



# Memorandum on Improving the Federal Hiring Experience (M-24-16)

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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### Applicant Experience

**Can vacancies be posted on USAJOBS without using the official job title on the job announcement?**

Yes. The use of official titling prescribed by OPM (title 5 United States Code (U.S.C.) 5105) on official documentation, e.g., position descriptions (PDs), does not preclude Federal agencies from using unofficial or alternative titling for recruitment purposes that represents the work. Using a descriptive, organizational, or functional job title on job announcements can be an effective recruitment tool.

**Leading Practice:** Use job titles that applicants will understand and relate to and that represent the actual job duties.

**The memo says that agencies should use job announcements that accurately reflect the position and skills sought by the hiring manager. What if the PD does not match the language the hiring manager wants to use in the job announcement?**

Agencies must have an accurate job analysis for each position posted. While the PD covers the major duties of the position, the job analysis provides competencies and skills that are used to rate applicants. The documentation in the job analysis can act as a bridge between the PD and an accurate job announcement. All pertinent information must be included in the PD and the job analysis when taken together. This information should be referenced to determine the appropriate titling based on the work of the position and the information to include in the job announcement.

**Leading Practice:** Create plain language job announcement templates for use across an occupation or organization.

## The memo says agencies should use data analytics reporting to verify regular communication with applicants. What does this mean?

Agencies should regularly review their talent acquisition system data to ensure applicant notifications at the four touchpoints are being sent out timely throughout the stages of the hiring process. The memo does not define timely since there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, agencies should have timelines that work for them and ensure they are being met. This includes ensuring that automated notices are enabled in whichever system the agency uses.

**Leading Practice:** Do not rely on standard notification templates. Revise applicant notices so they are accurate to the specific position, in plain language, understandable, and sent timely. When using multiple hurdles, notify applicants of the results at the completion of each hurdle.

## What are the four applicant touchpoints? Are the touchpoints changing?

The requirement to notify applicants of their status at four touchpoints—application received, application assessed for qualifications, applicant referred to selecting official (or not); and applicant selected (or not)—has not changed.

## What is the link between improved hiring timeframes and streamlined personnel vetting within agencies?

Enhancing the applicant experience includes shortening initial hiring timelines, both of which can be impacted by suitability and security requirements dependent on the position. Trusted Workforce 2.0, the government-wide personnel vetting transformation effort, which operates under distinct authorities and policies from hiring, has introduced the need for enhanced coordination across multiple enabler teams (i.e., HR, Information Technology, Security, and Finance/Budget) which, if re-mapped, re-imagined, and re-timed to align alongside the policy and operational hiring actions contained in the memo, will result in streamlined onboarding for agencies that better supports efficient hiring of talent into and across organizational units.

**Leading Practice:** Identify appropriate roles, responsibilities, and timing mapped to the security process. For example, identify at which stage in the hiring process security will be triggered and whose role it is to do so (e.g., HR or the hiring manager), identify whose role it will be to monitor progress, and take follow-up steps to ensure actions have been carried out.

## Hiring Manager Experience

The memo says that HR professionals need to be familiar with the passing grade assessment process where applicants must score a passing grade to be deemed eligible for advancing to the next level of the hiring process. What does this mean?

Minimum qualification standards are intended to identify applicants who are likely to perform successfully on the job, and to screen out those who are unlikely to do so. The use of minimum qualifications as the initial step before further assessing a candidate's skills increases the quality of the hiring process. Title 5 U.S.C. section 3304(b) says, in part, that an individual may be appointed in the competitive service only if they have passed an examination. This is further clarified in regulation at 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 337.101(a), which states, "...each applicant who meets the minimum requirements for entrance to an examination and is rated 70 or more in the examination is eligible for appointment."

Therefore, screening minimum qualifications is important, but a "deeper dive" is required in order to address the actual competencies that have been rated as critical for the job, and to evaluate who is genuinely qualified to perform the particular position (i.e., those who achieve a passing grade on the assessment) and then to assess their relative levels of qualification beyond the passing level. Applicants who fail to achieve a passing score on the assessment are not qualified for the position and do not advance in the hiring process. Through a job analysis, agencies determine the best assessment types and scoring approach based on the work and grade level of the position being filled.

