



Merit Hiring Plan Frequently Asked Questions

On May 29, 2025, the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy and the Acting Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), issued a [joint memorandum](#) communicating the Merit Hiring Plan in response to the January 20, 2025, Executive Order 14170, [Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service](#). This document provides guidance through the frequently asked questions below to assist agencies in implementing the joint Merit Hiring Plan memorandum.

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General Implementation

Q1 - Are all agencies, to include small and independent agencies, covered by the Merit Hiring Plan?

Response: Yes. All agencies, including independent agencies, are required to comply with the requirements and implementation of the Merit Hiring Plan.

Q2 - Do agencies need to follow the requirements in the Merit Hiring Plan when filling positions covered by unique personnel systems and authorities that are outside of Title 5?

Response: While not all aspects of the Merit Hiring Plan apply to non-Title 5 personnel systems and authorities, agencies using personnel systems and authorities outside of Title 5 should align their processes with the Merit Hiring Plan to the greatest extent practicable. For example, agencies should ensure their practices end racial discrimination in Federal hiring, recruitment, retention, and promotion and, to the extent practicable, use at least one technical assessment to identify top talent. Agencies should reach out to OPM with questions on whether a particular non-Title 5 personnel system and authority is within the scope of the Merit Hiring Plan.

Q3 - Are agencies serviced by shared service providers excluded from the implementation of the Merit Hiring Plan?

Response: No. Agencies who use a shared service provider are not excluded from complying with the Merit Hiring Plan, unless the agency is otherwise exempt from the Merit Hiring Plan. Agencies should work closely with their shared service providers to ensure elements of the Merit Hiring Plan are being implemented on their behalf.

Q4 - How soon do the requirements of the merit hiring plan (resume limit, 4 essay questions, ending self-assessments) have to be implemented?

Response: Agencies should begin implementing the requirements of the Merit Hiring Plan immediately and follow any guidance issued by OPM on these features.

Specifically, agencies should immediately:

- End racial discrimination in Federal hiring, recruitment, retention, and promotion;
- End use of self-assessments for rating and ranking;
- Incorporate at least one technical assessment into the hiring process; and
- Use the four short essay questions (Constitution, Efficiency, Executive Orders, Work Ethic).

Q5 - Can we wait to implement the Merit Hiring Plan until the hiring freeze lifts on October 15?

Response: No. Agencies with positions exempt from the hiring freeze should immediately begin implementing the requirements of the Merit Hiring Plan.

Q6 - My agency is not part of the Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs) Council, how do we participate in activities related to the Merit Hiring Plan?

Response: Non-CHCO Council agencies can participate through the Small Agency HR Council (SAHRC). SAHRC leadership forwards applicable communications from the CHCO Council to its members. For more information on the SAHRC, please contact HX@opm.gov. In addition, the Inspector General community can participate in implementation and receive updates via the Council of Inspector Generals on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE).

Reporting Requirements

Q7 - What are the agency reporting requirements related to the Merit Hiring Plan?

Response: Agencies are required to upload monthly Action Plan updates (with sheet 2) to their folder on the Connect.gov [Merit Hiring Plan Page](#) due on the last business day of each month and to complete the online quarterly survey when received.

Talent Teams

Q8 - Who is the OPM Federal Talent Team?

Response: The OPM Hiring Experience (HX) Group, in partnership with the various program areas across OPM, will serve as the OPM Federal Talent Team. The OPM Federal Talent Team can be reached at HX@opm.gov.

Q9 - My agency already has a Talent Team; does it need to change?

Response: No. If your agency already has a Talent Team with proven, strong performers who possess key functional and occupational expertise as required by the Plan, are aware of the requirements of the Plan, and are engaged in implementing it at the agency, then no changes are needed.

Q10 - How do I make changes to my Talent Team?

Response: The primary Talent Team POC should complete the Agency Talent Team tab (sheet 2) of the Merit Hiring Action Plan with any changes to Talent Team members and upload it with the Merit Hiring Action Plan due on the last business day of each month to their folder on the Connect.gov [Merit Hiring Plan Page](#).

