STRATEGIC RECRUITMENT PLAN
TEMPLATE

PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

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Introduction

Federal agencies encounter many challenges that require rapid growth of their workforce, such as national emergencies, large-scale attrition, new mission requirements or the need for skills in emerging fields. When these needs arise, the standard federal hiring practice of "post and pray"—where job announcements are posted to USAJOBS without additional recruitment activities or events to attract applicants—is not sufficient to quickly hire an atypical volume of candidates, also known as surge hiring.

Several approaches can help an agency effectively meet its surge hiring goals. In the Partnership for Public Service's research report "Rapid Reinforcement: Strategies for Federal Surge Hiring" (PDF file), the following three strategies were identified:

1. Determine which government-wide or agency-specific hiring authorities best meet the needs of the hiring surge.
2. Develop recruiting infrastructure by leveraging data and technology and by hiring recruiters or training current staff on how to attract candidates and guide them through the hiring process.
3. Apply a project management approach to streamline the hiring surge.

This document serves as both a recruitment guide and project management template for developing a strategic recruitment plan for surge hiring.

STRATEGIC RECRUITMENT PLAN OVERVIEW

Recruitment is not a monolithic process, but a multi-step strategy with distinctive actions, tools, and metrics. Below are the four steps commonly used to outline an agency's recruitment roadmap. There are interdependencies between the recruitment and hiring processes, but they are two different functions.

During the recruitment process, potential applicants identified in the "source" step are the target audience in the "attract" step with the goal to convert them to applicants for the "engage" step. Due to natural attrition, it is highly recommended agencies cast a wide net during the source step to ensure there are enough qualified applicants to screen during the engage step.

STEP 1: PLAN

Planning consists of workforce plans utilization, position description management, collaboration between HR professionals and hiring managers, and applicant tracking system optimization.

STEP 2: SOURCE

Sourcing refers to the cultivation of relationships with individuals and groups of talent—also referred to as a talent pipeline, talent pool or sourcing channel—who not only meet but exceed job announcement minimum qualifications.

STEP 3: ATTRACT

Attraction encompasses all efforts to elevate awareness of the organization's work, culture and job opportunities through social media and other digital platforms. The resulting knowledge will build credibility and keep the organization top of mind. The end game is to convert viewers of the content into applicants.

STEP 4: ENGAGE

Engagement is the approach of shifting from an administratively oriented process to one that centers around the candidate experience. Candidates feel like interactions are more personal and do not feel like they are pouring energy into a black hole.

PROJECT SPONSORSHIP

The work of the Partnership for Public Service ("Partnership") for this project was sponsored by the Democracy Fund. With its support, the Partnership conducted in-depth research—including a literature review as well as interviews with current and former federal HR leaders and other agency officials—to identify the most effective and widely applicable strategies for surge hiring. Based on the examination of previous hiring surges, the Partnership identified best practices, challenges and lessons learned, distilling these findings into three basic strategies (listed above) that agencies can use without additional authority from Congress.

Step 1: Plan

Planning consists of workforce plans utilization, position description management, collaboration between HR professionals and hiring managers, and applicant tracking system optimization.

DETERMINE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE STRATEGY

Begin the strategic recruitment plan process by appointing an individual to manage it. Clear accountability for generating and maintaining the strategy must be made clear at the very beginning. However, development of the strategy should not fall on the shoulders of a single individual. Agency human resources professionals, external human resources vendors, hiring managers, subject matter experts and perhaps affinity group members should participate in generating and executing the strategy. They should all feel like they collectively own the strategy and the talent hired as a result. If they do not, commitment to hiring the best talent will waver and the burden of managing the strategy will shift inequitably.

DEFINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

You can drastically improve your chances of achieving success if roles and responsibilities are clearly assigned to specific individuals. As it pertains to this document, you can assign responsibilities by each step's "action" items. This ensures that everyone involved, especially managers and HR professionals, know who is accountable for delivery.

ADDITIONAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN DETERMINING STRATEGIC GOALS

Factor #1: Use the workforce plan to forecast hiring needs now and in the next six to 12 months.

Guiding Questions:
- How many vacancies are there? What are the available employment type options to fill the vacancies: full-time employees, part-time, temporary or contract?
- What is the average percentage of vacancies filled by internal merit promotions and the competitive hiring (or designated examining) process?
- What is the annual turnover rate? What are the year-over-year trends?
- Based on historical trends and business needs on the horizon, will the workforce shrink, grow or remain steady?

