

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Pathways Programs Handbook



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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Pathways Programs (Programs) Handbook (Handbook) is to provide practical guidance to Pathways Programs Officers (PPOs), human resources (HR) professionals and other agency¹ employees who are responsible for the implementation and/or administration of the Programs. The three Programs include the Internship Program, Recent Graduates Program and Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program.

The Handbook, which reflects Government-wide guidance, should serve as a template for agencies to use in the development of an agency-specific program. It should be used in conjunction with Executive Order 13562, the operative regulations, your Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and agency-specific policies. Please consult your PPO, HR professional, or counsel's office, or a [representative in the Recruitment Policy and Outreach Office](#) at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), for further guidance.

BACKGROUND

On December 27, 2010, President Obama signed [Executive Order 13562](#), "Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates," which established the Internship and Recent Graduates Programs, and enhanced the PMF Program. As the Executive Order established, the Federal Government benefits from a diverse workforce that includes students and recent graduates, who infuse the workplace with their enthusiasm, talent and fresh perspectives.

These Programs, which were designed (or, in the case of PMF, redesigned) to help agencies recruit and hire well-qualified students and recent graduates by streamlining processes and providing applicants with clear paths to internships and full-time employment, as well as meaningful training, mentoring and career-development opportunities, went into effect on July 10, 2012. Taken together, they are intended to provide agencies with another resource in attracting talent and filling key competency gaps. These Programs are a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, the competitive hiring process. Along with the Government-wide initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion, and hire talented veterans, the Programs support agencies' efforts to fill workforce needs.

PROGRAM OVERVIEWS

Internship Program

The Internship Program provides students who are enrolled in or accepted for enrollment in a wide variety of [qualifying educational institutions](#) with paid opportunities to work either part- or full-time in agencies and explore career paths related to their academic fields of study or career interests. Students who successfully complete Program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the civil service.

¹ "Agency," as used in this Handbook, is an all-encompassing term that refers to any department, component or independent establishment of the Federal Government that has developed a Pathways MOU with OPM and is authorized to hire employees under the Programs.

Recent Graduates Program

The Recent Graduates Program is a dynamic, one-year developmental program that promotes careers in the Federal Government to recent graduates. Individuals must apply within two years of receiving a qualifying degree or certificate, with the exception of veterans, who have up to six years to apply to the Recent Graduates Program due to military service obligations. Students may also apply up to nine months prior to completing their academic requirements, depending upon agency-specific policies.

Participants in the Program receive training and professional development, complete an individual development plan (IDP), and are assigned a mentor. Recent Graduates who successfully complete Program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the civil service.

Presidential Management Fellows Program

The PMF Program is the Federal Government's premier, two-year leadership development program for advanced degree candidates who demonstrate academic excellence, possess management and leadership potential, and have a clear interest in and commitment to public service. Individuals must apply within two years of receiving a qualifying advanced degree. Students may also apply in the fall of their final year of graduate school.

Participants in the Program take part in an orientation session, receive training and professional development, complete an IDP, are assigned a mentor, and have at least one developmental assignment. PMF Fellows² who successfully complete Program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the civil service.

AUTHORITY AND POLICY

[Executive Order 13562](#) established the Schedule D appointing authority, which was designed to encompass appointments of individuals to the excepted service under the Programs. The Executive Order provides the basic framework which requires the application of merit system principles and veterans' preference. The regulation codified in [5 CFR 213.3402](#) and 362, provides further guidance on the implementation of all agency actions, including those to evaluate, appoint, develop and promote individuals under the Programs, will be based on merit and made without regard to political, religious or labor organization affiliation or non-affiliation, marital status, race, color, sex, sexual orientation, genetic information, national origin, non-disqualifying physical handicap or age, and must be based solely on job-related criteria.

- Review the general Schedule D provisions [here](#).
- Review the general Pathways Programs provisions [here](#).
- Review the Internship Program rules [here](#).
- Review the Recent Graduates Program rules [here](#).
- Review the PMF Program rules [here](#).
- Review the regulations governing how to fill excepted service positions, including how to apply veterans' preference, [here](#).

² "PMF Fellows," as used in this Handbook, refers to individuals who have been appointed to the PMF Program. "PMF Finalists," as used in this Handbook, refers to individuals who applied to the PMF Program and were selected by OPM as finalists who were eligible for appointment as PMF Fellows. All mentions of participants in the PMF Program will make reference to either "PMF Fellows" and/or "PMF Finalists."

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Office of Personnel Management

OPM prescribes Pathways regulations and has a critical oversight role to ensure that agencies comply with the President's direction to follow merit systems principles, apply veterans' preference, and use these Programs as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, the normal competitive hiring process. As part of this oversight role, OPM's Director may establish caps on the number of Pathways participants who may be appointed or converted in any Pathways Program within a specific agency or throughout the Federal Government, as provided in the regulations.

Recruitment Policy and Outreach Office

The Recruitment Policy and Outreach Office at OPM is dedicated to supporting the implementation and use of the Programs across the Federal Government.

Agencies

Agencies must execute a Pathways MOU with OPM in order to administer and use the Programs. Agencies must provide for equal employment opportunity in the Pathways Programs without regard to race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, or any other non-merit-based factor. This requirement includes the methods by which the agency will accept applications, assess candidates, rate and arrange qualified applicants, and ensure adherence to veterans' preference.

An agency must enter into a Participant Agreement with each Program participant that clearly identifies expectations, including a general description of duties, evaluation procedures, work schedules and minimum eligibility requirements for conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service.

Pathways Participants

A Pathways participant is an individual appointed under one of the Programs. She or he must follow the Program requirements set out in her or his Participant Agreement.

Pathways Programs Officers

Agencies that are implementing the Programs must designate a PPO who is responsible for Program administration plans, including coordinating recruitment and onboarding processes, and ensuring that mentors are assigned, as appropriate, and IDPs are put in place. The PPO should also serve as a liaison to OPM by providing OPM with implementation updates, clarifying technical and programmatic issues, sharing best practices and lessons learned, and submitting applicable reports.

Pathways Programs Supervisors

A Pathways Programs Supervisor is an individual who is responsible for managing a Pathways participant.

Presidential Management Fellows Coordinators

Agencies that are implementing the PMF Program must designate a PMF Coordinator, at the appropriate component level, who is responsible for administering the agency's PMF Program, including coordinating recruitment and onboarding, and ensuring that mentors are assigned and IDPs are put in place. The PMF Coordinator should also serve as a liaison to OPM by providing OPM with

implementation updates, clarifying technical and programmatic issues, sharing best practices and lessons learned, and submitting applicable reports. The PPO may also serve as the PMF Coordinator.

DEFINITIONS

Advanced Degree: A professional or graduate degree (e.g., Master's, Ph.D. or Juris Doctorate (J.D.)) from an accredited academic institution.

Advertisement: A notice to the public on [USAJOBS](#), which provides information on a job opportunity announcement (JOA), as well as instructions on how to apply for the JOA through [USAJOBS](#) or the agency's website.

Appointment: Any personnel action that brings an individual onto the rolls (staff) of an agency.

