without competition to a career or career conditional appointment at any time during his or her temporary or term appointment.

Hiring U.S. veterans makes sense. Veterans have the training, work ethic, and proven skills that will immediately add value to any organization.

# 10 Reasons To Hire Veterans

- 1. Accelerated learning curve.** Veterans have the proven ability to learn new skills and concepts. In addition, they can enter your workforce with identifiable and transferable skills, proven in real-world situations. This background can enhance your organization's productivity.
- 2. Leadership.** The military trains people to lead by example as well as through direction, delegation, motivation, and inspiration. Veterans understand the practical ways to manage behaviors for results, even in the most trying circumstances. They also know the dynamics of leadership as part of both hierarchical and peer structures.
- 3. Teamwork.** Veterans understand how genuine teamwork grows out of a responsibility to one's colleagues. Military duties involve a blend of individual and group productivity. They also necessitate a perception of how groups of all sizes relate to each other and an overarching objective.
- 4. Diversity and inclusion in action.** Veterans have learned to work side by side with individuals regardless of diverse race, gender, geographical origin, ethnic background, religion, and economic status as well as mental, physical, and attitudinal capabilities. They have the sensitivity to cooperate with many different types of individuals.
- 5. Efficient performance under pressure.** Veterans understand the rigors of tight schedules and limited resources. They have developed the capacity to know how to accomplish priorities on time, in spite of tremendous stress. They know the critical importance of staying with a task until it is done right.
- 6. Respect for procedures.** Veterans have gained a unique perspective on the value of accountability. They can grasp their place within an organizational framework, becoming responsible for subordinates' actions to higher supervisory levels. They know how policies and procedures enable an organization to exist.
- 7. Technology and globalization.** Because of their experiences in the service, veterans are usually aware of international and technical trends pertinent to business and industry. They can bring the kind of global outlook and technological savvy that all enterprises of any size needed to succeed.
- 8. Integrity.** Veterans know what it means to do "an honest day's work." Prospective employers can take advantage of a track record of integrity, often including security clearances. This integrity translates into qualities of sincerity and trustworthiness.
- 9. Conscious of health and safety standards.** Thanks to extensive training, veterans are aware of health and safety protocols both for themselves and the welfare of others. Individually, they represent a drug-free workforce that is cognizant of maintaining personal health and fitness. On a company level, this awareness and conscientiousness translate into protection of employees, property, materials and a healthier workforce.
- 10. Triumphs over adversity.** In addition to dealing positively with the typical issues of personal maturity, veterans have frequently triumphed over great adversity. They likely have proven their mettle in mission critical situations demanding endurance, stamina, and flexibility. They may have overcome personal disabilities through strength and determination.

# PLANNING YOUR RECRUITMENT

---

## **People with Disabilities Employment Program**

People with disabilities may be hired through the traditional competitive hiring process or, if they qualify, noncompetitively through the use of excepted service appointing options.

Excepted service appointing options for hiring people with disabilities were developed to provide an opportunity to people with disabilities to show that they can do the job and to circumvent the attitudinal barriers that managers and supervisors may have concerning people with disabilities. It is emphasized that candidates must be fully qualified and be able to perform the essential functions of the position with or without reasonable accommodation.

There are two ways to hire people with disabilities noncompetitively:

- People with disabilities may be certified as eligible by the state vocational rehabilitation agency or Department of Veterans Affairs. Employees may be converted to competitive status after two successful years of job performance.
- People who are severely disabled may also be hired noncompetitively after completion of a 700-hour appointment. This trial appointment allows people with disabilities to demonstrate their ability to do the job. If successful, employees may convert to a continuing Schedule A appointment without certification.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Several agencies throughout USDA hire volunteers to serve on various programs and initiatives such as our Earth Team, Health Studies and The People's Garden. In addition, we hire student volunteers and those individuals whose knowledge, skills and abilities assist in furthering the mission to serve our diverse agricultural industry.

The authority for USDA to establish volunteer programs is found in the Food and Agricultural Act of 1981, 7 U.S.C. 2272.

Additional information may be obtained from the following or your HR professional for agency guidance and procedures to follow.

- Departmental Regulation #4230-001 Volunteer Programs
- OPM Volunteer Fact Sheet