



# WHAT'S MY ROLE

A Step-by-Step Hiring Guide for Federal Managers

OCTOBER 2010



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to revitalize the federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works.

## Introduction

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Hiring new employees can be a time-consuming and challenging task for federal managers who face many pressing, daily obligations. Making the time to build the right team, though, is one of the most critical elements of success for your unit, agency, and ultimately, for our government.

For federal managers, this means hiring must become a primary leadership responsibility and not perceived simply as a human resources function. Smart hiring decisions, in fact, provide the foundation for developing a high-performing workforce, successfully delivering services and implementing federal policies and programs.

This document is a step-by-step guide designed to help you as a federal manager fully understand the crucial part you must play in this important process, and how you can work closely with other key agency colleagues to ensure that top-flight candidates are chosen for job openings. Before we outline the hiring steps, some background is needed.

Too often, federal offices or work units are hampered by chronic understaffing or staff capacity not properly aligned to achieve desired outcomes. This jeopardizes the ability of government agencies to properly fulfill their missions and requires that immediate and thoughtful attention be devoted by managers and supervisors to the recruitment, hiring and retention of talented professionals.

The goal is to get the best workers with the right skills in the right jobs. Unfortunately, research conducted by the Partnership for Public Service has shown that the federal hiring process has become more of a hindrance than a help on the path to building a first-class federal workforce. But change is under way. And you are part of that change.

As a federal manager, you are most familiar with the work that will be done by a prospective new employee, and you are the best evaluator of the talent, skills and abilities needed for the job. You also have a stake in making sure the best person is matched with the job that needs to be filled in your organization.

President Obama has recently initiated a major overhaul to the way the federal government recruits and hires its civilian workforce. On May 11, 2010, the president issued a memo to his Cabinet and other agency heads citing the “complexity and inefficiency of today’s federal

hiring process,” and declaring that it is keeping “many highly qualified individuals from seeking and obtaining jobs in the federal government.”

Among other changes, the president called for a more hands-on approach from federal managers in the hiring of new talent. Specifically, he directed agency heads to “require that managers and supervisors with responsibility for hiring are ... more fully involved in the hiring process” as well as being “accountable for recruiting and hiring highly qualified employees and supporting their successful transition into federal service.”

President Obama’s memo makes clear that one key to overhauling the lengthy and cumbersome federal hiring process is for federal managers to have greater input in filling their workforce needs. It is also incumbent upon human resources professionals to streamline the process and for both parties to collaborate toward a common goal.

Your job as a federal manager with hiring responsibilities involves five basic steps:

- 1** Understand your Workforce Needs
- 2** Partner with Human Resources
- 3** Recruit a Pool of Qualified Job Applicants
- 4** Hire the Best Person for the Job
- 5** Onboard the New Employee

Typically, the first step should take place before you have a staff opening. Waiting until you are short-staffed to fully understand your workforce gaps and needs will result in delayed completion of the task, depleting your work group’s resources and negatively affecting your productivity. Depending on your mission, this can increase the possibility of compromised safety or security. Step 2 should be an ongoing and collaborative relationship throughout the entire hiring process. Steps 3 and 4 will generally take place after an opening has been identified. And Step 5 will require preparation and work before and after the position has been filled.

Each section of this guide includes a brief description of what each specific step entails, followed by some tips to get you moving in the right direction. Along the way, you’ll also find examples of best practices or good ideas. And at the end of this guide, you’ll find a worksheet filled with questions to assist you in this process. Now, let’s get started.

**STEP 1****Understand your workforce needs**

Before you can begin to think about the person you want to hire for a given position, you first must analyze your workforce needs. No one understands those needs better than you, as the manager of your work area.

Workforce planning typically begins with an assessment of the types of individuals you need to perform your work now and in the future, followed by contrasting that outlook with the current state of your work unit. It helps to look at both the number of people needed to perform the key mission activities within your office and to identify the competencies required. Ask yourself what specific skills or behaviors, in addition to technical knowledge, your ideal candidates should possess. To assist in the development of your workforce plan, you should consult with those in your agency who may have workforce planning experience or expertise.