Appointment Extension: An agency may extend the appointment of an Intern Not-to-Exceed (NTE) (temporary Intern) who meets eligibility criteria for one additional year up to the maximum allowable time in the Program. An agency may extend the appointment for a Recent Graduate or PMF Fellow for up to 120 days to cover rare or unusual circumstances or situations. An agency's Pathways MOU must identify the criteria for approving extensions.

Break in Program (applies to Interns and Interns NTE): A period of time in which an Intern is working, but unable to attend classes, or is neither attending classes nor working. While breaks in program are not common, they are permissible in certain circumstances.

Break in Service: The time when an employee is no longer on the payroll of an agency. A separation of less than three calendar days is not considered a break in service. (In computing creditable service for benefits (e.g., leave accrual and reduction in force retention), a separation of one, two or three calendar days is not considered to be a break in service; a separation of four or more calendar days is considered to be a break in service and the days of separation are subtracted from the employee's total creditable service.)

Certificate Program: Post-secondary education, in a [qualifying educational institution](#), *equivalent to at least one academic year of full-time study* that is part of an accredited college-level, technical, trade, vocational or business school curriculum.

Competitive Service: All civilian positions in the Federal Government that are not specifically excepted from the civil service laws by or pursuant to statute, by the President or by OPM under Rule VI, and that are not in the Senior Executive Service (SES) or Senior Level position (SL).

Developmental Assignment (applies to PMF Fellows): An assignment lasting four to six months that is full-time, outside of the PMF Fellow's normal duties and immediate office, and which provides managerial or technical responsibilities that will help to prepare the PMF Fellow for conversion.

Entrance on Duty (EOD) Date: The date on which a person completes the necessary paperwork and is sworn in as an employee.

Excepted Service: Unclassified service, unclassified civil service or positions outside of the competitive service and the SES. Excepted service positions have been excepted from the requirements of the competitive service by statute, Executive order or OPM regulation.

Executive Resources Board (ERB) (applies to PMF Fellows): Senior official(s) who have been given responsibility for executive resources management and oversight by the agency head. The individual(s) review each PMF Fellows' conversion package and certify whether PMF Fellows have successfully completed Program requirements.

Individual Development Plan (IDP): A strategic roadmap that employees can use to create and track their career planning, professional development, and training activities. It should make note of an individual's target position, learning objectives and developmental requirements.

Intern: A current student who has been appointed to the Internship Program for an initial period that is expected to last more than one year.

Intern Not-to-Exceed (NTE): A current student who has been appointed to the Internship Program for an initial period that is not expected to last more than one year.

Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA): A Federal job announcement for hiring opportunities that is required to be posted on [USAJOBS](https://www.usajobs.gov).

Merit System Principles: The 9 basic principles in accordance with which Federal Executive Branch personnel management should be implemented. Other, more specific, provisions of title 5 of the United States Code and OPM regulations are intended, in large part, to apply these principles.

Non-Competitive Conversion: The changing of an employee from one appointment to another appointment without competition under the same or a different authority in the same agency.

Notice of a Recruitment Event: An agency advertisement or JOA on [USAJOBS](https://www.usajobs.gov) informing applicants how to submit an in-person application at a recruitment event, as well as instructions on an alternative method of applying to the JOA if candidates are unable to attend the event.

Participant Agreement: A required written agreement between every agency and Pathways participant that clearly identifies expectations, including a general description of duties, evaluation procedures, work schedules, and minimum eligibility requirements for conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service.

Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): A required written agreement that every agency must sign prior to utilizing the Programs. This document, which is renewed every two years, outlines how an agency will administer the Programs (e.g., with respect to accepting applications and assessing candidates).

Pathways Programs Officer (PPO): An individual who is responsible for Program administration plans, including coordinating recruitment and onboarding processes, and ensuring that mentors are assigned, as appropriate, and that IDPs are put in place. The PPO also serves as a liaison to OPM by providing OPM with implementation updates, clarifying technical and programmatic issues, sharing best practices and lessons learned, and submitting applicable reports.

Pathways Programs Participant: An individual who has been appointed to one of the Programs.

Pathways Programs Supervisor: An individual who is responsible for managing a Pathways participant(s).

Preference Eligible: Veterans who have been separated from the armed forces under honorable conditions and who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition, for which a campaign badge has been authorized, or during particular defined periods. It also includes disabled veterans and, under certain circumstances, the mothers, spouses or unmarried widows or widowers of certain veterans.

Presidential Management Fellow (PMF): An individual who has been appointed to the PMF Program.

Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Coordinator: An individual who is responsible for administering an agency's PMF Program, including coordinating recruitment and onboarding, and ensuring that mentors are assigned and IDPs are put in place. The PMF Coordinator serves as a liaison to OPM by providing OPM with implementation updates, clarifying technical and programmatic issues, sharing best practices and lessons learned, and submitting applicable reports. The PPO may also serve as the PMF Coordinator.

Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Finalist: An individual who applied to the PMF Program and was selected by OPM to become eligible for appointment as a PMF Fellow.

[Presidential Management Fellows \(PMF\) Talent Acquisition System \(TAS\)](#) (applies to PMF Finalists and PMF Fellows): The OPM database used to create accounts, search for and appoint PMF Finalists, and post JOAs and developmental and rotational assignments for PMF Fellows.

[Qualifying Educational Institution:](#) A public high school whose curriculum has been approved by a State or local governing body, a private school that provides secondary education as determined under State law, or a homeschool that is allowed to operate in a State; and any of the following educational institutions or curricula that have been accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the Secretary of Education: a technical or vocational school, a two- or four-year college or university, a graduate or professional school (e.g., law school or medical school), or a post-secondary homeschool curriculum.

Recent Graduate: An individual who has been appointed to the Recent Graduates Program.

Rotational Assignment: An assignment lasting one to six months that can be offered at the agency's discretion.

Schedule D: The schedule under which appointing authorities established by [Executive Order 13562](#), which were designed to appoint individuals to the various Pathways Programs, are consolidated and published.

Term Appointment: An appointment made to a position in the competitive service for a period that is expected to last longer than one year, but no more than four years, when the need for an employee's services is not permanent.

[USAJOBS:](#) The Federal Government's official one-stop source for Federal jobs and employment information and the mechanism by which OPM publishes information supplied by agencies about positions they intend to fill using one of the Pathways Programs.

HELPFUL LINKS

- [Executive Order 13562](#)
- [Final Rule](#)

- [Regulations](#)
- [OPM Pathways Fact Sheets](#)
- [OPM Pathways FAQs](#)
- [OPM Pathways Webpage](#)
- [Sample PMF ERB Certification Form \(OPM Form 1303\)](#)
- [Sample PMF IDP \(OPM Form 1302\)](#)
- [PMF TAS](#)
- [PMF Website](#)
- [HRU.gov](#)

II. GENERAL INFORMATION

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

While each of the three Pathways Programs (Programs) is unique, there are a number of elements that are common among these initiatives. This section addresses and provides more details about these cross-cutting features. For more information, please see the Program-specific sections of the Pathways Handbook (Handbook).

Agency Workforce Planning

OPM expects agencies to use Pathways as a supplemental hiring authority that is part of an overall workforce planning strategy, and not as a substitute for competitive hiring.