**Leading Practice:** After determining who meets minimum qualifications, use a pass/fail assessment pre-certificate to verify that those applicants have the necessary skills to perform the work of the position. One approach is to use subject matter experts to conduct a structured resume review as a pass/fail pre-certificate assessment. See OPM's free [Structured Resume Review Training](#) for more information. Another approach is to use a work sample or structured interview, or both, as pass/pail pre-certificate assessments.

**Does Structured Resume Review count as a hurdle for purposes of meeting the requirements of Executive Order (E.O.) 13932 of June 26, 2020, Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates?**

When implemented consistent with the OPM training, Structured Resume Review counts as a hurdle in a multiple hurdle approach for purposes of meeting the requirements of E.O. 13932. [Read the OPM training on Structured Resume Review.](#)

## **Should agencies use Structured Resume Reviews to rate and rank applicants in addition to screening out those not qualified?**

While resume screening, reviewing applicants' education and experience against minimum qualification requirements, is a commonly used screening practice, research indicates that resumes are less valid when used for rating (assessment) purposes compared to other assessment practices, such as structured interviews. OPM does not recommend using resumes for rating and ranking purposes. Additionally, a resume-only hiring approach can enhance inequities in hiring and may result in adverse impact.

## **Do candidates with veterans' preference "float" as long as they meet minimum qualifications even if they fail an assessment?**

When pass/fail assessments are used, all applicants, regardless of preference or priority status, must meet the passing grade on the assessment(s) in order to be qualified for the position. Any applicant who fails to meet the passing grade of an assessment is no longer eligible, including those with priority or preference, such as displaced employees, applicants with veterans' preference, individuals eligible for non-competitive consideration, etc.

There may be applicants who meet the minimum educational requirements but fail to achieve a passing grade on a pre-certificate assessment, thereby, failing to demonstrate they have the required competencies for the job. In this case, they would not progress through the process. Regardless of how an applicant meets minimum qualifications, such as through education, when pass/fail assessments are used the applicant still needs to demonstrate proficiency in the required competencies through achieving a passing grade on the assessment to proceed.

## **How should application reviewers adjust scores or disqualify applicants when self-assessments do not align with submitted documentation?**

Agencies should be transitioning away from relying on applicant self-assessment questionnaires. When warranted to use, review OPM's [Guide to Better Occupational Questionnaires](#) to help improve the rigor of the occupational questionnaires that are developed. Because applicants' scores are based on their self-reported responses to the questions in the occupational questionnaire, a systematic review of applicants' supporting documents helps to ensure the quality of applicants referred for further consideration. The review should verify that not only are the minimum qualifications met, but also that the rating from the occupational questionnaire accurately reflects the experience outlined in the applicant's resume. Agency policy should allow for applicant scores to be adjusted, including a determination of ineligible, as appropriate, when their resumes do not support or substantiate the experience claimed in their responses to the occupational questionnaire. In situations where adjustments are necessary, applicants may be reassigned to a

different quality category or the scores may be adjusted to other general quality levels (e.g., 70, 80, or 90) by comparing information in the applicant’s resume and other supporting documents to quality level descriptions appropriate for the position. The rationale for adjusting the score must be documented for the case file with sufficient detail to allow reconstruction of the action and support upon appeal/review by the applicant or a third party.

Defining quality levels requires a clear understanding of the most important tasks and competencies of the position. Reviewing the job analysis, position description, and classification standards, as well as seeking input from subject matter experts, is essential. Several methods exist for developing quality levels, and agencies can review “Defining Quality Categories” in Chapter 5 of the [Delegated Examining Operations Handbook](#) for examples. Although the Handbook describes this process in relation to category rating, the principles can be used for defining general quality levels for other types of hiring, as well.

**Leading Practice:** Outline a consistent agency practice for adjusting applicant scores when experience claimed is not justified. For example, when an HR Specialist identifies a clear inconsistency between the applicant’s self-rating and the supporting documentation submitted, a secondary reviewer (e.g., a peer, team lead, or supervisor) is asked to evaluate the applicant, as well. After the secondary review is completed, the findings of both raters are compared, and a determination is made as to whether or not a score adjustment is appropriate.

