

FACT SHEET

Hiring and Selection Process Information and Tips Federal Employees

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is committed to retaining a highly talented, dedicated, and diverse workforce. This fact sheet is a ready reference that is intended to provide DHS employees with hiring and selection tips for exploring promotions and other career opportunities within the Department.

Competitive Service versus Excepted Service Position Classes

There are two classes of non-executive positions in the federal government: 1) those that are in the competitive service, and 2) those that are in the excepted service.

- **Competitive Service** – Competitive service positions are subject to the civil service laws passed by Congress. The laws help to ensure fair and open competition, recruitment from all segments of society, and selection on the basis of the applicants' competencies or knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- **Excepted Service** – Excepted service positions are defined by statute, by the President, or by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as excepted. These positions are not subject to the appointment, pay, and classification rules of the competitive service.

NOTE: DHS Components have both competitive service and excepted service positions except for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which has only excepted service positions.

Competitive Service Hiring Authorities

Federal agencies use a variety of hiring authorities to fill positions. In the competitive service, individuals must go through a competitive hiring process (i.e., competitive examining) before being appointed to a vacant position. This process may include a written test, an evaluation of the individual's education and experience, and/or an evaluation of other attributes necessary for successful performance in the position to be filled.

Appointment Methods

- **Merit Promotion** – This system is used to consider employees for positions on the basis of personal merit. Positions are usually filled through competition with applicants being evaluated and ranked for positions based on their experience, education, skills, and performance record.

When a vacancy announcement or job opportunity announcement (JOA) indicates that status candidates are eligible to apply, federal government career employees and career-conditional employees who have served at least 90 days after being placed in a competitive appointment may apply. (To determine whether you are a "career employee" or a "career-conditional employee," see page 3, Job Opportunity Announcement Highlights).

Under the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998 (VEOA) eligible veterans can apply for positions announced under merit promotion procedures when a Component's job



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announcements are open to candidates from outside of its own workforce. These veterans may be hired through the competitive process.

- **Delegated Examining** – Delegated Examining (DE) applies to competitive examining only and not merit promotion, or non-competitive service processes. DE is an authority OPM grants to fill competitive civil service jobs with:
 - Applicants applying from outside the federal workforce,
 - Federal employees who do not have competitive service status, or
 - Federal employees with competitive service status.

Appointments made through the DE authority are subject to civil service laws and regulations.

- **Noncompetitive Action** – A noncompetitive action is an appointment to, or placement in a position in the competitive service. This action is not made by selection from an open competitive examination and it is usually based on current or prior federal service.

Employee Tips:

Employees selected using DE procedures may be required to serve a new probationary period. During the one-year probationary period, the fitness of the employee is determined and the employee has limited or no appeal rights.

Employees promoted, transferred, or otherwise assigned for the first time to supervisory or managerial positions are required to serve a supervisory/managerial probationary period.

Locating Job Opportunities

OPM maintains a central database, called USAJOBS, which lists nearly every federal job opening.

Available JOAs provide employees with information about job qualifications, duties, salary, duty location, benefits, and security requirements. The JOA can be used to help to you determine if your interests, education, and professional background match the vacant position which could possibly make you a good candidate for the job. A list of [common terms](#) is available to assist you in understanding the terms used in job announcements.

Most DHS jobs may be found at dhs.usajobs.gov. Most jobs in the Department require U.S. citizenship and successful completion of a full background investigation and drug screening.

Employee Tip:

For more detailed information on DHS Component specific career information visit the respective Component's website.



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Job Opportunity Announcement Highlights

All JOAs have the same basic parts, although the order, style, and wording vary. Knowing these parts can help you to zero in on key facts.

- **Basic information** – At the top of an announcement, you will find the announcement number, position title, grade, and duty location. The name of a person to contact for more information is generally listed at the end of the announcement.
- **Who May Apply** – Most jobs are open to the general public (e.g., All U.S. citizens) while other jobs are reserved for people who are current or former federal employees or who are veterans or individuals with disabilities who meet specific conditions.

Jobs open “Government-wide” are open to “status candidates.” These positions are open to:

- Current federal employees serving under a career or career-conditional appointment;
- Former federal employees with reinstatement eligibility;
- Persons eligible for noncompetitive appointment under [special hiring authorities](#);
- Persons eligible under an Interchange Agreement (view a list of [covered agreements](#)); and,
- Veterans’ preference eligibles or veterans who have been separated from the Armed Forces under honorable conditions after substantially completing at least three consecutive years of active duty (view information on [veterans](#)).

Employee Tip:

An employee can check his/her competitive service status by viewing his/her latest Notification of Personnel Action, SF-50, Block 34, Position Occupied. If the employee is currently working on excepted service, temporary, or term appointments for the federal government, the employee is typically NOT eligible to apply for positions announced using the merit promotion process.

- **Key Requirements** – These requirements include statements regarding employment (e.g., U.S. citizenship, clearance level, drug testing, residency requirements, time-in-grade requirements, etc.)