Workforce planning, the systematic process of identifying and addressing the gaps between the workforce of today and the human capital needs of tomorrow, is an important prerequisite to filling positions through the Programs. While the missions and workforce needs of agencies will determine when recruitment through the Programs is appropriate, the Programs can be a valuable tool to supplement traditional hiring, as well as an effective means of enhancing or sustaining workforce diversity, building entry-level talent pipelines and supporting succession plans. By allowing agencies to bring in individuals for term-limited appointments, the Programs provide organizations with an opportunity to evaluate candidates and determine their fit before hiring them into permanent positions.

Prior to filling jobs under Pathways, agencies should ensure that their workforce plans include a sufficient number of permanent positions or full-time equivalents to allow for the possibility of conversion of individuals who successfully complete Program requirements. Although service in a Program confers no right to further employment in the competitive service, incorporating the Programs into your agency's workforce plan will make the experience more rewarding to the agency, as well as the participant.

Pathways Memorandum of Understanding

Prior to administering and using the Programs, an agency must enter into a Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) that addresses the requirements outlined in [5 CFR 362.104](#). These agreements, which must be renewed every two years, should be submitted to the [Recruitment Policy and Outreach Office](#) at OPM.

Benefits

Coverage for health and life insurance for participants in the Programs depends on the type of Pathways appointment and the expectation of substantial employment during the year.

Students hired under an Internship³, Recent Graduates or Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) appointment for a period expected to last longer than one year are eligible for health and life insurance coverage, so long as they are also expected to be in a pay status for at least one-third of the total period

³ "Interns," as used in this Handbook, refers to longer term, indefinite Interns. "Interns NTE," as used in this Handbook, refers to temporary Interns. All mentions of participants in the Internship Program will make reference to either Interns and/or Interns NTE.

of time from the date of their initial appointment to the date of completion of their respective Program. The cost of premiums is split between the employee and the agency, as is the case for all permanent employees. Pathways participants that work part-time will be responsible for a larger share of their health insurance premiums than full-time Pathways participants.

When an employee on a temporary appointment, a seasonal schedule of less than six months per year, or an intermittent schedule is expected to work 130 hours per month or more for at least 90 days, the employee is eligible to enroll in an FEHB plan and receive the same government contribution as full-time permanent employees. These newly eligible employees will receive the same government contribution as full-time permanent employees.

Federal Student Loan Repayment Assistance

Agencies may offer Federal student loan repayment assistance as an incentive to recruit/retain highly-skilled students and recent graduates, and to fill mission-critical and hard-to-fill positions under the Programs. In offering this incentive, agencies should consider factors such as the value of the incentive to their organizations and pay parity.

Telework

Depending upon agency policy and individual circumstances, Pathways participants may be eligible for telework. If they are, agencies should follow their agency-specific telework policy.

Promotions and Within Grade Increases

Agencies may promote participants in the Programs above the grade to which these individuals were initially appointed. Promotions are never an entitlement and agencies must have excepted service policies in place that cover promotions for positions in the excepted service. In developing these policies regarding time-in-grade, agencies should consider factors such as the ability to perform at the next grade level and the impact of rapid advancement on employees outside of the Programs.

Agencies may establish agency-specific promotion policies for participants in the Internship Program. Considerations for promotion may include factors such as advancement toward a degree (e.g., completion of an additional year of education), work requirements and the ability to successfully take on more responsibility. Alternatively, agencies may use the [Group Coverage Qualification Standards for Schedule D, Pathways Internship Positions](#) to establish promotion eligibility.

Agencies must use the [OPM Qualification Standards](#) for participants in the Recent Graduates and PMF Programs when determining their eligibility for promotion.

Please consult your Pathways Programs Officer (PPO) or human resources (HR) professional for further guidance.

Time-in-Grade Limitations

Employees in Pathways positions are not subject to the time-in-grade limitations outlined in [5 CFR 300, Subpart F](#) prior to being promoted. These guidelines only apply to movement to or within the competitive service. Please consult your HR professional for further guidance.

Trial Periods

The length of a trial period for an Intern is determined by the employing agency. Depending on the length of the agency's trial period for employees in the excepted service, the Intern may gain

employee status for the purposes of appeal rights during the Internship appointment. The duration of Recent Graduates and PMF appointments in the excepted service is counted as a trial period across the Federal Government.

Reassignments

Agencies must follow their own policies for movement of excepted service personnel, and Pathways participants must meet the qualification requirements for the positions to which they will be reassigned.

Separations

Separations are actions that end employment with agencies. The most common forms of separations of Pathways participants are resignations and terminations.

Resignations

Pathways participants may resign at any time. When doing so, they should submit a resignation letter that states the effective date of resignation, and provides both forwarding contact information (e.g., address, phone number and email) and, if desired, a reason for resignation. This information should be documented as a remark entry on the [SF-52 \(Request for Personnel Action\)](#).

Terminations

Agencies may terminate Pathways participants for misconduct, poor performance or because they have been determined to be unsuitable under the applicable provisions of title 5 of the United States Code and the Code of Federal Regulations. Various situations may result in the termination of participants. The following examples are merely illustrative and not meant to be exclusive

- Do not maintain good academic standing, as defined by their educational institutions.
- Do not provide proof of current academic status during the allotted timeframe and/or fail to maintain eligibility as a student.
- Fail to meet any requirement set forth in their Participant Agreements.

In all cases, it is important to consult with a representative from your Employee Relations (ER) or Labor Relations (LR) Office who has responsibility for evaluating terminations and ensuring compliance with Federal regulations and agency-specific policies.

Reporting Requirements

Agencies must provide annually the following workforce planning strategy information to OPM, including:

- **For the coming year:**
 - The occupations for which any of the Programs will be used to fill entry-level positions; and
 - The percentage of overall hiring expected to be done under each of the Programs.
- **For the previous year:**
 - The number of participants initially appointed under each of the Programs;
 - The percentage of overall hires made under each of the Programs;
 - The number of Pathways participants converted to the competitive service for each of the Programs; and
 - The number of Pathways participants who were separated for each of the Programs.

Tenure Groups for Reduction in Force

As outlined in [5 CFR 351](#):

- Interns serving under appointments for an initial period expected to last more than one year are classified in Tenure Group II of the excepted service and have the same retention rights as other excepted service employees.
- Interns NTE, serving under appointments not to exceed one year, who have completed one year of current, continuous service, are classified in Tenure Group III of the excepted service and have the same retention rights as other excepted service employees.
- Interns NTE, serving under appointments not to exceed one year, who have not completed one year of service, are classified in Tenure Group 0 of the excepted service and have the same retention rights as other excepted service employees.
- Recent Graduates are classified in Tenure Group II of the excepted service and have the same retention rights as other excepted service employees.
- PMF Fellows⁴ are classified in Tenure Group II of the excepted service and have the same retention rights as other excepted service employees.

Appeal Rights

Please see the Program-specific sections of this Handbook.

RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH

Recruiting is about more than looking for talent when agencies need to fill vacant jobs. Effective recruiting means planning ahead, searching for talent all the time in unusual or non-traditional places, and often involves cultivating talent.

