



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

The Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Heads of Departments and Agencies

FROM: Scott Kupor, Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management

DATE: December 15, 2025

RE: Building the AI Workforce of the Future

The Federal government faces critical skills gaps, particularly in the areas of technology, artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, data science, and project management.¹ Too often, agencies lack the technology expertise and leadership required to upgrade and modernize technology systems. In addition, the Federal government “struggles to recruit qualified early career talent.”² To effectively lead in the AI race, the Federal government must rapidly close these gaps.

President Trump’s AI Action Plan calls for the Federal government to “[c]reate a talent-exchange program designed to allow rapid details of Federal staff to other agencies in need of specialized AI talent (e.g., data scientists and software engineers).”³ Additionally, the Merit Hiring Plan directs the Federal government to build pipelines of high-skilled early career and technology talent.⁴ It specifically calls for the Federal government to “build fellowship programs and professional/industry exchange programs that connect government employers with top private-sector talent” and expand Federal internship programs.⁵

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has unique authorities and expertise regarding Federal hiring.⁶ In the coming months, OPM will establish a suite of Federal talent programs to rapidly address critical workforce needs. Together, these programs will provide agencies with access to top-quality talent in technology, cybersecurity, AI, data science, and project management to deliver the most skilled technology workforce in the history of the U.S. government and help win the global race for AI dominance.

¹ See White House Domestic Policy Council & OPM, [Merit Hiring Plan](#), at p. 5 (May 29, 2025) (“The Federal government struggles to recruit and retain top STEM talent.”); Government Accountability Office (“GAO”), [Improving Program Management: Key Actions Taken, but Further Efforts Needed to Strengthen Standards, Expand Reviews, and Address High-Risk Areas](#), GAO-20-44 (Dec. 13, 2019) (noting critical skills gaps in the Federal government in program and project management).

² White House Domestic Policy Council & OPM, [Merit Hiring Plan](#), at p. 4 (May 29, 2025).

³ President Trump, [America’s AI Action Plan](#), at p. 11 (July 2025).

⁴ See White House Domestic Policy Council & OPM, [Merit Hiring Plan](#), at pp. 4-6, 14-16.

⁵ *Id.* at p. 15.

⁶ See 5 U.S.C. § 1104(a).

Through the workforce planning processes set forth in Executive Order 14356, [*Ensuring Continued Accountability in Federal Hiring*](#) (October 15, 2025), and in partnership with the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (“OMB”), OPM will ensure that agencies have set aside sufficient slots and budgetary resources for these initiatives. These fellowship and internship programs will combine centralized administration and recruiting of talent with de-centralized hiring and onboarding at the agency level to precisely match personnel with the needs of agencies. In implementing these programs, OPM will aid in the initial assessment and screening of applicants, executing on key aspects of Executive Order 14170 and the Merit Hiring Plan by using skills-based assessments in recruiting and selecting candidates and executing cross-government hiring actions.⁷ OPM will engage with the private sector, universities, community colleges, trade schools and non-profits to recruit early career candidates, and partner with select private sector companies and institutions to source highly-skilled technology personnel. OPM will additionally coordinate with agencies to provide training, development and recognition opportunities.

I. U.S. Tech Force

The U.S. Tech Force will provide agencies with top technical talent to serve 1- or 2-year fellowships with the Federal government. It will also consist of experienced technical managers sourced from the private sector who will lead and mentor the larger team of earlier career technologists, with the teams reporting directly to the agency head or designee. The U.S. Tech Force program will rapidly infuse Federal agencies with specialized technical expertise in emerging fields like AI, cybersecurity, data science, and software engineering.

The U.S. Tech Force will consist of annual cohorts of 1,000 Fellows who will be hired into and funded by agencies. This scale will give the U.S. Tech Force program the critical mass and range of skills that previous initiatives lacked and ensure the program can deploy sufficiently large teams to participating agencies. The Fellows will include early career candidates along with experienced managers hired from the private sector to serve 1- or 2-year terms in the Federal government. All applicants will take rigorous assessments to determine their skill level. Fellows would be appointed under Schedule A(r) of the excepted service.⁸

The U.S. Tech Force Fellows will gain unique skills and experience working on important, high-impact projects, giving Fellows the opportunity to implement and deploy technology at scale in ways they could not do in the private sector. OPM will manage outreach, recruitment, and assessment of the Fellows, and it will track Fellows through program completion. The U.S. Tech Force program will be overseen by the OPM Director, in regular consultation with the OMB Director, the Federal Chief Information Officer, the Administrator of the General Services Administration, the Director of the National Science Foundation (“NSF”), the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, the Assistant to the President for Science and Technology Policy, the Special Advisor to the President for AI and Crypto, and the White House Public Liaison. This group of consulting officials will serve as a governance, oversight, accountability, and coordination mechanism. It will also oversee efforts to improve Federal employment practices to close critical AI skills gaps.