Q11 - How will small agencies without the staff or resources establish a Talent Team?

Response: OPM will work with small agencies to cluster agencies with similar hiring needs under one Talent Team. If a small agency lacks resources to establish a Talent Team, it should alert OPM to its resource concerns and request to be clustered with other agencies.

Q12 - What are agencies without a delegated examining unit expected to do for establishing Talent Teams?

Response: Agencies should identify proven, strong performers who possess key HR technical and operational expertise to support the hiring of the agency. OPM can meet with your agency to discuss your talent acquisition needs and plans to achieve the merit hiring reforms.

STEM and Early Career Talent

Q13 - What are the parameters or definitions that OPM uses for STEM positions?

Response: STEM encompasses a wide array of roles such as Civil Engineers, Computer Scientists, Economists, IT Cybersecurity Specialists, and Mathematical Statisticians. Professionals in these roles utilize their expertise in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to foster innovation and address real-world challenges.

In 2024, OPM extended the [Direct Hire Authority](#) (DHA) that included STEM, acquisitions, and cyber positions, through the end of 2028 to include additional positions.

In addition to the IT Cybersecurity Specialists* (2210 series), the extension now covers Criminal Investigators* (1811 series) at the GS-12 to GS-15 grade levels, Computer Engineers (Cybersecurity) at the GS-12 to GS-15 grade levels, and other related cybersecurity positions. Please see the DHA for the full list of positions and grade levels covered by the authority.

* These positions must require IT knowledge and IT competencies, the work must be coded to include cybersecurity functions as supported by the job codes in the: [Guide to Data Standards](#) and the [NICE Cybersecurity Workforce Framework, 2017](#), and the cybersecurity work must be performed the majority of the time.

Q14 - What are the parameters or definitions that OPM uses for Early Career Talent positions?

Response: Early career talent refers to a spectrum of potential applicants from students and trainees through those who have less than 5 years of experience. Agencies may use a variety of recruiting activities and hiring authorities when filling early career positions. Any such activities should be in alignment with the recruitment initiatives and strategies set forth in the Merit Hiring Plan, particularly Appendix 1. OPM will be providing additional guidance regarding the recruitment initiatives set forth in the Merit Hiring Plan.

Pooled Hiring Actions

Q15 - Will agencies be required to use OPM centralized (cross-government) hiring actions for common occupations or will agencies have flexibility to initiate recruitment efforts for these occupations?

Response: Agencies have the discretion to fill positions through any available hiring mechanism (consistent with law and the requirements of the Merit Hiring Plan). However, when an existing cross-government or agency shared certificate exists, agencies are strongly encouraged to review the certificate of eligibles and consult with their agency Shared Certificate Coordinator before initiating a new hiring action. In addition, when hiring for a position series that is common across the Federal government, agencies should consult with their agency Shared Certificate Coordinator and the OPM Federal Talent Team before initiating a new hiring action. Agencies can realize the efficiencies, in both time, resources and candidate quality, when using a ready-made certificate of eligibles and engaging in a cross-government hiring action.

There are three main mechanisms agencies use to share certificates: 1) internal certificate sharing within a department or agency; 2) under the provisions of the [Competitive Service Act](#) (CSA), external certificate sharing with other departments or agencies hiring for the same positions filled under delegated examining; and 3) OPM-run cross government certificates. OPM-run cross-government certificates are created using

subject matter experts (SMEs) from across agencies to ensure identification and assessment of common job requirements meet the needs of multiple agencies to maximize the number of hires made from a single job announcement rather than each agency running its own action.

Through the workforce planning process, agencies are to identify positions, including those that require critical and specialized skills, needed across multiple agencies for which recruitment actions and certificates of eligibles could be shared within the agency or with other agencies as part of a governmentwide pooled hiring strategy. Agencies should consult with their Talent Pool Manager and use the Talent Pools feature in the USAJOBS [Agency Talent Portal](#) to share and receive certificates. Agency Talent Teams are to collaborate with the [OPM Federal Talent Team](#) in the identification and use of cross-government announcements and utilizing CSA shared certificates across agencies to reduce government-wide time-to-hire.

