

Recruitment for Federal Agencies

Meeting 21st Century Hiring Demands



Federal Hiring in 2023

The American workplace is rapidly evolving. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated existing trends, including the move to hybrid and remote work models; the rise in e-commerce; and the pace of investment in, and adoption of, automation, artificial intelligence and self-service. More Americans are quitting their jobs compared to any other time in the last two decades.

In addition, renewed attention to racial and social justice and equity has changed expectations for employers to support a diverse, equitable, inclusive and accessible workplace. To address these challenges, organizations across the country are implementing targeted recruitment efforts to attract, engage and retain a capable workforce.

Like many organizations, federal agencies face numerous challenges in attracting and hiring top talent, including those who have high-demand skills, younger workers and diverse workers. In addition to navigating cultural shifts and trends, the evolution of technologies and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government must face the changing landscape of federal employment, including increased competition from the private sector, waning interest in public service, skills shortages across many occupations and a large percentage of the workforce nearing retirement age.

According to the [October 2023 Job Openings and Labor Turnover \(JOLT\) report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), quit rates hover at about 2.3%, wages are up and there are millions more open jobs than unemployed workers. It is in this environment that federal agencies are trying to hire thousands of new employees.

[As of October 2023, there were 156,000 federal job openings](#). To help federal agencies recruit and hire staff quickly and at scale, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) created the [Talent Surge Playbook for Rebuilding the Federal Workforce](#).

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Agencies need to hire now to fill essential and mission-driven roles: scientists to combat climate change, engineers to repair and rebuild our roads and bridges, and workers to help ensure that every community in America has clean water, just to name a few. The jobs needed to implement the IJA are on top of other critical hiring needs the federal government faces to invest in our communities, support the nation's economy, and advance justice.

OPM Director Kiran A. Ahujam

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The federal government needs to move fast and think big. To remain competitive while simultaneously supporting the government-wide initiative to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA), established by [Executive Order 14035](#), the federal government must accelerate its efforts to build the workplace and workforce of the future.

Success will likely require a major departure from the status quo, both in approach and scale – and in many cases the size of the investment – to not only meet today's challenges, but to capitalize on the opportunity to strengthen the existing workforce and bring a new generation of Americans into public service.

Agencies can achieve this by adopting proven candidate engagement best practices tailored to their unique hiring challenges and by implementing technologies that enable integrated data analysis across the candidate journey.

If you're reading this whitepaper, these hiring challenges are likely your problem to solve. Below we outline four action steps that have proven successful in transforming recruiting efforts for multiple federal agencies. Individual agencies can easily adapt and customize these approaches to meet their specific needs.



Attracting Talent to Fill Critical Hiring Needs

Create candidate personas informed by both data and qualitative research.

It is crucial to develop a deep understanding of how qualified candidates think and where they obtain their information. Developing candidate personas, or semi-fictional representations of your ideal job candidates, especially for historically hard-to-fill roles, informs recruiting and outreach approaches and can help to diagnose potential friction points in the candidate journey.

Applying analytics technology to combined datasets, including both internal agencies' hiring information and relevant industry datasets, enables agencies to quantify characteristics of ideal candidates, scale the number of potential candidate personas and uncover untapped opportunities to reach candidates that help the federal workforce increasingly represent the diverse makeup of the American people.

Pairing this data-driven approach with qualitative, human-centered design research that engages actual potential candidates enables agencies to validate and make more well-rounded, tangible personas. This strategic exercise ensures recruiting efforts focus on the right types of candidates who are most likely to be both qualified and open to learning more about federal employment opportunities.

Execute Digital Advertising that Highlights Your Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and Available Opportunities – and Targets Qualified Candidates

According to the [Academy to Innovate HR](#), an EVP is the “promise you make as an employer to your employees in return for their commitment. This promise entails the sum of benefits and rewards employees receive from the organization they work for.” A strong EVP sets an employer apart and consists of five key elements: compensation, work-life balance, stability, location and respect.

Digital advertising presents tremendous opportunities to market the federal government to candidates who may not have considered civil service in the past. When strategically executed, even modest investments in paid advertising can yield major, measurable recruiting results. This starts with creating branded assets tailored to digital channels that highlight your agency's EVP to align to the personas of the candidates you most want to reach. Agencies can cultivate candidates most effectively by running both awareness messaging focused on the EVP and specific calls to action to apply to open Job Opportunity Announcements (JOAs) simultaneously. We have seen this approach drive an increased volume of USAJOBS applications for multiple federal agencies.

Target the right candidates across devices and channels. Targeting is paramount to ensuring carefully crafted messaging reaches the intended audience. Available channels and targeting options enable federal agencies to precisely reach individuals likely to be highly qualified for critical roles – from animated mobile display ads to video ads on ConnectedTV through Hulu and Roku. This includes targeting based on user behavior and available anonymized data sources to reach individuals that align to defined candidate personas and are likely to respond to your agency EVP. The graphic below provides an overview of targeting approaches available across channels that we can combine and stack to reach high-quality candidates, along with relevant examples for federal agencies.

Get to Know Your Ideal Candidate

To engage the next generation of federal accountants, the Chief Financial Officers Council created data-driven audience personas to understand what aspects of federal accounting careers would most attract Gen-Z graduates. They used these insights to transform collateral and outreach strategies.

Engage the Right Candidates Where They Are

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) uses a combination of digital and traditional advertising through Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to highlight the VA Careers employer brand and promote specific priority job openings in critical medical specialties. This includes innovative tactics like geofencing medical specialty conferences to reach a high volume of highly qualified providers through their mobile devices during times when they are primed to be networking and considering new job opportunities.