⁷ See Executive Order 14170, [*Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service*](#) (January 20, 2025); White House Domestic Policy Council & OPM, [*Merit Hiring Plan*](#), at pp. 5-8, 16-18.

⁸ See 5 C.F.R. § 213.3102(r).

While OPM and the aforementioned officials will provide centralized oversight and administration, U.S. Tech Force fellows will be hired by and onboarded directly into each agency, with teams of about 30-40 individuals at most large agencies.⁹ The U.S. Tech Force leaders in each agency will report directly to the agency head or designee. Work assignments and objectives will be set directly by the agency head (or designee) and in coordination with agency CIOs. This structure reflects that technology specialists will not be maximally effective without a broader, coordinated team of technology personnel. It also ensures that the fellows have a clear mandate from, and direct report to, agency leadership. In addition, this structure will best foster team cohesion and mentorship.

In sum, the U.S. Tech Force Program will serve several key purposes. It will:

- Attract top AI, cyber, and data experts into public service.
- Help address the early-stage career gaps in government.
- Provide mid-career technologists a pathway to serve without requiring a permanent transition.
- Build a network of tech alumni with Federal experience.
- Increase Federal domain expertise through collaboration with onboarded experts.
- Deploy teams of technologists to high-impact agency projects.
- Rapidly infuse managerial talent for high-priority initiatives.
- Accelerate adoption of AI and emerging technologies across government.

OPM will initiate the first pilot wave of this program by Spring 2026 with the first on-cycle cohort by September 2026.

II. Project Management and Data Science Fellows

The Project Management Fellows and Data Science Fellows programs are new programs that will help to fill longstanding critical skills gaps in project management and data science by expanding talent pipelines in these areas. Closing skills gaps in these two areas is essential to ensuring the efficient use and rapid scaling of AI across the Federal government.

The Project Management Fellows and Data Science Fellows programs will infuse agencies with skilled project management and data science professionals. The Fellows will be vetted through rigorous, multiple-hurdle assessments in a competitive hiring process using a cross-government application process, in alignment with key parts of the Merit Hiring Plan.¹⁰ For project management candidates, this process will incorporate a project and program management assessment and a writing skills assessment to evaluate both technical expertise and communication. Data science candidates will complete a tailored set of technical and analytical assessments designed to validate applied expertise in data methods and problem-solving. Agencies would then make selections from shared certificates, reducing duplicative recruitment actions and accelerating access to a high-quality talent pool across government. Together, these programs will

⁹ For purposes of this provision, covered agencies include those listed in 31 U.S.C. § 901(b)(1).

¹⁰ White House Domestic Policy Council & OPM, [Merit Hiring Plan](#), at pp. 4-6, 11, 13-17, 19.

address immediate skills gaps in project management and data science and create a pipeline of leaders capable of driving modernization and AI adoption across the Federal government.¹¹

Project management has long been identified as an area where the Federal government faces a critical skills gap.¹² Effective program and project management are essential to ensuring that Federal programs and projects meet their intended purposes, meet time and budget targets, and are managed effectively.¹³ The Project Management Fellows Program will provide agencies with skilled project managers to lead mission-critical initiatives; increase on-time, on-budget delivery through professionalized project management practices; infuse fresh perspectives into agencies; and position the Federal government to execute on implementation of AI initiatives. OPM will begin the Project Management Fellows Program in Spring 2026 with a cross-governmental competitive hiring action, with a target of 250 fellows hired across government

The Federal government also faces a skills gap in data science. Effective use of AI across government will require that the government modernize and improve its data practices.¹⁴ The Federal government lags private industry in making effective use of data, and skills gaps in data science threaten to prevent the government from using AI to its full potential.¹⁵ Thus, President Trump's AI Action Plan recognized data science as a key skill needed to drive AI adoption.¹⁶ The Data Scientist Fellows Program will help close this critical skills gap. OPM will begin the Data Science Fellows Program in Spring 2026 with a cross-governmental competitive hiring action, with a target of 250 Fellows hired across government.

To ensure a strong applicant pool, OPM will leverage centralized outreach through USAJOBS and dedicated program websites, private industry, and select universities, non-profits, and professional associations. The programs will feature standardized career paths across agencies, cohort-based mentoring, and integration with data science and AI governance and oversight structures. OPM will work with agencies to ensure that fellows gain access to appropriate training, leadership development, and networking opportunities.