Understand that both internal and external forces, including the economy, changes in mission, retirements of key personnel and budget changes will impact your workforce plan. You also will want to analyze how effectively your current talent roster can meet mission priorities, goals and targets, and how expected changes will affect your work unit.

**TIPS FOR STEP 1**

- Work with HR to acquire relevant data, such as attrition rates and retirement eligibility.
- Discuss with HR and others how you will cope with mission changes, the economy, new funding cycles, retirements and changing workforce trends.
- As you develop your workforce plan, consider your unit's balance of new and experienced talent, and whether that balance will continue to serve you well.
- Your workforce plan ultimately should provide a clear picture of your mission priorities, goals and targets, and your capacity to achieve results with your current staff, both now and in the future.
- Become aware of the desire of current staff to be promoted within your department and how that could alter your capabilities.

**STEP 2****Partner with human resources**

Clear and focused communication between your office and HR increases your chances of hiring top talent. In concert with HR, develop plans that leverage your respective knowledge and resources across technical, HR and policy areas. Helping HR staff understand your organization's specific needs, which you outlined in Step 1, will help engage HR in collaborative planning to meet those needs. This collaboration will result in better candidates, a faster hiring process and increased chances of success.

Set up a committee comprised of HR representatives and members of your staff who can work together on Steps 3 and 4: recruiting and hiring. For a small organization, this committee may be comprised of only you and an HR representative. Perhaps you aren't co-located with your HR office and they're in another region of the country. Or maybe your agency uses a shared services model. Get creative. Try virtual meetings. You could work with your IT office to pilot free video chat through Google Chat or Skype on your computer, or try a teleconference.

The group should meet regularly to discuss upcoming hiring actions, recruiting strategies and events, and onboarding, including training and development opportunities. This group can also provide feedback on your strategic workforce plan, helping you with data collection, as necessary. Set clear measurable goals and targets for the committee as a whole and for each member of the committee. Then, check your progress against these goals to keep the committee on track.

Informal approaches, such as periodic check-ins between you and your HR colleagues can strengthen the partnership. Don't let strained relationships or a history of miscommunication get in the way—it's your work unit that will benefit. Getting everyone on the same page early and often will go a long way in avoiding frustration.

Your employees also care deeply about the mission of their organization and the importance of the work they do, and you can leverage their strengths as you establish your hiring committee. Not only does their involvement help you in the hiring process, but it's also good leadership. It can be a nice and welcome change for staff, an opportunity to develop or hone communication skills, and a wonderful motivator for those who might enjoy representing their agency at conferences or on recruiting visits to universities.

**TIPS FOR STEP 2**

- Set up a hiring committee charged with establishing the framework for recruiting and hiring new employees. HR representatives and members of your own organization should make up the committee.
- Open, honest and empathetic communication with HR will go a long way.
- Identify strategic outreach opportunities to help recruit a diverse and talented applicant pool.

**WORKING TOGETHER AT DOT**

Chartered as a 19-member working group with professionals from both HR and acquisition offices, the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Acquisition Workforce Taskforce is a cross-section of representatives from DOT's agencies. The taskforce established clearly defined roles and responsibilities and met regularly to produce an Acquisition Workforce Manual that addresses workforce planning, recruiting, retention and employee engagement. This kind of proactive collaboration built mutual trust and a shared sense of accountability between HR and hiring managers in pursuit of a common goal.

**STEP 3****Recruit a pool of qualified job applicants**

Making sure you get the best available talent to apply for the job is essentially a three-part process: identifying your current needs based on the recently vacated or newly created position; composing a job announcement; and publicizing the opening to all appropriate avenues for recruitment. This is the perfect opportunity to continue to utilize the committee that you established in Step 2.

**Identifying needs**

This is where the workforce plan that you developed in Step 1 comes in handy. Apply the plan to your current situation based on the position that has become available. It may be that the way the job has been handled in the past is not the way you need the job to be handled in the future. Job duties, and the skills necessary to perform them, may change as your work unit evolves. By analyzing your group's mission and skill needs, you will be better able to conceptualize what you need and how best to find it as you proceed with recruitment and hiring.