**Leading Practice:** Provide a warning statement to applicants that aligns with agency policy. *Sample Warning Statement:* It is important to note that all of your responses are subject to review and verification. If after reviewing your resume and/or supporting documentation a determination is made that you have overstated your qualifications and/or experience, you will be rated ineligible, or your score will be lowered.

### **How should agencies handle applications that copy language directly from the announcement into their resumes?**

Agencies should address this situation in their policies. For example, an applicant copies the duties section of the announcement into their resume as their current experience. Agency policy could include advising applicants in the announcement that they will be disqualified if they copy and paste from the announcement without including their own documented examples of the required experience.

**The memo is “Allowing HR and hiring managers to decide when it is appropriate to ask applicants to provide a short description of their technical skills or showcase their technical ability for the position as part of the initial application.” Does this mean agencies should not ask applicants to showcase their skills later in the application process, for example, as a qualifying assessment**

## hurdle or as a post-certificate step? Similarly, does this bring back the ability to request [truncated] KSA essays from applicants?

Agencies can request applicants to showcase their technical ability or describe their technical skills at any point in the hiring process **as long as** the request is aligned with the job analysis (i.e., is job-related) and included in the job announcement. Agencies are not allowed to return to the practice of requiring applicants to provide written essays for each required qualification at the time of application, per the Presidential Memorandum of May 11, 2010, on Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process. However, agency applications can be structured to ask for up to three (and no more than three) candidate questions that may request up to one paragraph each of descriptive text (not to exceed 700 characters each) to illustrate a candidate's technical ability or that may ask a candidate to complete a very short task to showcase their skills.

**Leading Practice:** Use verification boxes within the assessment questionnaire to request from applicants' short answer verification information, such as indicating the specific jobs held where they have gained certain experiences as indicated on applicants' resumes; and, with this change, request a short descriptive paragraph of their skills and experience.

## What is the Agency Talent Portal and how do agencies use it?

The USAJOBS Agency Talent Portal (ATP) offers targeted recruitment services to help recruiters, HR specialists, and hiring managers discover highly-skilled talent. With ATP, agencies can create and collaborate on recruitment campaigns, search over 1.5 million resumes, and create career-related events to post on USAJOBS. ATP now hosts Talent Pools, the governmentwide platform for sharing certificates. Learn more about ATP by visiting the [help center](#). For access, send an [email request](#).

## The memo says agencies should, when appropriate, limit their review of resumes to a pre-determined number of pages and notify applicants of this review process in the job announcement. Should agencies limit what applicants submit?

No. While agencies cannot limit the type of resume submitted, per the Presidential Memorandum of May 11, 2010, on Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process, they can tell applicants in a job announcement that the agency will only review a specific number of pages of a submitted resume. This practice can greatly decrease the workload of HR and subject matter experts conducting resume review.

**Leading Practice:** Specify in the job announcement that only a certain number of pages of experience in applicant resumes will be reviewed to determine if minimum qualifications are met.

## HR Practitioner Experience

**How should agencies collaborate with OPM on opportunities to share certificates as described in the memo?**

OPM's Hiring Experience Group (HX) is working closely with agency Talent Teams and those agencies piloting shared certs. Agencies should communicate to OPM HX through their Talent Team lead(s) when they identify an opportunity to share a certificate. OPM HX will work with the agency HR practitioners to ensure all requirements for sharing are met and provide support and technical assistance to the agency throughout the process as needed. With the launch of [Agency Talent Pools](#), the governmentwide shared certs platform, once a certificate is ready to be shared across other agencies, OPM will provide support, as needed, to ensure the "talent pool" is created and available for other agencies.

**What are the innovative hiring actions described in the memo, and how can Talent Teams help support shared hiring actions?**

Agency Talent Teams, teams of HR practitioners; industrial/organizational psychologists; recruitment, selection, and policy experts; and talent operations professionals, at the headquarters and component level, help ensure the agency HR workforce can support recruitment and hiring efforts, including transitioning to using effective hiring assessments and empowering the HR team with new tools and capabilities needed to effectively support mission needs.