Factor #2: Are there specific workforce gaps associated with the makeup of the team or department?

Guiding Questions:
- Is the representation of the agency's workforce reflective of the available talent in all occupational series?
- Is there specialized knowledge, or skills or abilities, missing among the team or department?
- Is there a particular career level to target, such as early career, to establish a stronger talent pipeline for internal growth?
- Does the focus need to be on best qualified or minimally qualified?

ACTION #1.1: DEFINE THE STRATEGIC GOALS

Total Number of Hires	
Targeted Occupational Series	
Targeted Field Offices or Regions	

	HIRING MILESTONES			
	DATE	DATE	DATE	DATE
Targeted Number of Hires				
Actual Number of Hires				
Targeted Cumulative Number of Hires				
Actual Cumulative Number of Hires				

ACTION #1.2: DEVELOP AND FINALIZE THE RECRUITMENT BUDGET

Whether you "post and pray" or develop a comprehensive recruitment strategy, personnel salaries will always be the largest line item for an agency.

A comprehensive recruitment budget will also include the cost of:
- Sourcing (e.g., job boards, recruitment agencies, etc.).
- Recruiting events (e.g., career fairs, informational sessions, open houses, etc.).
- Employer branding activity, including overhead costs from in-house communication team (e.g., social media campaigns and posts, media marketing, etc.).
- Technology, including in-house IT teams (e.g., chatbots, upgrades of human capital management system functionality, etc.).

ACTIVITY	BUDGET
Sourcing	
Recruiting events	
Employer branding	
Technology	
Total	

ACTION #1.3: IDENTIFY GOVERNMENTWIDE AND AGENCY-SPECIFIC HIRING AUTHORITIES

Determine which government-wide or agency-specific hiring authorities meet the needs of the hiring surge. Because the average competitive selection time-to-hire in the federal government is 90 days and only 45 in the private sector, federal agencies should use hiring authorities whenever possible to shorten the hiring process.

See Appendix II of the Partnership's "Rapid Reinforcements" report (PDF file) for a comprehensive list of hiring authorities, including descriptions, decision criteria and additional federal regulation references.

CONFIRMED HIRING AUTHORITIES

HIRING AUTHORITIES	TYPE OF APPOINTMENT	TYPE OF AUTHORITY	DESCRIPTION

ADDITIONAL HIRING AUTHORITIES TO CONSIDER

HIRING AUTHORITIES	TYPE OF APPOINTMENT	TYPE OF AUTHORITY	DESCRIPTION

ACTION #1.4: ESTABLISH COLLABORATION AGREEMENTS BETWEEN HR PROFESSIONAL AND HIRING MANAGER

As mentioned in the "Rapid Reinforcements" report, treating recruitment, assessment, selection, security clearance and salary negotiations as separate HR functions disrupts the continuum of the hiring process, adding layers of bureaucracy and discouraging efficiency. To increase efficiency during surge hiring, a single HR professional or human resources office is recommended to serve as the coordinator between individuals and teams administering separate steps of the process.

The collaboration between hiring managers and HR professionals (and/or recruiters) is essential for executing an efficient recruitment strategy and cultivating a positive candidate experience. Below are general principles to keep in mind:

- *Lay out the entire process.* Collaborate to not only develop the recruitment plan but also finalize, as much as possible, sourcing channels, recruiting events and candidate engagement approaches. Such a level of planning will streamline work down the road and enable the team to better track its progress.
- *Identify must-haves and nice-to-haves upfront.* Sometimes hiring managers have ambitious expectations about the number of recruiting events or desired level of candidate qualifications. These expectations need to be shared upfront and prioritized to ensure sufficient resources are allocated for recruiting as well as targeting the right talent sources. This would prevent the need to repost a job announcement because of inaccurate qualifications stated in the job announcement or an insufficient number of qualified applicants.
- *Schedule regular check-ins.* Choose a mutually beneficial cadence for updates and clarify the key metrics to monitor with the understanding that milestones will shift. Work to understand each other's roles and responsibilities in the recruitment process as well as preferred modes of communication.

Step 2: Source

Sourcing refers to the cultivation of relationships with individuals and groups of talent—also referred to as a talent pipeline, talent pool or sourcing channel—who not only meet but exceed the minimum qualifications of a job announcement. Development of sources can improve applicants' understanding of the agency's work and culture, increase the probability of an agency hiring highly qualified candidates, and decrease the time it takes to generate a certification list.