Recruiting qualified applicants for Pathways positions starts with developing a clear picture of your agency's short- and long-term workforce planning priorities from the top down, as well as the communication of project needs from the ground up. For more information, please see [Agency Workforce Planning](#) above.

Likewise, a best practice for recruiting applicants for Pathways positions is to begin with the end in mind. Is there a clear understanding of which Programs would be a good fit for the agency? Are there creative or effective ways to target the desired pool of applicants that also meet the recruiting requirements? Will these positions offer conversion to full-time status and career ladder potential at the end of the Programs? Is there capacity to develop participants once they are on board?

HR professionals can help hiring managers and supervisors to conduct job analyses to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform the work in your agency and collaborate with them and others to create a recruitment strategy.

In addition to building and maintaining partnerships with accredited colleges and universities in order to conduct onsite recruiting for students and recent graduates, agencies should also use technology to recruit these individuals for Pathways positions. Digital media has transformed recruitment options, so agencies are encouraged to supplement traditional recruitment strategies with other popular and effective strategies, such as social media and mobile recruitment. Colleges and universities are using

⁴ "PMF Fellows," as used in this Handbook, refers to individuals who have been appointed to the PMF Program. "PMF Finalists," as used in this Handbook, refers to individuals who applied to the PMF Program and were selected by OPM to become eligible for appointment as PMF Fellows. All mentions of participants in the PMF Program will make reference to either "PMF Finalists" and/or "PMF Fellows."

these tools to attract and sell themselves to potential applicants. When your agency recruits, it, too, is selling the organization and its jobs to potential applicants. Provide potential applicants with a quick and easy way to connect to your agency's job posting, information about your organization, career events, or other recruitment-related information. Agencies retain the discretion to determine how they will recruit and accept applications as long as they comply with applicable law and the regulatory procedures of part 302.

Advertise in targeted places using digital technology or paper-based methods, beyond the traditional (e.g., local and/or national newspapers, radio, magazines, billboards and journals). For example:

- Send links to job postings via an email listserv;
- Meet with representatives from minority-serving organizations within communities;
- Post notices at youth centers and schools;
- Advertise on bulletin boards, at supermarkets, libraries, health clubs, child care centers, family restaurants, etcetera;
- Visit schools that train people with disabilities;
- Meet with directors of local agencies offering services to people with disabilities;
- Speak at adult evening education classes;
- Hold career fairs at high schools with career programs, not just at colleges and universities;
- Advertise at community centers; and/or
- Present information in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, especially if your agency seeks specific language skills.

Above all, learn where to find potential applicants with the skill sets that your organization needs. Learn how best to communicate with and attract them, as well as market your agency and available positions, so that you get the right talent in the right jobs at the right time.

Announcing Pathways Opportunities

When accepting applications for Internship and Recent Graduates opportunities from individuals outside of the Federal workforce, agencies must fulfill the public notice requirements outlined in [5 CFR 362.105\(b\)](#), [5 CFR 362.203\(a\)](#) and [5 CFR 362.303\(a\)](#). Public notice may be provided via [USAJOBS](#) in the form of a job opportunity announcement (JOA), or advertisement. An agency may accept applications at a recruitment event, but must notify applicants of an alternative means of submitting applications for those applicants unable to attend such an event. For more information, please see JOA, advertisement and notice of a recruitment event under [Definitions](#) in the Introduction and Background section of this Handbook.

Agencies must “use appropriate merit-based procedures for recruitment, assessment, placement, and ongoing career development for participants in the Pathways Programs.” E.O. 13562, § 7(c). See the [Merit System Principles](#). Among other things, when posting a JOA, advertisement or notice, agencies must consider whether the notice and time allowed provide for fair and open competition that ensures that potential applicants for positions will receive fair and equitable treatment.

To maximize recruitment opportunities for PMF Finalists, agencies are strongly encouraged to publicize each of their PMF positions in the [PMF Talent Acquisition System \(TAS\)](#) according to their agency-specific policies and procedures.

Posting Job Opportunity Announcements

JOAs must meet public notification requirements. At a minimum, JOAs for Internship and Recent Graduates positions that are posted on [USAJOBS](#) should include:

- Position title, series and grade;
- Salary information;
- Geographic location(s);
- Promotion potential;
- Conversion eligibility;
- Information on how to apply or a link to where applicants can find instructions on how to apply;
- Reasonable accommodation statement;
- Information about how to claim veterans' preference;
- Opening and closing dates;
- Total number of vacancies;
- Duration or type of appointment;
- Who may apply;
- Job summary;
- Job duties;
- Qualification or eligibility requirements;
- Required documents;
- Selective Service requirement;
- Agency contact information;
- Alternate application procedures;
- Information about the possibility of conversion to a permanent position, if applicable; and
- Availability of relocation expenses and/or recruitment incentives, if applicable.

JOAs for PMF positions posted in the [PMF TAS](#) must also clearly state promotion potential above the grade level being filled and describe the possibility of conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service. There is a JOA template that agencies can populate in the [PMF TAS](#) that walks users through providing information for the required fields and others.

Managing Job Opportunity Announcements

Agencies have several options for managing the Pathways JOA process so that it does not result in an unmanageably high number of applications received, including:

- **Limiting the number of days a JOA is open:** Agencies have the discretion to determine the length of time that a Pathways JOA is open. When doing so, agencies should give consideration to the types, grade levels and geographic locations of the positions being filled. For example, an administrative Internship NTE position being filled at the GS-4 level for the summer in a regional office located near a number of campuses may not need to be open as long as a scientific Internship position being filled at the GS-11 level in the fall at a headquarters location.
- **Limiting the number of applications received:** Agencies have the discretion to set "cut-offs" or limits (e.g., the first 100 applications received) on the number of applications that they will consider when filling a Pathways position. When using such limits, OPM strongly encourages agencies to accept any applications received up until 11:59 p.m. of the day the limit is reached in order to accommodate applicants in non-Eastern time zones.
- **Using specific eligibility requirements for entrance into the Internship Program:** With respect to the Internship Program, agencies may use requirements such as the ability to work a specified number of hours per week or be in good academic standing (i.e., maintenance of a minimum

grade point average) as eligibility criteria. In addition, agencies may require applicants to confirm their ability to work in the specific location(s) listed in the JOA. Agencies may not require the completion of educational requirements for specific coursework for occupations that do not have positive education requirements.

Agencies' procedures for receiving applications must address the use of these options as outlined in [5 CFR 302.301](#). When one or more of these limitations is used, agencies must state the limitations in the Pathways JOAs and thoroughly document the business rationale for using them in the related staffing case files.

Position Classification

Pathways participants whose positions fall under the General Schedule (GS) or a comparable pay system must be classified in the xx99 series of the appropriate occupational group.

Pathways participants whose positions fall under the Federal Wage System (FWS) must be classified in the xx01 series of the appropriate occupational group.

SELECTION PROCESS

Assessing, Rating and Ranking Applicants

Agencies must apply veterans' preference in accordance with the procedures outlined in [5 USC 3320](#) and [5 CFR 302](#), as well as any applicable agency-specific policies. How veterans' preference is applied depends upon the selection method that agencies choose to use when filling Pathways positions.