Qualification Standards

Q16 - Will OPM make any changes to the job qualifications standards, such as degree requirements for certain occupational series?

Response: Yes. OPM is conducting a pilot project, the Skills-Based Hiring for Information Technology (IT) Management Positions Project, to transition the IT Management job series to fully skills-based hiring by the end of 2025. This job series includes mission-critical, in-demand technical positions such as product managers, software developers, and AI specialists, each requiring a variety of technical skillsets. OPM is preparing to issue updated qualifications guidance for the IT 2210 series, which will serve as a prototype for other job series. Previously, OPM released updates to the [General Schedule Qualifications Operating Handbook](#), integrating competency-based requirements and assessments as a core policy for qualifying talent.

Assessments

Q17 - What is the definition of technical assessment?

Response: The Chance to Compete Act of 2024, [Public Law 118-188](#), defines a “technical assessment” as a position-specific tool that allows for the demonstration of job-related skills, abilities, knowledge, and competencies; is based upon a job analysis; and does not solely include or principally rely upon a self-assessment for automated examination (see [5 United States Code \(U.S.C.\) 3304\(a\)\(9\)](#)).

Q18 - Will agencies have time to phase out use of self-assessments for rating and ranking?

Response: Federal hiring initiatives have been moving in this direction for almost a decade, with slow progress made. Use of more rigorous assessments in the hiring process will ensure selections are made from the highest quality candidates.

Therefore, agencies have until September 30, 2025, to stop using self-assessments for rating and ranking, except for positions at the GS-4 level and below, seasonal positions, and Federal Wage System positions filled under Job Element examining procedures. Agencies may continue to use self-assessments (or occupational or assessment questionnaires) to screen applicants on minimum qualifications and eligibilities, such as veterans' preference and displaced employee programs.

Q19 - What is considered a self-assessment?

Response: Self-assessments allow applicants to self-evaluate or self-certify a certain level of proficiency (e.g., I am a "Novice" or "Expert") based on a series of questions, usually statements of tasks to be performed on the job. Further, self-assessments delivered through talent acquisition systems typically allow applicants to change their self-evaluations while the job opportunity announcement is open. The most commonly used self-assessment in Federal hiring is an occupational questionnaire, also known as an assessment questionnaire.

Q20 - Are USA Hire assessments self-assessments?

Response: No. Assessments delivered through USA Hire are not self-assessments. The USA Hire Program provides Federal agencies with both off-the-shelf and customized competency-based assessments that meet the definition of technical assessments as described in the Chance to Compete Act. Assessments delivered on USA Hire were developed based on job analysis and followed applicable professional and legal standards. Since inception, a goal of the USA Hire Program has been to provide high-quality, competency-based assessments as an alternative to the self-assessments delivered through USA Staffing.

Q21 - Are agencies required to use multiple assessments and/or multiple hurdles or just one technical assessment?

Response: Agencies are required to use at least one technical or alternative assessment before issuance of a certificate of eligibles. Agencies are strongly encouraged to use two assessments to ensure a rigorously ranked certificate of eligibles. Additionally, agencies should continue to develop and use skills-based and multi-hurdle assessments, especially for mission critical occupations.

Q22 - What is the difference between multiple assessments and multiple hurdles?

Response: **Multiple assessments** involve the use of two or more assessment tools to gather information about individuals' competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics) related to the job. In the hiring context, this information is used to

rate and rank applicants in preparation for issuing a certificate of eligibles, including eliminating applicants who fail to meet the required minimum, if a required minimum, or passing grade, is established.

Multiple hurdles involve the administration of assessments in sequential steps. After each assessment is administered, it is then scored. Applicants who score below a predetermined threshold fall out of the process. Applicants not eliminated proceed to the next assessment or step in the process, eventually leading to a final rating used for placement on a certificate of eligibles.

Q23 - If an agency uses a structured interview, is that done before or after issuing a certificate of eligibles?

