

THE HIRING PROCESS



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HIRING PROCESS

(ˈhɪər-ɪŋ präs-,es)
noun

A series of actions or operations by which jobs are filled.

FURTHER READING

Government Accountability Office, "Human Capital: Status of Efforts to Improve Federal Hiring," GAO-04-769T (June 2004).

Extreme Hiring Makeover.
<www.extremehiringmakeover.org>

Partnership for Public Service, "Asking the Wrong Questions: A Look at How the Federal Government Assesses and Selects its Workforce," 2004.

Government Accountability Office, "Human Capital: Opportunities to Improve Executive Agencies' Hiring Processes" GAO-03-450 (May 2003).

Bilmes, Linda, and Jeffrey Neal. "The People Factor: Human Resources Reform in Government." *For the People: Can We Fix Public Service?* Ed. John D. Donahue and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. Brookings Institution, 2003.

The federal government is our nation's largest employer, with nearly 1.9 million employees. Ensuring that it has the manpower it needs means hiring about 100,000 permanent employees per year.

Filling these posts with qualified workers will become increasingly difficult in the coming years. Half of all federal employees will be eligible to retire by 2008, there is an increasing need for talent in highly-competitive technical and professional fields, and less than one in four recent college graduates – and just one in five A students – say they are very interested in government service.

However, the biggest challenge that agencies must overcome to hire talented personnel is the hiring process itself.

OBSTACLES TO TALENT

While the myriad of rules and procedures governing federal hiring decisions were designed to ensure equity and consistency, three elements of this process are now key obstacles to securing talent:

1. *Time*. On average, according to a 2002 Government Accountability Office report, it takes more than three months to hire a new employee. Often, the process extends over six months and with security clearances it can take over a year. Yet a 2002 Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates survey found that more than two-thirds of college students are unwilling to wait more than one month for the federal government to make an offer.
2. *Complexity*. In some cases, federal job application instructions can be up to 35 pages in length. The applications themselves are often filled with irrelevant questions, jargon

and acronyms that are incomprehensible to those new to government service.

3. *Efficacy*. There is often poor communication between federal managers and HR professionals on the qualities and skills needed in a candidate. Further, the self-reporting assessment instrument used by most agencies to determine whether individuals possess these characteristics is considered the least effective tool available.

Those individuals who make it to the end of this process are often not the most qualified for the position. In fact, in the 2004 Federal Human Capital Survey less than half of government workers said that their work unit is able to hire people with the right skills.

MOVING FORWARD

Congress and the Administration have taken a number of steps to combat these hiring problems. The passage of the Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004 provided agencies with the ability to tailor recruitment and retention incentives to their needs. In recent years, the Office of Personnel Management overhauled the federal hiring website and set a new 45 day target for hiring decisions. Yet, the task of making the hiring process work ultimately falls to the agencies and their leaders.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The federal hiring process is so daunting that it often reinforces applicants' worst fears of government as an ineffective, unresponsive and incomprehensible bureaucracy. Only by insisting that agencies make recruiting talent a top priority and that both agency leaders and managers are held responsible for results can we ensure that the government recruits the talent it needs to meet the challenges ahead.



To learn more about the Hiring Process, please visit www.ourpublicservice.org or email research@ourpublicservice.org