In accordance with [5 CFR 302](#), agencies can generally choose from among three selection methods when filling jobs in the excepted service—the ranked list, the unranked list and the category rating-like process. These strategies, which are outlined below, are considered to be the *standard* selection methods.

- **Ranked list:** This method works the same way as the “rule of three” rating-and-ranking process previously used in the competitive service. Individuals are assessed against criteria that produce a numerical score. Preference eligibles (i.e., veterans eligible for veterans' preference or individuals eligible for derived preference) who earn a passing score receive zero, 5 or 10 points, as appropriate, which are added to their scores. Applicants are then listed in score order and selections are made from among the highest-ranked three names on the list. Preference eligible veterans with 10 percent or more disabilities are placed at the top of the list, and thus achieve the highest rank. Agencies cannot select non-preference eligible veterans over preference eligible veterans with an equal or higher score without going through the proper pass over procedures.
- **Unranked list:** Applicants who meet basic eligibility criteria are listed by veterans' preference category: 10 percent or more compensably-disabled veterans, 10-point preference eligible veterans, 5-point preference eligible veterans and non-preference eligible veterans. Agencies must consider the candidates in the highest preference group first. Agencies cannot select non-preference eligible veterans until the preference eligible veterans are exhausted or the agency has gone through the proper pass over procedures with respect to the remaining preference eligible veterans.
- **Category rating-like process:** Under [5 CFR 302.105](#), agencies may establish their own systems for applying veterans' preference provided that such systems result in preference eligible

veterans receiving at least as much of an advantage as they would under the numerical ranked or unranked selection methods outlined above. Out of convenience, many agencies have adopted a category rating-like process. This method works the same way as category rating does in the competitive service. Rather than using numerical scores, individuals are assessed against agency-established criteria and placed in one of two or more pre-defined quality categories. Preference eligible veterans are listed ahead of non-preference eligible veterans in the quality category into which they are placed. Preference eligible veterans with 10 percent or more disabilities are placed in the highest quality category, ahead of the non-preference eligible veterans. Agencies must make their selections from the highest quality category. Agencies cannot select non-preference eligible veterans over preference eligible veterans until the preference eligible veterans in the highest category are exhausted, or the agency has gone through the proper pass over procedures with respect to the remaining preference eligible veterans. Agencies may select any preference eligible veteran in the highest quality category. If fewer than three people are in the highest quality category, agencies can merge the highest and second highest quality categories into a new category provided that all preference eligible veterans from both categories are listed ahead of the non-preference eligible veterans in the newly merged category.

- **Professional Order:** When filling professional and scientific positions at the GS-9 level and above, the selection rules may vary slightly. Agencies may list applicants either in a ranked list by score order or in an unranked list by preference status. When a ranked list is used, preference eligible veterans who earn a passing score will have an additional 5 or 10 points, as appropriate, added to their scores. Applicants are then listed in score order (i.e., nobody “floats”) and a selection is made from the highest-ranked three names on the list. If numerical scores are not used, all preference eligibles are listed together regardless of the type of preference, followed by all other candidates. Agencies must consider preference eligible veterans in the highest preference group first. Agencies may not consider a non-preference eligible until all preference eligible veterans have been exhausted or the agency has gone through the proper pass over procedures with respect to the remaining preference eligible veterans.

Qualification Standards

Qualification standards should be used to evaluate minimum qualifications for the positions and grade levels being filled. To be eligible for Pathways opportunities, applicants must meet the requirements for participation in the particular program, plus all qualification requirements specified in the qualification standards used by the agency for the specific position, including any positive education requirements and/or selective placement factors, as well as any other designated special qualification requirements.

Applying Veterans’ Preference

Veterans’ preference applies to selection for positions in the Programs. Selections must be made in accordance with the requirements in [5 CFR 302](#) and OPM guidance issued as a memorandum for Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs) on Procedures for Pass Over of Compensably-Disabled Preference Eligibles in the Excepted Service. This includes, but is not limited to, ranked and unranked referral lists, as well as category rating-like processes.

Passing Over Preference Eligibles

All pass over requests for preference eligible veterans must follow the procedures outlined by statute in [5 CFR 332.406\(c\)](#) and [5 CFR 302.401\(b\)](#), as well as any agency-specific policies.

Order of Consideration, Referral and Selection

For Pathways positions, all qualified preference eligible candidates must receive consideration prior to non-preference eligible candidates. Referral and selection of applicants should be made in accordance with the procedures outlined in [5 CFR 302.302](#), [5 CFR 302.304](#) and [5 CFR 302.401](#).

Entitlement of Restoration Rights

An individual who is covered by [5 USC 8101\(1\)](#) and entitled to priority consideration under [5 CFR 302.103](#)⁵ may appeal a violation of her or his restoration rights to the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) under the provisions of MSPB's regulations by presenting factual information that she or he was denied restoration rights because of the employment of another person.

Employment of Relatives

As outlined in [5 CFR 362.105\(f\)](#), a Pathways participant may work in the same agency as a relative so long as there is not a direct reporting relationship between them, and provided that the relative is not in a position to influence or control the participant's appointment, employment, promotion, advancement or conversion within the agency.

Citizenship

Agencies may hire non-U.S. citizens under any of the Programs provided that they meet applicable immigration requirements and the agency has no budgetary restrictions upon paying a non-citizen for performing the duties of the position. Participants in the Programs must be U.S. citizens, however, in order to be eligible for non-competitive conversion to the competitive service.

Qualifying Educational Institutions

[Qualifying educational institutions](#) must be recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. They include:

- High schools;
- Technical, vocational and trade schools;
- Two- or four-year colleges or universities;
- Graduate or professional schools; and
- Other qualifying institutions (such as accredited State-certified home-school curricula (high school or college) or awardees of the Harry S. Truman Foundation Scholarship Program).

Certificate Programs

A certificate program is post-secondary education, in a [qualifying educational institution](#), *equivalent to at least one academic year of full-time study* that is part of an accredited college-level, technical, trade, vocational or business school curriculum.

Selection and Appointment

Agencies must apply the provisions in [5 CFR 302](#) when considering, selecting and appointing individuals to positions under the Programs. These provisions govern the order of consideration, selection and appointment of individuals to positions in the excepted service. For more information, please see [Order of Consideration, Referral and Selection](#) above.

⁵ An individual "entitled to priority consideration" is a person who was furloughed or separated without misconduct from a position without a time limit because of a compensable injury and whose recovery takes longer than one year from the date compensation began. To be eligible under this part, the person must apply for reappointment to her or his former agency within 30 days of the date of cessation of compensation.

APPOINTMENTS

Pathways appointments are subject to the same requirements governing term, career or career-conditional employment. Agencies are responsible, under their specific adjudication guidance, for determining applicant suitability and for verifying qualifications prior to making appointments.

For more information about:

- The Schedule D appointing authority, please see [Authority and Policy](#) in the Introduction and Background section of this Handbook.
- Program-specific eligibility requirements, please see the Program-specific sections of this Handbook.

Documenting the Appointment

Appointments to the Programs must be made under the Schedule D appointing authority and should be documented using the appropriate codes and remarks from the [OPM Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#). Agencies should look to Chapter 11 of the [OPM Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#) for the nature of action and legal authority codes and remarks to be used when documenting appointments on the [SF-52 \(Request for Personnel Action\)](#).