**Composing a job announcement**

The best job announcements are those that attract the most qualified candidates. As such, they should start with an accurate and interesting description of the position, comprised of a clear, concise job summary and the job's career progression; the job duties, requirements and assignments; qualifications for the position; an explanation of how applicants will be evaluated; and, certainly, how to apply. Your hiring committee is essential for this task. Using your job analysis as a guide, the committee will be able to decide on the selection criteria that will determine the viability of job candidates.

Write the announcement for the lay reader. It is common for the position description (PD) to be used in drafting the announcement. Remember that the PD was written for a different purpose and a different audience. Speak to the things that would most resonate to an applicant—how the job fulfills the organization's mission, not just the tasks that will have to be performed. Try to think about what language would attract a talented person to this job.

**Publicizing the opening**

You should already have a pretty good idea about how to get the word out about your open staff position. Through your work in Step 2, your hiring committee and HR should have a thorough list of distribution points. For example, HR will handle posting the position on USA-

JOBS.gov, while other members of your hiring committee may have specific ideas about how to target specific audiences. Targeted outreach is crucial to ensuring a diverse applicant pool. Also, be sure to spread the word to your peers and others who may know good candidates. For specific ideas on creative places to publicize your job opening, see Tips for Step 3.

As you collaborate with HR on getting the word out about your job opening, be prepared to share your contacts, professional association connections and other potential talent sources. Together, you can identify whom to notify about job openings and who will take the lead in conducting additional outreach.

One good place to start is by examining where you have historically had success in recruiting top talent. Look over the resumes of current employees, ask members of your staff how they heard about their current job, and then pursue those channels.

Also, do a quick search for historically black colleges and universities or Hispanic-serving institutions and strike up new relationships at those schools. Or reach out to diversity organizations at large educational institutions. Identify a point of contact at each new organization or school that can refer candidates to your agency and alert your office to recruiting events and opportunities. Often a faculty member, career service professional or academic advisor who regularly interacts with your target population is in the best position to publicize your job openings. This requires regular communication to maintain those relationships and keep your contacts up to date. Building a multiyear presence and establishing solid relationships requires effort, but it will pay off many times over by creating trusted candidate pipelines for the future.

Use student programs and entry-level internships and fellowships to strengthen talent pipelines. Your best opportunity to evaluate a person's skills, attitude and growth potential is when they work as interns and fellows in your organization. Look for their potential to join your team as possible full-time, permanent employees of the future.

Smart recruiting goes beyond posting job announcements. After your hiring committee has narrowed the candidate pool, it may be helpful to use a more personal touch in your contact with applicants. This should include designating someone to answer questions or provide status updates to applicants. These simple actions make all the difference in keeping candidates interested until an offer is made.

### TIPS FOR COMPLETING STEP 3

- Start by reviewing your workforce needs and how those apply to this particular job opening.
- With the final position description in hand, work with HR to conduct a job analysis. This analysis will help you determine the specific skills and knowledge needed to perform the job.
- Develop a short, interesting job announcement that describes the position, duties and requirements, as well as an explanation of the hiring process and how to apply that can be posted on USAJOBS.gov and elsewhere.
- Publicize the job opening as appropriate. Specifically, consider the following options:
  - Establish Campus Liaisons: Identify members of your team who would be effective at building relationships with a university. Connecting people to their alma maters can bring an added dimension that will help to build strong and lasting relationships with schools that produce the talent you seek.
  - Call on Interns: Ask former interns and recent graduates to be recruiters on campus and at career fairs—they are often the best ambassadors for your agency. They also could be good job candidates themselves.
  - Use Social Media: Work with your agency's office of public affairs to develop a social media strategy that your office and HR can use to reach potential job candidates. In accordance with your agency's guidelines, you may want to establish a Facebook fan page, Twitter account, post videos on YouTube, network on LinkedIn or other social media platforms.
  - Integrate with Other Efforts: Take stock of existing recruiting materials and ask HR what information would be helpful to them when talking about your open positions. Tailor existing materials by adding an insert or supplemental flyer about your job opportunities.