Response: A structured interview can be administered either before or after issuing a certificate of eligibles. Note, to meet the requirement in the Merit Hiring Plan to include at least one technical assessment before issuance of the certificate, the structured interview needs to be conducted before issuing the certificate if this is the only technical assessment used.

Agencies can use a post-certificate structured interview to further evaluate referred candidates; however, the results of the interview cannot be used to re-rate or re-rank applicants on the certificate.

Q24 - Many of the assessments, e.g., USA Hire assessments, require funding that small agencies don't have. How are small agencies expected to use USA Hire assessments if they don't have the resources?

Response: Agencies are not required to use USA Hire assessments, but they are recommended in the Merit Hiring Plan as a best practice. Appendix 5 of the Merit Hiring Plan provides examples of technical and alternative assessments that agencies may consider using, which agencies may develop at little to no cost (e.g., structured interviews). Agencies are also encouraged to make selections from pooled hiring and shared certificates that use USA Hire assessments. Agencies should ensure that they are budgeting and allocating resources to fully implement the Merit Hiring Plan, as implementing the Plan is a key administration priority.

Four Short Essay Questions

Q25 - Do the four short essay questions have to be included in every job opportunity announcement?

Response: The four short essay questions (Constitution, Efficiency, Executive Orders, Work Ethic) must be used on all competitive service job opportunity announcements open to the public graded at GS-05 or above, except for job announcements for teacher, Wage Grade, and seasonal positions. While it is not a requirement to use these questions

for competitive merit promotion hiring (both internal and external), agencies are encouraged to do so.

Agencies may exempt other positions from use of the questions in their discretion, where they determine that such an exemption is appropriate for the position. Agencies should keep documentation in the case file as to why such an exemption was granted.

Q26 - How are applicant answers to the 4 essay questions used?

Response: Answers to these questions are not scored or rated. Agencies should treat responses to these questions in the same way they would treat the submission of a cover letter. The questions give candidates an opportunity to provide additional information about themselves, their background, and dedication to public service, but must not be used as a means of determining whether the candidate fulfills the qualifications of a position. The questions also must not be used to impose an ideological litmus test on candidates. If an applicant does not answer the questions along with their application, they are not disqualified or screened out.

Q27 - Who should review applicant answers to the 4 essay questions?

Response: Answers to the four essay questions are reviewed only by the hiring manager and agency leadership (or a designee), as part of an application packet forwarded to the manager and later to agency leadership if the candidate is recommended for selection. Hiring managers and agency leaders or designees must only use the questions in accordance with [Merit System Principles](#), and should additionally be mindful of [Prohibited Personnel Practices](#).

Q28 - Are agencies required to include the 4 short essay questions for Senior Technical/Senior Leader (ST/SL) positions?

Response: Yes, these positions are included in this requirement.

Two-Page Resumes

Q29 - When does the 2-page limit on resume length go into effect? Will there be a phase out timeline?

Response: OPM is granting a transition period for agencies to implement the 2-page resume. This transition period will end on September 27, 2025, at which time applicants will be required to adjust their resume to the new 2-page limit before applying to a Federal job through USAJOBS. This transition period ensures that applicants are not immediately penalized and have ample opportunity to revise their resumes accordingly.

Agencies will need to consult with their talent acquisition system (TAS) provider on a technical solution for how to handle resumes that are directly uploaded into the TAS during the application process.

Q30 - Will applicants be required to certify whereby if they do not comply in submitting only a 2-page resume, they will be disqualified from further consideration?

Response: No. USAJOBS is building a technical solution that will prevent applicants from applying to Federal jobs with a resume longer than 2 pages.

The requirements for completing the application process should be clearly stated in the job opportunity announcement, including the submission of a 2-page resume and any other supporting documentation required by the hiring agency. Applicants should adhere to the requirements outlined in the job opportunity announcement. Limiting the number of pages ensures that the most relevant experience is reviewed and considered, which is a common practice in both the public and private sectors. Agency reviews should focus on the relevance of the skills and experiences presented.