Duration of the Appointment

Please see the Program-specific sections of this Handbook.

ONBOARDING

Once your agency has recruited, selected, and appointed the right candidates for the Programs, it should focus on ensuring that participants are prepared, engaged and productive by maximizing their onboarding and orientation sessions.

Onboarding and orientation are terms that are often used interchangeably, though they have different goals and outcomes. Onboarding is the process of welcoming and acclimating new employees into an organization, and providing them with the knowledge, tools and resources that they need to be successful and productive. It is a broader, longer-term process that helps new employees to transition smoothly and become engaged members of an agency, while orientation prepares them for their first days of work. Onboarding starts before the employee begins and often lasts through the first year of employment. The effectiveness of an onboarding program may not only impact employees' ability to successfully transition into an agency, but may also impact the agency's ability to retain talent.

Orientation

Orientation is an important part of a Pathways participant's experience. In addition to helping participants learn about the benefits associated with their appointments and ensuring that they complete various forms, orientation is an opportunity for participants to become familiar with key agency points of contact for questions that will inevitably arise during their tenures, as well as information about specific Programs, including roles and responsibilities.

Participants in the PMF Program are required to participate in an orientation. While participants in the Internship and Recent Graduates Programs are not required to participate in an orientation, agencies are strongly encouraged to hold these sessions for participants in all of the Programs within 30 days of their appointments.

Participant Agreements

Agencies must enter into written agreements with *each* Pathways participant that they employ. These agreements are typically signed by an HR professional, hiring manager or supervisor, and the participant. Each agreement must include expectations and define the following:

- A general description of the duties to be performed;
- Work schedule;
- Length of the appointment and termination date;
- Mentorship opportunities;
- Training requirements;
- Evaluation procedures;
- Requirements for continuation and successful completion of the Program;
- Minimum eligibility requirements for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service; and
- Any other requirements or expectations established by the agency.

Agencies have discretion to tailor Participant Agreements for each of the Programs. While these documents must include certain elements, agencies have the flexibility to incorporate additional components into them (e.g., points of contact at participants' educational institutions).

Individual Development Plans

The Programs provide structured training to ensure a meaningful developmental experience for participants. Recent Graduates and PMF Fellows are required to complete an Individual Development Plan (IDP) within 45 days of their appointments. While Interns are not required to complete IDPs, OPM recommends that Interns appointed for longer than 90 days be placed on one.

The IDP is a formal plan, developed jointly by the supervisor and Pathways participant. It is a strategic roadmap that participants can use to create and track their career planning, professional development, and training activities. It should make note of a participant's target position, learning objectives and developmental requirements.

IDPs should be tailored around the following elements:

- **Target Position or Portfolio:** A brief description of the target position or portfolio, and the specific knowledge, skills and abilities that will be needed to qualify for it upon successful completion of the Program.
- **Learning Objectives:** A description of general management areas, as well as specific technical skills and experiences.
- **Details and Timelines:** An overview of when and how the learning objectives will be met through participation in required trainings and other developmental activities.
- **Demonstrated Success:** A means for tracking the completion of all IDP objectives. The supervisor and participant are partners in determining whether the objectives set forth in the IDP have been met at the end of the Program.

PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Performance Management and Evaluation

Each Pathways participant, regardless of appointment duration, should be placed on a formal performance management plan. This plan will help the participant to understand what is expected of her or him during the Program, and will allow the supervisor and other officials to provide objective

feedback regarding her or his performance. It will also outline the level of job performance required for the participant to be eligible for conversion to the competitive service, and will help supervisors and other officials to make a recommendation for conversion, as appropriate, at the end of the Program.

Awards

Awards are an excellent way to acknowledge employee contributions and to encourage employees to excel in their jobs. As agency employees, Pathways participants are eligible to receive awards for their work. Agencies should consider the range of options available for awarding and acknowledging employees, including performance awards, on-the-spot awards, special acts, time off and more.

Training

Each Program has specific training requirements. For more information, please see the Program-specific sections of this Handbook.

Developmental Assignments

Developmental assignments are required for PMF Fellows. For more information, please see the [Presidential Management Fellows Program](#) section of this Handbook.

Rotational Assignments

Rotational assignments are encouraged for all Pathways participants. For more information, please see the Program-specific sections of this Handbook.

Mentors

Agencies must assign mentors to participants in the Recent Graduates and PMF Programs within 90 days of their appointments.

Mentors for Recent Graduates should be current agency employees, at the journeyman level or above, outside of the participants' chain of command. Mentors for PMF Fellows must be current managerial employees inside of the participants' agencies, but outside of their chain of command.

Mentors should serve as coaches and trusted colleagues, not as supervisors. A formal mentoring process affords Recent Graduates and PMF Fellows with professional development and guidance, and capitalizes on the experiences of seasoned employees who are committed to developing a highly-skilled and high-performing workforce.

Agencies are also encouraged to assign mentors to Interns whose appointments are expected to last longer than 120 days.

Having access to mentors does not guarantee promotions to participants in the Programs. It does, however, afford direction in their careers to new and/or junior employees by providing them with an opportunity to benefit from their mentors' knowledge, talents and guidance.

CONVERSIONS

Subject to any OPM-imposed conversion limitations, agencies have the discretion to non-competitively convert any Pathways participant who has met Program requirements to a term or permanent position in the competitive service provided that this option was clearly stated in the Pathways JOA. A Pathways participant who is non-competitively converted to term appointment in the competitive service may be

subsequently converted to a permanent position in the competitive service at any time before that term appointment expires.

Each Program has specific requirements for non-competitive conversion to the competitive service. For more information, please see the Program-specific sections of this Handbook.

Conversions to the Excepted Service

By definition, and as provided in [Executive Order 13562](#), the Schedule D appointing authority was intended to be used as an exception to filling positions that would normally be filled through a competitive process. Accordingly, non-competitive conversion means assignment to a position in the competitive service. The Pathways Executive Order and implementing regulations do not provide for conversion to an excepted service position for participants in any of the Programs.

Program Completion

Each Program has specific requirements for completion. For more information, please see the Program-specific sections of this Handbook, as well as your agency-specific policies.

III. INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Internship Program provides students who are enrolled in or accepted for enrollment in a wide variety of [qualifying educational institutions](#) with paid opportunities to work either part- or full-time in agencies and explore career paths related to their academic fields of study or career interests. Students who successfully complete Program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the civil service.

The flexible nature of the Internship Program allows agencies to fill different gaps by providing opportunities to hire both longer-term, indefinite Interns, as well as temporary Interns (Interns Not-to-Exceed (NTE)).⁶ For more information, please see “Intern” and “Intern NTE” under [Definitions](#) in the Introduction and Background section of the Pathways Handbook (Handbook).

The Internship Program appointing authority can be found in [5 CFR 213.3402\(a\)](#). The regulations that should be used to implement the Program can be found in [5 CFR 302](#) and [5 CFR 362, Subparts A and B](#).