**STEP 4****Hire the best person for the job**

This step of the hiring process begins once applications are submitted. It involves: a careful, team-driven review of applications to determine which candidates are most qualified and deserving of interviews, based on merit; communicating with applicants and setting up interviews with top prospects, whether remotely or in person; discussing with the candidates all aspects of the job, your organization and its mission; and, ultimately, choosing the top candidate.

You will have already established a procedure for all of these efforts thanks to your talent committee in Step 2. Careful planning will help streamline and expedite the hiring process by eliminating redundancy, frustration and delay.

**Reviewing applications**

HR typically will receive applications and conduct an initial review of candidates. You should select someone from your hiring committee to stay in touch with HR during this process. Using the criteria that you established during Step 3, HR will be able to sort the applications into appropriate groups, producing the candidates who are the best matches for the job.

**Communicating with and interviewing candidates**

Once you have established a pool of viable candidates, you should contact those applicants to set up interviews. Contrary to popular belief, there is a right way and a wrong way to conduct interviews to most accurately assess a job candidate. Ask experts within your agency and outside for guidance on how to conduct successful structured interviews.

Your HR office should have procedures that detail when and how to appropriately communicate with applicants. In most cases, the task of notifying candidates that their applications have been received is automated and handled by HR. If not, ask if HR has basic correspondence templates that can be tailored to your needs. This is a good time to reinforce the great benefits of working at your agency and provide a point of contact who can answer questions.

**Discussing the job**

You should have a clear message about your organization and mission, and straightforward descriptions of the job to be filled. One smart approach is to develop a 30-second pitch—often referred to as an elevator speech—that explains in plain English what your office does and how it relates to your agency's mission. Then,

go over this message with all the members of your hiring committee so that they will all be able to communicate with a consistent voice to applicants.

**Picking the right person for the job**

Your committee will gauge top candidates on how well their skills and abilities line up with your hiring needs. It may be that one candidate stands out above the rest or it's possible that you will have several highly qualified individuals. In either case, this task is a crucial part of the overall process. Keep in mind that your agency is only as good as its people.

**TIPS FOR STEP 4**

- Select someone from your staff to work with HR to review applications and evaluate candidates based on the hiring criteria identified in the job announcement.
- Contact applicants using a standardized process to ensure fairness and efficiency.
- In talking about the job to applicants, make sure all members of the hiring committee share the same key messages and talking points.
- Choose the top candidate based on how well that person matches your needs.
- Once the job offer is accepted, work with HR to make certain that all required forms and documents are collected, expediting the hiring process and eliminating confusion.

**STEP 5****Onboard the new employee**

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Onboarding is the process of integrating new employees into an organization and equipping them to become successful and productive. The new employee's supervisor should drive this process. Before the first day, she/he should send a welcome packet that orients the new employee to the position and agency. The first day for new employees ought to begin with training and support that familiarizes them with office procedures and practices and prepares them to take on and successfully perform their work assignments.

The welcome packet for your new employee should combine useful information with a friendly greeting. Put simply, it should provide them with tools to help them feel comfortable in their first day on the job and basic knowledge to start them on a productive career with the federal government. This might include a personalized welcome letter; first-day logistics; benefits information; and a summary of job, agency and department missions. You should also let them know that you are available to answer questions they might have about their new job.

With long-term retention of the new talent as a primary goal, you should work with your HR staff to develop an organized orientation program to create a positive first impression. You should also establish a year-long program to drive employee engagement. Once on board, the new employee should plan on regular meetings with you, members of his or her team, and HR. The assessment process continues throughout this first year. During this time you will make the final determination as to whether this new employee is right for this position, particularly if the new employee is also new to federal government and subject to the probationary period.

New employees play an important role in fulfilling the agency's mission. Including them at the outset goes a long way toward making your new employees view themselves as value-add to your organization. Educate them about the agency's mission and goals, and inform them of how their individual performance goals link to office goals, which are themselves in support of the agency goals and attainment of the mission. Engage them as appropriate in strategic planning and in identifying how your agency will meet its objectives.