III. “Semester of Service” Student Volunteer Service Program

The Federal government has authority to accept volunteer service from students.¹⁷ When implemented properly, Federal student internships can expand mission capacity while giving students meaningful public-service experience and the opportunity to earn college credits. In

¹¹ By concentrating on specialized, high-demand fields, these new fellowships deliver higher-impact and more cost-efficient pipelines than the now-terminated Presidential Management Fellows program.

¹² GAO, *Improving Program Management: Key Actions Taken, but Further Efforts Needed to Strengthen Standards, Expand Reviews, and Address High-Risk Areas*, GAO-20-44 (Dec. 13, 2019) (noting critical skills gaps in the Federal government in program and project management).

¹³ *Id.* at p. 1.

¹⁴ See OMB M-19-18, *Federal Data Strategy - A Framework for Consistency* (June 14, 2019).

¹⁵ See Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence of the National Science & Technology Council, *The National Artificial Intelligence Research and Development Strategic Plan: 2019 Update* (June 2019).

¹⁶ President Trump, *America's AI Action Plan*, at p. 11 (July 2025).

¹⁷ See 5 U.S.C. §3111 and 5 C.F.R. part 308.

practice, however, Federal student internships are not used as widely or effectively as they could be. Agency approaches are fragmented, forms and waiver language vary, documentation and onboarding are inconsistent, and there is little government-wide oversight or visibility. OPM, with its government-wide hiring authorities and mandate to close critical skills gaps, is positioned to standardize and scale this function.

OPM will establish a single, government-wide “Semester of Service” Student Volunteer Program with a toolkit that drives awareness and standardizes processes, model agreements and documentation, clear roles for schools and supervisors, and baseline mentoring/training guidance, while leveraging existing agency channels and systems. OPM will assemble and maintain a central talent pool of interested students through outreach to universities, community colleges, and technical and vocational schools, and will ensure that a broad representation of universities, community colleges, trade and technical schools outside of major metropolitan areas are included. Agencies would be responsible for making selections from this pool along with day-to-day supervision. OPM will work with agencies to ensure that a substantial number of internship positions outside of the Washington, D.C. area are available to students. Agencies would also be responsible for providing projects to OPM that they would like the interns to work on. OPM will partner with schools and agencies to ensure robust cohorts each term and that students may gain college credits through the internship program.

This model will promote consistent practices across government; faster, simpler onboarding for offices with semester-length project needs; and a broader, more reliable pipeline of students. The first cohorts would focus on students in technology programs, with an initial target of 200 student interns, and would scale to additional career fields based on demand.

IV. Fostering the Future

On November 19, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14359, [*Fostering the Future for American Children and Families*](#), which directs agencies, in consultation with the Office of the First Lady, to develop strategic partnerships to increase educational and employment opportunities for young Americans who have been in the foster care system. As part of this effort, OPM will collaborate with Federal agencies to identify internships and early-career employment for youth and young adults who have experienced foster care via the Pathways Program, a special government hiring authority for early career talent.¹⁸ In addition, OPM will build a dedicated applicant portal and incorporate a speaker series and other professional development activities to help participants build skills, networks, and confidence to succeed in the range of opportunities available through Federal service.

V. Other Early Career Recruitment Initiatives/Points of Contact

In the coming months, OPM will work with agencies to build early career talent pipelines of highly-skilled Americans “committed to improving the efficiency of the Federal government, passionate about the ideals of our American republic, and committed to upholding the rule of law

¹⁸ See 5 C.F.R. part 362.

and the United States Constitution.”¹⁹ To this end, OPM will lead efforts to use the Pathways Program and other hiring authorities “to build and maintain a strong talent pipeline of students, recent graduates and other early career talent” and support targeted recruitment efforts in alignment with the Merit Hiring Plan.²⁰ OPM will work with agencies to increase their percentage of early career hires to build a strong talent pipeline for the Federal government, and ensure that these early career opportunities are distributed widely across the country. OPM requests that agencies designate one non-career appointee along with one member of their Agency Talent Team to lead these efforts, and identify those individuals to OPM at AIworkforce@opm.gov no later than December 22, 2025.

OPM additionally requests that agencies identify points of contact for U.S. Tech Force, Project Management Fellows, Data Science Fellows, Semester of Service, and Fostering the Future and identify those individuals to OPM at AIworkforce@opm.gov no later than December 22, 2025.

For questions about any of these programs, please contact OPM at AIworkforce@opm.gov.

cc: Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs), Deputy CHCOs, Human Resources Directors, Chiefs of Staff

¹⁹ Executive Order 14170, [Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service](#) § 2(b)(i) (January 20, 2025); White House Domestic Policy Council & OPM, [Merit Hiring Plan](#), at p. 4.

²⁰ White House Domestic Policy Council & OPM, [Merit Hiring Plan](#), at pp. 4-5.