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility Requirements

Interns and Interns NTE must:

- Be accepted for enrollment or enrolled and seeking a degree or certificate in a [qualifying educational institution](#) on a half- to full-time basis (as determined by the educational institution);
- Meet the definition of a student throughout the duration of their appointments;
- Meet agency-specific requirements as specified in the agency's Participant Agreement with the Intern and; and
- Meet the qualification standards (e.g., series and grade) for their Internship positions.

In addition to the Government-wide eligibility requirements noted above, agencies may use requirements such as the ability to work a specified number of hours per week or remain in good academic standing (i.e., maintenance of a minimum grade point average) as eligibility criteria. In addition, agencies may require applicants to confirm their ability to work in the specific location(s) listed in the job opportunity announcement (JOA). These criteria may be referenced in the agency's Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the JOA and/or the Participant Agreement.

Agencies may not require the completion of educational requirements for specific coursework for occupations that do not have positive education requirements.

⁶ “Interns,” as used in this Handbook, refers to longer term, indefinite Interns. “Interns NTE,” as used in this Handbook, refers to temporary Interns. All mentions of participants in the Internship Program will make reference to either “Interns” and/or “Interns NTE.”

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Types of Work

Interns should be assigned meaningful work that supports agencies' needs and Interns' academic fields of study or career interests. They should not be assigned, as their primary duties, simple administrative or clerical tasks (e.g., scanning documents or filing).

Interns NTE should be assigned work that is short-term, of a project-oriented nature or of similarly limited duration. They should primarily be assigned to help complete temporary projects or perform labor-intensive tasks not requiring subject-matter expertise or fill summer jobs.

Student Schedules

Interns and Interns NTE may work either part- or full-time schedules. Supervisors are responsible for establishing work schedules with participants in accordance with [5 CFR 610.121](#). Supervisors and participants should agree on a work schedule that does not interfere with the student's academic schedule or performance, and that allows for completion of both her or his academic and Program requirements in a reasonable timeframe. This schedule must be documented in the Participant Agreement.

Breaks in Program

A break in program is defined as a period of time in which an Intern or Intern NTE is working, but unable to attend classes, or is neither attending classes nor working. While breaks in program are not common, they are permissible in certain circumstances (e.g., medical leave, financial hardship or military service). An agency may use its discretion to either approve or deny a request for a break in program, as well as determine the length of the break.

Agencies should establish a policy that addresses breaks in program, including limitations on breaks, in order to fairly and consistently manage breaks in program. This policy should also provide guidance regarding the circumstances in which a break in program may be granted (e.g., maternity leave, illness, emergencies or other situations outside of the participant's control).

To ensure students continue to make reasonable progress toward completing their academic and Program requirements by the established date, as documented in the Participant Agreement, and to support Program accountability, the policy may identify limits on the number and length of breaks and provide for a mechanism for approval, as well as tracking and monitoring of breaks.

Program Extensions

Intern NTE appointments may be extended in increments of up to one year. There is no limit on the number of extensions that may be granted, so long as the Intern NTE maintains eligibility for her or his appointment by:

- Continuing to demonstrate progress toward the successful completion of her or his academic program within the timeframe indicated in the Participant Agreement;
- Remaining a student in good academic standing;
- Receiving a positive recommendation and/or evaluation to justify the extension from her or his supervisor; and
- Completing at least a half-time course load each term as determined by her or his educational institution.

Promotions and Within Grade Increases

Interns may be promoted when an agency has an excepted service policy in place for promotions and when the Interns meet the qualification requirements for the higher-graded positions.

Interns NTE are similar to temporary employees and are not eligible for promotions.

For more information, please see [Promotions and Within Grade Increases](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Time-in-Grade Limitations

Please see [Time-in-Grade Limitations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Trial Periods

Please see [Trial Periods](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Reassignments

When reassigning an Intern to another Internship position, agencies must follow their own policies for movement of excepted service personnel, and the Intern must meet the qualification requirements for the position to which she or he will be reassigned.

When reassigning an Intern NTE to another Internship position, agencies must provide minimum public notification (internal to the agency, not on [USAJOBS](#)) so that similarly situated Interns who are also interested in the position can apply to it. If more than one individual is interested in the position, then agencies must apply the selection procedures outlined in [5 CFR 302](#), including the application of veterans' preference and pass over procedures. This applies regardless of whether the position is in a different job series or in a different series with a career ladder, or whether it is in the same series and grade level as the Internship NTE position. An Intern NTE must meet the qualification requirements for the position to which she or he will be reassigned.

For more information, please see [Reassignments](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Separations

Please see [Separations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Resignations

Please see [Resignations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Terminations

As a condition of employment, an Internship appointment expires:

- 120 days after completion of the designated academic course of study, unless the participant is selected for non-competitive conversion under [5 CFR 362.204](#); or
- Upon expiration of the Internship NTE appointment.

A termination based on the expiration of an Internship appointment is not effected under [5 USC Chapter 35](#), [5 USC Chapter 43](#) or [5 USC Chapter 75](#), and the Intern or Intern NTE does not have appeal rights. In these instances, agencies should follow the termination-expiration of appointment procedures found in the [OPM Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#).

If an Intern or Intern NTE's employment is to be terminated at any time prior to the completion of the individual's designated appointment, agencies must determine whether the action should be processed in accordance with [5 USC Chapter 35](#), [5 USC Chapter 43](#) or [5 USC Chapter 75](#), and the Intern or Intern NTE may be given appeal rights. In most cases, this determination will be based on whether the Intern or Intern NTE meets the definition of "employee" as set forth in 5 USC 4301 or [5 USC 7511](#), as applicable.

Interns and Interns NTE not deemed employees under 5 USC 7511 may be terminated for any other reason including, but not limited to:

- Failure to follow any of the terms and conditions identified in the Participant Agreement;
- Failure to maintain eligibility as a student throughout the duration of the appointment.
- Changes in academic status (e.g., major) that will not qualify the participant for the target position;
- Lack of available work or for budgetary reasons;
- Misconduct or performance issues;
- Determination that the candidate is unsuitable for Federal employment and/or adjudication that candidate is no longer eligible to hold a position that is sensitive from a national security perspective (see E.O. 10450; 5 CFR 1400).
- Failure to receive a favorable recommendation for conversion from the supervisor at the end of the academic program;
- Suspension, expulsion or withdrawal from the educational institution; or
- Inability of the agency, for administrative reasons, to retain the participant in the job (e.g., reorganization).

For more information, please:

- Contact a representative from your Employee Relations (ER) or Labor Relations (LR) Office; and
- See [Terminations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Tenure Groups for Reduction in Force

Please see [Tenure Groups for Reduction in Force](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Appeal Rights

If an Intern meets the definition of "employee," as defined in [5 USC Chapter 75](#), then she or he may have the right to appeal the balance of the remainder of the appointment. If so, then the adverse action procedures outlined in [5 CFR 752](#) will apply to the action.

RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH

Please see [Recruitment and Outreach](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Announcing Pathways Opportunities

Please see [Announcing Pathways Opportunities](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Posting Job Opportunity Announcements

Please see [Posting Job Opportunity Announcements](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Managing Job Opportunity Announcements

Please see [Managing Job Opportunity Announcements](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Position Classification

Please see [Position Classification](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

SELECTION PROCESS

Assessing, Rating and Ranking Applicants

Please see [Assessing, Rating and Ranking Applicants](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Qualification Standards

Agencies may establish agency-specific qualification standards or use the [OPM Qualification Standards](#) for the competitive service in place of the [Group Coverage Qualification Standards for Schedule D, Pathways Internship Positions](#).