Recruitment Advertising Targeting Approaches for Optimal Return on Investment



CONTEXTUAL

Uses page-level content to place ads that are relevant and aligned to what candidates are browsing.

Example: Reach people who are reading an article about diplomatic efforts between the U.S. and China with an ad that promotes a career at the Department of State.



BEHAVIORAL

Leverages browsing behavior to serve ads to consumers who have demonstrated interest or in-market intent.

Example: Reach individuals who currently have law enforcement careers based on available data to recruit new agents for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).



GEOFENCING

Creates a virtual boundary around a specific area – using GPS and mobile location data – to deliver messages to target audiences when their devices are captured within the “geo-fence.”

Example: Reach individuals attending the 2024 American Psychological Association convention in Seattle to help the Veterans Health Administration recruit psychologists to support the mental health of Veterans.



DEMOGRAPHIC

Directs ads to candidates who display targeted characteristics.

Example: Reach candidates between the ages of 35 and 45 who likely have at least 12 years of relevant professional experience required for GS-13 supervisory positions at the U.S. Department of Transportation Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.



GEOTARGETING

Targets a specific geo-location, by state, metro region, ZIP code or city block.

Example: Reach potential auditors living within 25 miles of the Defense Contract Audit Agency Wichita Brand Office.



RETARGETING

Uses site pixels to serve various campaign ads to individuals who have already visited a website.

Example: Reach individuals who already visited the application portal for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity Service with ads encouraging them to review unique benefits and submit their application.

Reduce Barriers to Expressing Interest in Federal Jobs – and Automate the Follow Up

Federal agencies face a dual challenge in engaging potential candidates early in the process of considering job openings. First, many agencies do not offer a streamlined way to express interest in their career paths without applying to specific JOAs through USAJOBS.gov. Even more foundationally, job descriptions for federal positions remain notoriously difficult for outsiders to navigate. One analysis found a seven-page federal software engineer job description, compared with a one paragraph listing for a similar role at a major corporation.

Second, many agencies do not capture candidate information in a structured way. As a result, promising candidates may linger in a rarely checked Human Resources email inbox or another variant of “limbo” instead of connecting with recruiters who provide additional information on relevant opportunities.

Deploying a customized Candidate Relationship Management (CRM) system that leverages an existing Software as a Service (SaaS) platform enables agencies to effectively engage strong candidates long before they apply, including automated outreach efforts that can target all candidates, or those who meet specific JOA requirements, delivering relevant employment information.

A customized CRM system reduces the burden on recruiting teams and improves the probability that qualified candidates will take the time to complete the full USAJOBS application process. This tool ensures fewer strong candidates fall by the wayside, facilitating improved government hiring that is faster and better.

Capture and Analyze Data to Understand the Candidate and Employee Journey

To effectively hire world-class employees, agencies must first determine which recruiting strategies drive the most successful hires. Manual processes – from paper sign-in sheets at hiring events, to candidate lists that are filed on a shared drive never to be seen again – decrease productivity from Human Resources and workforce planning professionals and preclude understanding of how to optimize hiring approaches. Manual processes can also undermine an agency’s EVP due to delayed or non-existent responses, leading to a negative candidate experience. A clear understanding of a candidate’s journey to join the federal workforce in a way that does not rely exclusively on self-reported information is key to understanding a recruitment strategy’s return on investment (ROI).

Deploying a CRM platform allows agencies to accurately attribute where candidates are coming from by capturing their information, allowing an agency to nurture interested persons throughout their journey towards an application. This information is then subsequently matched on an ongoing basis with outputs from USA Staffing about selected candidates, allowing the agency to monitor and adjust recruitment marketing efforts while also leveraging inter-agency coordination with OPM. Developing this clear data story in a manner that complies with Privacy Act requirements enables agencies to focus limited resources on recruiting and hiring efforts that drive desired end results, not just pageviews on agency web pages.



Engage Top Candidates Through Automation

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) implemented a user-friendly “Talent Network” that enables easy engagement of potential candidates for front line roles before they are ready to apply on USAJOBS. Candidates who sign up are sent automated, branded follow up emails including details of CBP’s EVP and links to open JOAs and opportunities to interact with recruiters at regular careers webinars.

Find Your Real Recruiting ROI

Multiple agencies within the Department of Defense (DoD) have CRM systems that enable them to automatically attribute the source of potential candidate leads and subsequently match those individuals with USAJOBS applications or Direct Hires through USA Staffing. Combined with integrated customizable analytics and data visualization, this allows an agency to have a single source of truth, allowing for an easy evaluation of hiring approaches which yield candidates that thrive in the federal workforce.

START ENHANCING YOUR RECRUITING EFFORTS TODAY.

Schedule a
FREE
30-MINUTE
ASSESSMENT

The imperative to hire great talent rapidly and efficiently has never been stronger for federal agencies. The action steps outlined above represent tangible actions that you can take within the next three to nine months to begin the process of transforming your recruiting efforts. Knowing where to start can be overwhelming, but you don't have to go it alone.

Schedule a free 30-minute Rapid Recruiting Assessment with Aptive's recruiting experts today to determine the most impactful immediate first step to improve your agency's recruiting outcomes.

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT RECRUITMENT AND BRANDING BPA

OPM Human Resources Solutions (HRS) provides key services to meet every aspect of an agency's human resource lifecycle. Through the HRS recruitment and branding BPA, federal agencies can directly access a wide range of services and capabilities from proven vendors. From strategy development to targeted advertising and candidate experience optimization, agencies have access to comprehensive talent and recruitment strategies.

All orders are managed by OPM Staff Acquisition consultants and executed by expert contractor resources. This reduces contract management stress and delivers high-quality, measurable results.

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