Talent Teams can help lead innovative hiring assessment strategies such as using the SME-Qualifications Assessment (SMEQA) process, incorporating pass/fail assessments pre-certificate, and using other custom technical assessments within their agencies. Talent Teams can also include shared cert language in all their high-quality competitive announcements including those for mission critical occupations (MCOs) and other positions common across government where pooled hiring is most useful. They can also connect their HR Specialists and Hiring Managers to available shared certificates on the Agency Talent Pools, the shared cert platform.

**Leading Practice:** Identify hiring actions using high-quality assessments and include shared cert language in the job announcements. Work with OPM HX to ensure all requirements are met for sharing.

**To what extent will OPM run central hiring actions versus agencies sharing existing high-quality certificates with each other under the Competitive Service Act of 2015 (Public Law 114-137)?**

OPM is continuing to run several cross-government hiring actions. Collaboration among agencies and OPM make these efforts successful in maximizing selections across agencies. In addition, agencies are encouraged to promote the use of shared certificates for common occupations, both



those that originate within their own agency and those shared by another agency. Agencies are encouraged to use their Talent Teams to encourage the use of available shared certs within the agency and the use of shared cert opt-in language in its own announcements that use high-quality assessment hurdles. For more information on sharing certs, see OPM's [Implementing Guidance](#).

The goal is to continue to increase the number of OPM-run actions and agency-led shared cert actions, so that occupations common across government will have ready-made certificates of highly qualified candidates available for use across all agencies.

**Leading Practice:** Take full advantage of hiring actions that use rigorous assessments with multiple hurdles to determine applicant qualifications by sharing the high-quality certificates across components to maximum the number of selections made.

**The memo says that agencies should ensure effective use of human capital evaluation systems to document, measure, track, and report progress on implementing the requirements of this memorandum. How can agencies measure the benefits of improving the hiring process?**

An agency's evaluation system should establish the methods to document, measure, and report progress of human capital strategies. Below are resources to develop and/or enhance agency evaluation systems:

[Human Capital Framework](#)

[Evaluation System Standards \(chcoc.gov\)](#)

**Leading Practice:** Take an enterprise approach to implementing an agency's evaluation system. Encourage leadership to contribute to identifying program areas for evaluations and to participate in monthly HRStat reviews and weekly engagements. The accountability program manager, or equivalent, should report evaluation findings to senior leaders on an annual basis.

**Are there other tools, trainings, or resources OPM has available to support agencies?**

OPM has built new tools and trainings to further streamline hiring processes. This includes functionality to conduct Structured Resume Reviews in the USA Staffing system and the governmentwide shared certificate platform in USAJOBS [Agency Talent Portal](#) described above that allows hiring managers to see available Talent Pools of pre-assessed applicants who are on active certificates of eligibles and available for immediate selection under the shared cert rules.

OPM also has training available on conducting [Structured Resume Reviews](#) that, when implemented consistent with the OPM training, counts as a valid assessment hurdle in a multiple hurdle approach for purposes of E.O. 13932 of June 26, 2020, Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates.



OPM has developed an additional suite of training to improve HR and agency assessment capabilities, including designing agency assessment strategies, scaling assessment capabilities, developing scored assessments, conducting job analyses, and other areas focused on skills-based approaches to improve Federal hiring practices. [Take the trainings “Designing an Assessment Strategy: Fundamental Concepts, Processes, and Applications,”](#) and, [“Use of Hiring Assessments: A SME-Based Approach.”](#)

In addition, OPM is launching a [series of free trainings](#) for hiring managers and HR practitioners to improve their knowledge and skills. Many of these trainings will be geared for hiring managers and should help advance these overall efforts.

OPM established a new HX Group in 2022 to support agencies in their implementation of much of this work. HX works closely with agency Talent Teams, and its work includes:

- Funding several cross-government hiring actions using improved assessment hurdles
- Supporting agency shared certificates using rigorous assessments
- Ensuring agency access to data to drive effective hiring assessment decisions
- Supporting the creation and adoption of custom technical assessments
- Bringing agency Talent Teams together to identify best practices and elevate common policy and implementation challenges
- Driving outcomes that empower HR specialists, hiring managers, and SMEs
- Identifying existing bottlenecks in the hiring process and consider piloting and implementing government-wide tools to automate some of them, to the extent appropriate and permitted by law.

For more information on ways OPM is supporting agencies, attached to the memo, please see the comprehensive list of resources available to support agencies in driving these improvements.