Take active steps to promote professional development to nurture the learner in all of us. You can encourage your employees to seek out rotational programs in which employees spend a period of time working di-

rectly with customers or on projects of a different size or scope than their normal assignments. Such rotations also build knowledge across the agency, allowing for idea exchanges that can lead to process improvements and other benefits to the agency.

**TIPS FOR STEP 5**

- Work with HR to determine who will send a welcome packet with important information (e.g. benefits and first-day logistics) and welcome letter.
- Arrange for new employees to meet key stakeholders from other areas of your agency.
- Develop plain-English performance standards and establish clear ties to agency mission.
- Provide meaningful work for the new employee—either training or substantive work related to the new job.
- Study the results of employee feedback surveys such as the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings ([bestplacestowork.org](http://bestplacestowork.org)) to identify key factors about why employees leave and what will help retain high-performers.

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**BEST PRACTICES**

The Partnership's report, "Getting on Board: A Model for Integrating and Engaging New Employees" ([ourpublicservice.org/publications](http://ourpublicservice.org/publications)), emphasizes that onboarding is a year-long experience and should include a structured plan for new employees to meet with their supervisors and mentors to identify what additional guidance, support or information they need. Agencies should measure the effectiveness of their onboarding programs by routinely administering surveys to new employees 90 days after they have started and using that information to continuously improve.

By now, you should have a firm grasp of the importance of hiring the right workers with the right skills for the right jobs. By understanding your workforce needs, partnering with human resources and recruiting a pool of qualified job applicants, you will be able to hire the best person for the job. And by properly onboarding the new employee, you will maximize the value of your investment in new talent by increasing their opportunity for greater productivity and the likelihood they will stay with the agency.

Good government starts with good people. Finding those people, hiring them, and keeping them on board is essential for revitalizing our federal government and transforming the way our government works.

## WORKSHEET

### QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU WITH THE HIRING PROCESS

#### STEP 1

- To assist you in developing your workforce plan: What necessary skills are in short supply on your staff?
- How do you anticipate your skills shortage changing in the near term due to anticipated workforce changes? What about over the long term?
- How are the demands on your organization—and your staff—changing?
- Will your work unit’s mission be changing in the months or years ahead as a result of larger changes in your agency or department? What are those changes?
- What new technical and managerial skills will you need?
- Do you utilize outside contractors? If so, do you anticipate an adjustment in this practice, and why?
- Will national occupational trends or economic cycles affect your work area?

#### STEP 2

- Are you familiar with the HR representatives who have responsibility for your program area?
- Do you know if members of your staff have previous experience as hiring managers? Have you approached them about participating on your hiring committee?
- What key features have been successful in filling jobs in the past? Where is there room to innovate or think creatively?
- Which recruitment avenues will be pursued by HR and which will be handled by your office?

#### STEP 3

- Is recruiting just a distribution of business cards with instructions to “go to the website” or do you have a more proactive approach?
- Do you pursue ongoing relationships in support of your recruiting, or do you stop recruiting after HR posts an announcement on USAJOBS.gov?
- When putting together the job announcement, is the language appropriate for the intended audience? Is

it filled with jargon that would make it difficult to understand? What are the current recruiting processes for your positions?

- Do you recruit students and send your staff, particularly the recently hired, to college campuses?
- Do you or members of your hiring team visit classrooms to inform students and professors about their field and available positions?
- Is the HR staff representing your agency equipped to explain your job needs at career fairs?
- Have the current recruiting approaches worked in getting the right professionals for the job? If not, why?

#### STEP 4

- How efficient is your hiring process? Could any unnecessary steps be eliminated or modified?
- Which member or members of your hiring committee will take the lead on assessment?
- What are the key messages you want to communicate to job candidates about the job? Do all members of your committee know these messages? Are these messages mission critical?
- Could you schedule interviews during a three-day window to expedite your candidate assessment process?

#### STEP 5

- Do you have a template for a welcome letter to the new employee? Does HR have one?
- Have you made yourself available to answer the new employee’s questions?
- Have you established a career path for the new employee?
- Do you have a clear training schedule and milestones for an employee’s first year?
- What do new employees need to know to become productive as quickly as possible?
- Does the new employee have any special needs or accommodations that you need to take into consideration before they begin work?





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