If an applicant does not comply with submitting all the required documentation as stated in the announcement, they will be removed from further consideration. This action should be documented and supported by the instructions included in the announcement, merit principles, and applicable laws.

Q31 - Will there be updates/changes to guidance provided to applicants (through USAJOBS or some other mechanism) on how to ensure their 2-page resumes meet the requirements for determining qualifications for Federal positions?

Response: Yes. Agencies will provide guidance and support to help applicants comply with the new 2-page resume format. OPM will provide additional guidance to applicants on updates to the hiring process as outlined in the Merit Hiring Plan including the transition to the 2-page resume format and qualifying for Federal positions. OPM guidance will include updated USAJOBS help center content and resume best practices training.

Q32 - Should instructions such as font type, font size, and margins be included in the job announcement?

Response: To ensure applicants' resumes meet submission requirements and formatting guidelines, agencies should provide detailed instructions on the application process. These instructions may cover the 2-page limit, required resume content, and recommended formatting.

USAJOBS will not restrict uploaded resumes to specific font types, sizes, or margins. USAJOBS will enforce the resume being no longer than 2 pages and provide guidance on recommended font types, sizes, and margins. Additionally, USAJOBS will update Resume Builder functionality to comply with the 2-page limit.

Q33 - How will the 2-page resume limit impact non-Title 5 positions and judicial and legislative branch agencies that post jobs on USAJOBS?

Response: USAJOBS will restrict all resumes to 2-pages. If judicial and legislative branch agencies want to accept resumes longer than 2-pages, they will need to add language to the job opportunity announcement with instructions for applicants on how to submit a longer resume.

Q34 - Can I select a candidate with a resume longer than 2-pages for placement from a Talent Program or RPL list?

Response: Agencies may consider applicants with resumes longer than 2 pages in existing Talent Programs and Reemployment Priority Lists because those resumes are considered placement resumes, not hiring resumes. Hiring resumes, which are submitted for job announcements, must comply with the 2-page limit.

USA Hire, USA Staffing, USAJOBS

Q35 - What talent acquisition systems are compatible with USA Hire?

Response: USA Hire assessments are only available through USA Staffing. The “human resources user” functionality to enable and configure USA Hire assessments is located within USA Staffing.

Q36 - Are USAJOBS and USA Staffing merging? If so, does that impact the Federal staffing process and adherence to the Merit Hiring Plan?

Response: USAJOBS and USA Staffing are streamlining the online application process to eliminate redundancies and create a better applicant experience.

Workforce Data and Applicant Flow Data

Q37 - Should agencies continue to collect demographic data in recruitments for reporting requirements, such as the Management Directive (MD)-715 report, if the data is not tied to individual applicants and will not be used for hiring, recruiting, retention or promotion decisions?

Response: Yes, agencies will continue to collect and report this information to OPM to support annual and quarterly data reports that agencies are statutorily required to post publicly such as MD-715 and annual Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) reporting. OPM will continue collecting the demographic data on USAJOBS but restrict its provision to agencies unless there is a justified use case.

OPM Training and Resources

Q38 - Will OPM provide training to agencies on the Merit Hiring Plan and the different sections?

Response: Yes. OPM launched its [Merit Hiring Learning Series](#) for all agency HR professionals, Talent Team members, hiring managers and agency leadership.

Q39 - Will OPM provide additional resources to support agencies implementing the Merit Hiring Plan?

Response: Yes. OPM launched the [Merit Hiring Plan Resources webpage](#), which includes resources related to training (including the slides and webinar recordings from the Learning Series), assessments, job application process and pooled hiring.

Q40 - Who should agencies contact for more information?

Response: For additional information and support, agency headquarters-level human resources offices may email:

- HX@opm.gov for implementation assistance or questions concerning the Merit Hiring Plan.
- MeritHiring@opm.gov for questions on Merit Hiring Plan reporting or compliance.
- Employ@opm.gov for questions concerning hiring policy.

Component-level human resources offices must contact their agency headquarters for assistance. Employees must contact their agency human resources offices for further information.