ACTION #2.1: SELECT THE RIGHT SOURCING TECHNIQUE(S)

Qualified candidates can come from internal resume banks, employee referrals, a pool of social media followers or elsewhere. Agencies must be intentional about using the right techniques to promote the agency and its mission to attract the right talent for the job. There is some trial and error with this action, which is why tracking and monitoring metrics is essential.

SOURCING TECHNIQUE	DESCRIPTION
Boolean searches	Boolean search in recruitment is defined as the structured process of using search function operators such as AND, OR and NOT to broaden or limit your candidate search on databases such as Google, LinkedIn, and other professional platforms.
In-person and virtual events	These events include but are not limited to career fairs, open houses (i.e., mixers hosted at the agency), seminars and conferences. Meeting people face-to-face, even in a virtual setting, provides a great opportunity to ask questions.
Resume and profile mining	Mining is the process of sorting through large repositories of resumes or professional profiles, such as in LinkedIn, for example, based on specific criteria (e.g., years of experience) and/or key words (e.g., artificial intelligence). In these instances, individuals whose attributes match the desired profile receive a targeted message inviting them to apply for a job.
Social Media	There are boundless approaches and strategies to identify potential applicants through social media. For example, an agency could send direct messages to everyone who follows a specific hashtag, such as "#artificialintelligence," when it seeks an IT professional with experience in that field. Not everyone who follows the hashtag will be qualified, but interest is an indicator of the possibility. See the Partnership's "#NowHiring: The Role of Social Media in Agency Recruiting" report (PDF file) for best practices in the federal government.
Referrals	Employment referral is a method for finding potential new employees through recommendations from current employees.

ACTION #2.2: IDENTIFY TALENT SOURCES BASED ON DESIRED KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES

BUILD AND SUSTAIN SOURCING CHANNELS OR TALENT PIPELINES

Preestablished sourcing channels increase the probability of attracting applicants who are qualified, know the agency and its work, and are likely to accept an extended offer. Without strong talent sources, organizations can still hire good talent, but time-to-hire and quality are less predictable.

There are several factors to take into consideration when identifying and prioritizing talent sources including but not limited to the following:

- Size of the talent pool (i.e., number of qualified group members).
- Strength of employment brand among members that can be quantified by:
- Number of annual agency events and attendees with the talent source.
- Number of current employees who are members or alums of the talent source.
- Number of talent source members who have applied to job announcements in the past.
- Geographic location of headquarters, local chapters and/or members.
- Desired industry background of the group, such as academia, government (local, state or federal), private sector, social impact nonprofit, etc.
- Diversity of the talent pool.

PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND TALENT SOURCES TO CONSIDER

When establishing sourcing channels, agencies should consider the overall diversity of their talent sources, combined. Developing relationships with and conducting targeted outreach to universities or organizations with high populations of underrepresented groups can help the organization recruit qualified applicants with diverse backgrounds and experiences. These can include but are not limited to:

- Historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs; Hispanic-Serving Institutions; universities with high Asian American and Pacific Islander populations; tribal colleges; and women's institutions, which can be further prioritized by field of academic study.
- Nontraditional institutions, such as online colleges and universities.
- Universities and colleges outside the Washington, D.C./Maryland/Virginia region whose students may not have previously considered careers in federal government.
- Professional organizations that promote racial and ethnic diversity in their field, such as the following:
  - › Association of Black Psychologists.
  - › National Association of Black Social Workers.
  - › National Association of Asian American Professionals.
  - › National Association Puerto Rican Hispanic Social Workers.
  - › American Psychological Association Women's Programs Office.

RECOMMENDED TALENT SOURCES

ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION

ACTION #2.3: CONTINUALLY MONITOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOURCING CHANNELS

The effectiveness of sourcing channels pertains to how much each of your sourcing channels (e.g., job boards, recruitment ads, sourcing tools, professional social networks, etc.) are contributing to the volume and depth of qualified applicants.

KEY STRATEGIC METRICS TO TRACK

Leading metrics
- Applicant pool depth (n, %)—the number of qualified applicants from the source, especially for critical roles.

Lagging metrics (see Close Out section on page 14)
- Hires per source (n, %).
- Interviewees per source (n, %).
- Offers per source (n, %).

