Acquisition Hiring Challenges Focus Group -
Results Debriefing

Classification and Assessment Policy
Talent Acquisition and Workforce Shaping
Employee Services
U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Presentation Outline

- **Topics of Focus Group Debriefing**
  - [Background](#)
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    - Theme Identification
    - Challenge Prioritization
    - Large Group Discussion
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Background

- **Acquisition Hiring Challenges Focus Group**
  - Held Thursday, August 30th 2018 at OPM Headquarters
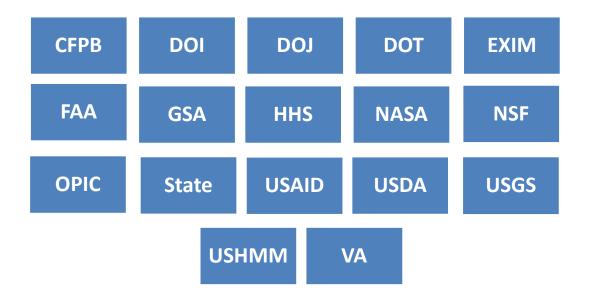 - Purpose: Explore barriers to Acquisition hiring

SME Identification

- **Expert groups contacted to elicit volunteers**
  - Chief Acquisition Officers
  - Senior Procurement Executives
  - Acquisition Career Managers identified by the Federal Acquisition Institute

Agency Participation

- **20 Acquisition SMEs from 17 agencies participated**

CFPB	DOI	DOJ	DOT	EXIM
FAA	GSA	HHS	NASA	NSF
OPIC	State	USAID	USDA	USGS
	USHMM	VA		

Focus Group Goal

- **Engage in an open dialogue to capture a governmentwide perspective on:**
  - Challenges impacting Acquisition hiring;
  - Themes across challenges; and
  - Priorities within identified challenges, including potential solutions.

Focus Group Methodology

- **Human Centered Design Approach**
- **Small Group Exercise: 4 separate groups**
  - Part 1: Individual Challenge Brainstorming
  - Part 2: Group Theme Identification
  - Part 3: Group Challenge Prioritization
- **Large Group Discussion**
  - Impact of key challenges and possible solutions

Theme Identification Results

- Within each group, challenges were sorted into themes

- *Note the following content reflects what agency SMEs reported*

Themes Across Challenges

- **Hiring process**
  - Hiring Manager and HR disconnect in identifying the best-suited candidates
  - Time to hire
  - Agency HR staff not leveraging Direct Hire Authority
  - Education requirement is too restrictive (unnecessary after experience is gained)
  - Reference checks: Supervisors are not forthcoming regarding bad performers

Themes Across Challenges

- **Hiring process (cont.)**
  - View that because Veterans only need to meet minimum qualifications, they may not always have the best skills needed for the job
    - **May reflect the 9/30/17 direct hire expiration**
  - Security backgrounds not identifying candidate issues
  - Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) issues
  - Governmentwide hiring freezes

Themes Across Challenges

- **Lack of qualified candidates**
  - Candidates lack needed education and experience
  - Skill gaps
  - Needs are so disparate
    - **Particularly salient at small agencies**
- **FAC-C issues**
  - Training is expensive and time consuming

Themes Across Challenges

- **Recruitment**
  - Private sector professionals and recent grads do not know about or have interest in government positions
  - Non-existent 1102 recruitment activities
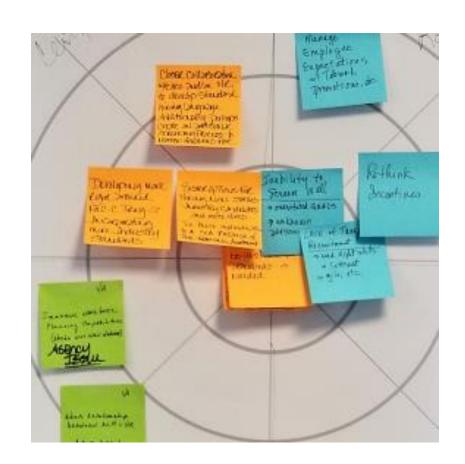 - Finding the right place to advertise to bring on talent

Themes Across Challenges

- **Retention**
  - Telework reductions
  - Lack of mentoring
  - Difficult to retain contract specialists after they've received their certification/training

Challenge Prioritization Results

- Within each group, challenges were prioritized into tiers based on impact to the Acquisition workforce