Employee Tip:

Time-in-grade requirements only apply to merit promotion actions. Current federal employees must have served 52 weeks at the next lower grade or equivalent grade band in the federal service before being promoted to the next grade level. The time-in-grade requirement must be met by the closing date of the JOA.

- **Qualification Requirements** – Qualifications are a description of the minimum requirements necessary to perform work of a particular occupation successfully and safely. The minimum requirements may include specific job-related work experience, education,



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medical or physical standards, training, security, and/or licensure. They are not designed to rank candidates, identify the best qualified for a particular position, or substitute for an analysis of an applicant's knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies.

General Experience - This broad-based experience provides knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that may be useful in demonstrating your ability to perform the duties of the position that is being filled.

Specialized Experience - This specific experience is usually obtained from having worked in a position similar to the vacant position.

Education - Employees can qualify for some jobs based solely on education instead of experience. For other jobs, both education and experience are required to qualify; and for other jobs, employees can qualify based on a combination of both experience and education.

Employee Tips:

All experience is valuable and creditable, whether paid or unpaid. Experience is evaluated based on the level of the work performed (i.e., the level of experience must be equivalent to the work at the next lower level).

DHS hires people with nearly every level of education and experience from high school students with no experience to Ph.D.'s with established careers. Jobs in some occupations, such as engineer, contract specialist, and attorney, require employees to have a bachelor's or graduate degree and credit for specific college classes. A few jobs, such as office clerk, require no education or experience to start. The qualifications needed for each job are described in detail in the JOA.

- **Additional Qualifications** – The additional qualifications describe further qualifications for the job. These additional criteria are used to determine an applicant's eligibility for the position and to rank applicants.
 - Selective Placement Factors are job-related KSAs that are essential for satisfactory performance on the job. Only employees that meet this requirement as of the closing date of the JOA receive further consideration for the job.
 - Quality Ranking Factors are job-related KSAs that could be expected to significantly enhance performance in the position but could not reasonably be considered necessary for satisfactory performance.

Employee Tip:

Applicants should describe how their work experiences link to the additional qualifications outlined in the JOA.



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General Steps in the Hiring and Selection Process

1. **Complete Application or Resume** – Employee applications should accurately represent the skills and competencies applicable to the position announced. For each past job, give the standard information found in most resumes. Begin with your current position and list all other positions held in chronological order. Specifically, state the job title, starting and ending dates (including month and year), prior employer’s name and address (or write “self-employed,” if that applies), and major duties and accomplishments. Include any positions temporarily held. In addition, show the average number of hours worked per week or simply state “full-time”; salary or wage earned; supervisor’s name, address, and telephone number; and whether your most recent supervisor may be contacted. Include the occupational series numbers and the starting and ending grades of the federal government positions held. Include any relevant volunteer experience.

Most importantly, describe job duties and accomplishments in a way that demonstrates how you are qualified. Study the JOA and emphasize the parts of your work history that match the qualifications listed there. Remember, human resources specialists might not be familiar with your career field. To help them understand how your experience matches what is required for the vacant position, make sure that you describe your experience in laymen’s terms.

Employee Tips:

Spell out all acronyms and other abbreviations included in your application.

Applications with one or two sentence descriptions of highly technical positions that do not truly reflect a complete picture your work experience may cause you to lose consideration for the position.

Consider listing either within your work history or in a separate section, any performance awards or bonuses you have received.

2. **Apply for the Job** – Submit your application by the “closing date” of the JOA. Sometimes, applications only need to be postmarked by the due date. Applications usually, must arrive at their specified destination by either 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time (EST) or by the close of business.

Employees must submit any additional documentation outlined in the JOA that verifies all qualifications such as transcripts, SF-50 Notification of Personnel Action, performance appraisals and/or Veterans’ Form DD-214. If you fail to submit a required document, you may be found ineligible for consideration.

3. **Interview for the Job** – The names of the best-qualified candidates are forwarded to the supervisor or hiring official. If you are one of the best-qualified candidates, the supervisor or hiring official may interview you in person or by telephone, or in rare cases may hire you based



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solely on your application materials. Selection procedures are subject to Federal Civil Service laws, which ensure that all applicants receive fair and equal treatment in the hiring process.

Interviews are tests designed to measure a variety of competencies important to performance on the job. Interviews may include scenario-based questions that measure selected competencies, e.g., Leading Others, Team Building, Performance and Results Management, Decision-Making and Problem Solving, Oral Communication, Interpersonal Skills, Technical Questions, etc.

4. **What to Expect Next** – The application that you submit will go through many levels of review. First, human resources specialists will screen it to see if you meet the basic eligibility requirements for the position. Then, the human resources specialists or a panel of experts will rate your application according to the additional qualifications listed on the JOA. If your application rates among the best-qualified, it will be forwarded to the hiring manager, who will make the final selection.
5. **Questions** – If you have questions regarding a position to which you are applying or to find out the status of your application, please speak to the point of contact listed for each JOA.

For more information about the hiring and selection process, please contact your servicing human resources office.