Step 3: Attract

Attraction encompasses all efforts to elevate awareness of the organization's work, culture, and job opportunities through social media and other digital platforms. The resulting employer brand will build credibility and keep the organization top of mind. The end game is to convert viewers of the content into applicants.

ACTION #3.1: PROMOTE THE EMPLOYER BRAND TO THE TARGET AUDIENCE

An employee value proposition is the unique set of benefits employees receive in return for the skills, capabilities and experience they bring to a company. An employee value proposition is about defining the essence of your agency—how it is unique and what it stands for. In a competitive market for the best candidates, the agencies that will win are the ones that are clear about why someone would choose to work for them over a competitor.

Assess how effective your employment branding campaign has been in building awareness among your target population. Where does your agency fall on the Best Places to Work lists? What is the current trend in media regarding your agency at-large or in a targeted region, if applicable?

ACTION #3.2: GENERATE CALENDAR OF RECRUITMENT EVENTS

Determine which recruiting events to hold, and the requisite resources and development time needed to run them.

TYPE OF EVENT	DESCRIPTION AND TARGET AUDIENCE
Career Fair (in-person and virtual)	A job fair, also commonly referred to as a job expo or career fair or career expo, is an event in which employers, recruiters and schools give information to potential employees.
"Live" events (via social media)	Some social media platforms, such as Instagram Live or Facebook Live, have a feature that allows users to broadcast live videos to other users on the platform. Events vary in nature and duration, from short celebratory accomplishments to in-depth panel discussions. See the Partnership's "#NowHiring: The Role of Social Media in Agency Recruiting" report (PDF file) for best practices in the federal government.
Information session (or "open house")	An information session is an open forum scheduled by an organization. Sessions—typically hosted in a classroom or space on campus—enable the agency to meet with potential candidates in a more informal setting.
Case study competition	Participants strive to develop the best solution to a business- or education-related case study within an allocated time. Typically involves teams of four or more individuals who are graded on their solution by a panel of agency employees.

ACTION #3.3: DEVELOP PROTOCOLS FOR HANDLING INQUIRIES

Below are a couple of practices to keep at the forefront:

- *Use clear and frequent communication.* HR professionals should be clear and transparent about the hiring process, especially the average time-to-hire. Effective communication is also central to HR professionals' efforts to educate hiring managers about their role in surge hiring.
- *Emphasize the involvement of hiring managers.* As mentioned in the Rapid Reinforcements report, it is important that the HR professional keeps the hiring manager up to date on the status of the hiring surge, so they are prepared to onboard new staff and get them to work right away.

Step 4: Engage

Engagement is the approach of shifting from an administratively oriented process to one that centers around the candidate experience. The interactions are more personal and candidates do not feel like they are pouring energy into a black hole. More importantly, the federal government hiring process is twice as long as the private sector process—on average 90 days versus 45—so candidates need to feel engaged so they do not drop out of the process.

ACTION #4.1: HIRING MANAGERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

Hiring managers play an integral role in the "candidate experience." Not only are they the candidate's potential boss but they will also influence the candidate's view of the organization itself. Therefore, managers need to know their role in the hiring process and their role in the hiring experience.

Remember that the candidate is assessing the agency as much as the agency is assessing them through the hiring process. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- [More than 75% of candidates](#) said they would tell friends and family about a bad experience with a potential employer, and almost 20% said they would post on social media. Either disclosure will impact the agency's employment brand.
- Responding within 24-48 hours to candidates' inquiries influences their perceptions of how much the agency values them as a potential employee as well as the overall organization of the hiring process.

So what can hiring managers do to ensure a positive candidate experience?

- Briefly outline the entire hiring process in an email to candidates with estimated dates to make decisions after each stage of the hiring process. This will mitigate surprises about the duration of the hiring process and how many interviews and assessments they should prepare for.
- Treat candidates like customers. With a customer-centric mindset, managers will be more mindful of their interactions with candidates, especially if managers have concluded that the candidate is not the best one for the position.

- Drop the jargon. Every agency loves their acronyms and shorthand language, but it will leave most candidates confused and possibly frustrated if they must constantly decipher your communication.
- If your hiring process entails a long background or security clearance check, schedule bi-weekly or monthly 15-minute check-in calls with candidates to keep them engaged and personally informed about the status of their employment screening.