- *Note the following content reflects what agency SMEs reported*

Top Prioritized Challenges

- **Low quality: Certificate of eligibles**
  - Inability to screen well
- **Lack of qualified candidates**
  - Lack needed training, education, and experience
  - Lack breadth of skills needed
    - **Particularly salient at small agencies**
  - Overstate their qualifications
- **Lack of targeted recruitment**

Top Prioritized Challenges

- **Duration of hiring process**
- **Impact and perceived necessity of Govermentwide hiring freezes**
- **Veteran's preference**
  - View that because Vets only need to meet minimum qualifications, they may not always have the best skills needed for the job
    - **May reflect the 9/30/17 direct hire expiration**

Large Group Discussion: Key Excerpts

Each group identified top priority challenges for large group discussion on:

- Agency impact
- Possible solutions

Note the following content reflects what agency SMEs reported

Large Group Discussion: Key Excerpts

- **Veteran's preference**
  - *Problem: When we put a job announcement out, Vets are sometimes blocking highly qualified candidates. They meet the minimum skill requirements. We end up hiring them instead of a candidate from industry who can jump right in and start.*
  - *Possible Solution: A SME referenced a well-received, established agency program that supports the development of and hiring of highly qualified veterans.*

Large Group Discussion: Key Excerpts

- **Hiring freeze**
  - *Problem: Changes in resource allocations and hiring freezes have impacted our ability to recruit.*
  - *Possible Solution: There needs to be considerations given for agencies who have extremely low levels of coverage to be exempt from hiring freezes. This could be based on liabilities.*

Large Group Discussion: Key Excerpts

- **Relationship between education and experience**
  - *Problem: The importance of education shrinks as an employee moves up the ladder, and the value of experience and training explodes over the course of their career. If someone can do the work, and may not have the degree with specific course work, should we hold that against them?*

  - *Possible Solution: Modify the regulations and hiring criteria to reflect a compensatory relationship between education and experience.*

Large Group Discussion: Key Excerpts

- **Barriers to and for industry candidates**
  - *Problem:* *It isn't uncommon for someone to be hired from industry with significant experience, and they are placed in coursework to obtain an FAC certification. These employees complain that they are already familiar with the coursework, but they aren't allowed to test out of it.*

  - *Possible Solution:* *We need to build in reciprocity for private sector certifications or develop a common certification that could be used across government and industry.*

Large Group Discussion: Key Excerpts

- **Speed to hire and make changes to hiring process**
  - *Problem:* *Hiring process is too slow, complex, and hard to change.*
  - *Possible Solution:* *Be more like the private sector, and allow for quicker changes to be made to Acquisition policy in order to hire and train people.*

Large Group Discussion: Key Excerpts

- **Broad skill-set**
  - *Problem: You have to be able to be good in so many areas (negotiations, business, creativity, public speaking, etc.). At my agency we call it being a renaissance 1102. How do we target and recruit the right people?*
  - *Possible Solution: Work with HR to better define the most essential skills and target these skills throughout the hiring process.*

OPM Findings and Recommendations

The following content reflects OPM's perspective on:

- **Key challenges**
- **Targeted recommendations**
  - **Strategic resources for agencies** (where appropriate)

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Low quality Certificate of Eligibles/ Inability to screen well

Agency assessment processes are not yielding candidates with the best skill and experience fit

Revamp Hiring Processes

-Complete a job analysis to identify essential duties and competencies for inclusion in the JOA

-Extend assessment practices (e.g., structured interviews, knowledge tests, situational judgment tests)

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Low quality Certificate of Eligibles/ Inability to screen well

Revamp Hiring Processes

Strategic Resources for Agencies: Getting Started
1. Hiring Excellence Campaign (HEC) Assess for Success *(attachment 1)*
2. Assess for Success Video
3. Assessment and Selection Resources
4. The Guide to Better Occupationnel Questionnaires Video
5. Structured Interview Training Video

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Hiring process challenges

Lack of trust in agency HR stakeholders

Improve HR and Hiring Manager Collaboration

Establish partnerships with agency HR and hiring managers to promote role clarity, transparency, and collaboration

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Hiring process challenges

Improve HR and Hiring Manager Collaboration

Strategic Resources for Agencies: Getting Started
1. HEC Collaboration *(attachment 2)*
2. HEC Mythbusters
3. Delegated Examining Operations Handbook: A Guide for Federal Agency Examining Offices (DEOH)

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Hiring process challenges (cont.)