ACTION #4.2: CONTINUOUSLY MONITOR THE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Keys to a good candidate experience:

- *Communicate, communicate, communicate*. Always tell candidates what to expect next. Starting with the "we received your resume" email, keep them informed every step of the way. Send regularly scheduled status update emails and promptly respond to inquiries, prompt being within 24-36 hours generally.
- *Make your entire hiring process transparent*. The easiest way to avoid surprises for candidates, like multiple assessments or what may feel like countless interview panels, is to share your process in a one-pager at the very beginning.
- *Treat candidates like human beings, not a number*. When engaging candidates via email or phone, refer to them by name and do your best not to rush them through their questions or inquiry.
- *Collect, analyze and visualize data*. Process-improvement efforts risk being ineffective or counter-effective when not driven by data analysis. Dashboards are easy to read, provide data in relatively real time, chart important trends and enable users to make informed decisions.

The best way to monitor your progress is to implement a candidate survey. Thirty days after candidates complete your process, send them a survey. It will provide invaluable insight about your hiring process.

CLOSE OUT

Continual improvement should be a point of emphasis with each surge hiring occurrence. Assess whether the recruitment strategy was widely distributed and completely understood by everyone who participated in the recruiting process. Ask a random sample of hiring managers and recruiters to describe the desired strategic outcomes and key elements, to assess awareness and understanding of the strategy.

Below are additional best practices from the "Rapid Reinforcements" report to consider when assessing adjustments for the next surge hire:

- *Communication and collaboration are key*. Ensure key agency leaders and stakeholders—including the chief human capital officer, the chief information officer and the chief financial officer—are part of the development and implementation of the hiring strategy. Gaining their input and buy-in is critical for identifying needs, potential barriers and the available resources for overcoming them.
- *Be flexible and open to change*. Agency leaders and staffs need to be flexible when undertaking a hiring surge. They should be willing to shift internal resources and evolve processes if they recognize opportunities for increasing efficiency. Institutional norms and practices should not prevent efforts to improve the hiring process.
- *Training is necessary*. Provide training to agency leaders, supervisors, hiring managers and other stakeholders to reduce misinformation about and increase the effectiveness of surge hiring campaigns.

KEY STRATEGIC METRICS TO TRACK

- Time-to-Hire (days)—Time-to-hire (or otherwise known as "time to fill") is the amount of time it takes to hire a candidate for a job announcement.
- Retention Rate (%)—Employee retention rate measures an organization's ability to retain its employees. It takes the number of employees who left their job during a certain time and divides this number by the total number of employees during this same time period.
- Quality of Hire—Measuring quality of hire helps you measure the value employees bring to your company. Quality of hire includes many metrics that can vary for different functions. In some cases, it includes factors such as retention, the time it takes an employee to meet performance expectations, cultural fit, etc.
- Satisfaction Rate—Satisfaction rate refers to the hiring manager's satisfaction with the quality of the candidates interviewed. It can also include the satisfaction of the candidate's interview experience. The Chief Human Capital Officer's Management Hiring Process Satisfaction Survey administered by the Office of Personnel Management is a widely accepted tool for measuring the satisfaction rate.

Strategic Recruitment Plan

STEP 1: PLAN

Action #1.1: Define the strategic goals

	HIERING MILESTONES				OCCUPATIONAL SERIES:
Targeted Number of Hires					
Actual Number of Hires					
Targeted Cumulative Number of Hires					
Actual Cumulative Number of Hires					

Action #1.2: Develop and finalize the recruitment budget

ACTIVITY	BUDGET
Sourcing	
Recruiting events	
Employer branding	
Technology	
Total	

Action #1.3: Identify government-wide and agency-specific hiring authorities

STEP 2: SOURCE

ACTION #2.1: Identify talent sources based on desired knowledge, skills and abilities

ACTION #2.2: Select the right sourcing technique

ACTION #2.3: Continuously monitor sourcing channel effectiveness

KEY STRATEGIC METRIC				
Applicant pool depth (n, %)				
Hires per source (n, %)				
Interviewees per source (n, %)				
Offers per source (n, %)				

STEP 3: ATTRACT				
ACTION #3.1: Generate calendar of recruitment events				

STEP 4: ENGAGE		
ACTION #4.1: Hiring managers' responsibilities	Has the hiring manager reserved time on their schedule to conduct bi-weekly or monthly 15-minute check-in calls with candidates while they wait for their background or security clearance check to be completed?	
ACTION #4.2: Continuously monitor the candidate experience	Has the hiring manager and HR professional reviewed the candidate experience survey scores? Where is their room for improvement, if any?	