Misinformation on Veteran's preference and hiring process in general

Leverage Hiring Process Resources

-Learn about the range of options available for hiring 1102s (e.g., special hiring authorities, shared certificates)

-Dispel myths associated with Veteran's preference

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Hiring process challenges (cont.)

Leverage Hiring Process Resources

Strategic Resources for Agencies: Getting Started
1. Governmentwide Direct Hire Authorities (see STEM)
2. Veteran Guide for HR Professionals
3. Shared Certificate Policy Guidance
4. HEC Placemat *(attachment 3)*

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Lack of targeted recruitment

Design a Recruitment Strategy

Strategic Resources for Agencies: Getting Started
1. Pathways Program Information
2. Sourcing Planner for University Hires *(attachment 4)*
3. Recruitment Strategy Meeting Guide *(attachment 5)*
4. Effective Skills for Successful Federal Recruiters Handout *(attachment 6)*
5. Recruitment Incentives
6. Referral Bonuses

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Lack of targeted recruitment for 1102s (cont.)

FAC-C certification is a barrier to recruiting seasoned industry candidates

Explore FAC-C Flexibilities

Recommend FAI and OMB explore the following options:

-Allow experienced professionals to 'test-out' of the FAC-C

-Recognize comparable private sector certifications

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Lack of qualified candidates

1102 positions require a DIVERSE skill set, particularly at small agencies

Create a Pipeline of Skilled 1102s

Develop training and learning strategies to mitigate known skill gaps at the entry, mid, and senior levels for 1102s

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Lack of qualified candidates

Create a Pipeline of Skilled 1102s

Strategic Resources: Getting Started
1. Reskilling Toolkit
2. Training Needs Assessment Information
3. Training Needs Assessment Handbook *(attachment 7)*
4. Workforce Planning Best Practices

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Lack of qualified candidates (cont.)

Being "FAC-C certified" could be reflective of additional needed skills

Explore FAC-C Improvements

Recommend FAI and OMB conduct focus groups with FAC-C certified 1102s to identify skill gaps

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Retention challenges

Lack of qualified 1102s leads to grade escalation and perceived stealing from other agencies or within an agency

Engage Current 1102s

-Stand-up mentoring programs

-Offer telework and flexible schedules

-Create a culture of open feedback

-Involve current 1102s in developing strategies to target skill gaps

OPM Findings and Recommendations

Retention challenges

Engage Current 1102s

Strategic Resources for Agencies: Getting Started
1. 2018 Federal Workforce Priorities Report
2. Mentoring Best Practices
3. Training and Development Policy Wiki
4. Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey
5. Retention Incentives
6. Student Loan Repayment

Next Steps – Governmentwide Strategy

OPM can partner with OMB and FAI to empower agencies to navigate the issues raised during the Acquisition Hiring Challenges Focus Group.

Next Steps – Governmentwide Strategy

- **OPM/OMB/FAI partnership may include:**
  - Developing an Acquisition Talent Management Strategy.
  - Building a cohort of HR Specialists specializing in attracting, assessing, and hiring acquisition talent.
  - Standing up an Acquisition Community of Practice for hiring managers and HR staff.
  - Providing strategic HR advisory services to agencies.

Next Steps – Governmentwide Strategy

- **OPM/OMB/FAI partnership may include (cont.):**
  - Exploring modifying the educational and experience requirements to be more reflective of the current acquisition needs and talent pool.
    - The Contracting Series (1102) qualification standard was developed by the Office of Federal Procurement Policy under the authority of 41 U.S.C. 433.
  - Following-up on the FAI competency survey by proposing recruitment, employee development, and assessment recommendations agencies can leverage to address the identified skill gaps.

Next Steps – Governmentwide Strategy

- **OPM/OMB/FAI partnership may include (cont.):**
  - Developing a test out-option for the FAC-C for seasoned industry professionals.
  - Establishing a framework for reciprocity between the FAC-C and private sector certifications.
  - Creating guidance on developing an agency service agreement policy that would require a service commitment from 1102s prior to agencies providing funding enabling employees to complete the FAC-C.

Contact Information for Questions

Classification and Assessment Policy

Talent Acquisition and Workforce Shaping

Employee Services

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

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