For positions that have positive education requirements, agencies may impose educational requirements so long as they relate to the [OPM Qualification Standards](#) for the target positions. These educational requirements should be stated as eligibility requirements, rather than minimum qualification standards. For example, if an agency is filling a Petroleum Engineering Internship position, which upon conversion would require that the Intern had completed specific courses in engineering, then the agency could indicate that only students who have completed or are currently taking some or all of those required courses will be eligible for the Petroleum Engineering Internship position.

For positions that do not have positive education requirements, agencies may not impose educational requirements. Agencies may, however, indicate in the JOAs that they seek or prefer candidates who are pursuing certain degrees or taking specific courses.

For more information, please see [Qualification Standards](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Applying Veterans' Preference

Veterans' preference applies to the selection process for Interns and Interns NTE. For more information, please see [Applying Veterans' Preference](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Passing Over Preference Eligibles

Please see [Passing Over Preference Eligibles](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Order of Consideration, Referral and Selection

Please see [Order of Consideration, Referral and Selection](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Entitlement of Restoration Rights

Please see [Entitlement of Restoration Rights](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Employment of Relatives

Please see [Employment of Relatives](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Citizenship

Please see [Citizenship](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Qualifying Educational Institutions

Interns and Interns NTE must be accepted for enrollment or enrolled and seeking a degree or certificate in a [qualifying educational institution](#) on a half- or full-time basis (as determined by the educational institution). For more information, please see [Qualifying Educational Institutions](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Academic Fields of Study

The duties of the position to which an Intern is appointed should be related to her or his academic field of study or career interests.

Selection and Appointment

Please see [Selection and Appointment](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

APPOINTMENTS

Appointments to the Internship Program will be made under the Schedule D appointing authority and pursuant to agencies' Pathways MOUs.

Interns and Interns NTE may be appointed to any grade level for which they qualify. The duties of the position to which an Intern is appointed should be related to her or his academic field of study or career interests.

For more information, please see [Appointments](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Documenting the Appointment

Interns and Interns NTE must provide documentation to verify their enrollment status in a [qualifying educational institution](#) prior to initial appointment. Such documentation may be in the form of an official copy of a school transcript, official documentation of registration, a tuition bill, or, if the Intern or Intern NTE is a new student, a copy of her or his acceptance letter. For more information, please see [Documenting the Appointment](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Duration of the Appointment

Agencies may appoint an Intern for an initial period expected to last more than one year. An Internship appointment is not required to have an end date. However, agencies are required to specify an end date for the Internship appointment in the Participant Agreement with the Intern. The end date is generally the Intern's projected graduation date, plus 120 days. The 120-day period cannot be used to finish any remaining academic and/or Program requirements.

Agencies may appoint an Intern for an initial period expected to last less than one year. Typically referred to as Interns NTE, these individuals complete work that is short-term, of a project-oriented nature, or of similarly limited duration. Agencies may extend these temporary appointments for various reasons as long as the Interns NTE continue to meet eligibility requirements.

ONBOARDING

Please see [Onboarding](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Orientation

Agencies are encouraged to provide orientations for Interns and Interns NTE. These sessions may address Program requirements and expectations; tips for maximizing participation in the Program; and/or agency stakeholders, processes and culture. For more information, please see [Orientation](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Participant Agreements

Please see [Participant Agreements](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Individual Development Plans

While Interns are not required to complete Individual Development Plans (IDPs), it is recommended that each Intern in an appointment lasting 90 days or more be placed on one. For more information, please see [Individual Development Plans](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Performance Management and Evaluation

Agencies should establish performance goals and evaluation criteria with Interns and Interns NTE. Formal evaluations are required for any appointments lasting 90 days or more. Agencies should complete evaluations annually and hold mid-year reviews. Agencies are also expected to provide regular feedback and identify any deficiencies or areas of improvement for Interns and Interns NTE. For more information, please see [Performance Management and Evaluation](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Awards

Interns and Interns NTE are eligible to receive awards. For more information, please see [Awards](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook, as well as your agency-specific policies.

Training

Interns and Interns NTE are eligible to participate in training and development activities.

Rotational Assignments

Interns are eligible to participate in one- to six-month rotational assignments in their employing agencies or other agencies. Agencies may use these assignments to provide Interns with valuable knowledge, skills and experiences; broaden their perspectives of the Federal Government; and aid in their retention.

Mentors

While agencies are not required to assign mentors to participants in the Program, they are encouraged to assign mentors to Interns whose appointments are expected to last longer than 120 days in order to support their development and aid in their retention. For more information, please see [Mentors](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

CONVERSIONS

For both Interns and Interns NTE, agencies have the discretion to consider interns for non-competitive conversion to term or permanent positions in the competitive service, provided that the interns have met all academic and Program requirements, and that they are within 120 days of academic program

completion. For Interns to be eligible for conversion, this possibility must have been included in the job opportunity announcement used to fill the Internship positions.

If the Agency decides to convert the intern, then conversion to the competitive service must take place within 120 days of successful degree completion for both Interns and Interns NTE. If eligible participants are not converted within this window of time, then they must be terminated. The 120-day period, which cannot be extended, cannot be used for the participant to finish any remaining academic or Program requirements—it should be used solely for administrative purposes.

An eligible participant may be converted to a position within her or his employing agency or any other agency across the Federal Government. But, conversion is *not* mandatory or guaranteed for participants.

If an eligible Pathways participant is converted to a term position in the competitive service, she or he may be non-competitively converted from that competitive term position to a career or career-conditional appointment without further competition. The conversion must be made effective prior to the expiration of the competitive term appointment.

For more information, please see [Conversions](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Conversion Eligibility

To be eligible for conversion, an Intern or eligible Intern NTE must:

- Be a United States citizen;
- Complete at least 640 hours of work experience acquired through the Program while enrolled as a half- or full-time degree- or certificate-seeking student;
- Complete a course of academic study, within the preceding 120-day period, at a [qualifying educational institution](#) conferring a diploma, certificate or degree;
- Meet the qualification standards for the position to which she or he will be converted;
- Receive a favorable recommendation by an official of the agency or agencies in which she or he served; and
- Meet agency-specific requirements, as specified in the Participant Agreement.

Exceptions to the 640-Hour Service Requirement

Interns must complete 640 hours of work in order to be eligible for conversion to the competitive service. In order to more quickly convert Interns to the competitive service, agencies may grant credit for up to 320 hours for:

- Other comparable Federal internship experience;
- Other comparable non-Federal (e.g., third-party) internship experience;
- Certain active duty military or volunteer service; or
- Outstanding academic achievement and exceptional job performance.

Agencies may evaluate, consider and grant credit for up to one-half (320 hours) of the 640-hour service requirement for comparable non-Federal internship experience in a field or functional area related to the student's target position and acquired while the student:

- Worked in, but not for, a Federal agency, pursuant to a formal internship agreement comparable to the Internship Program, between the agency and an accredited academic institution;

- Worked in, but not for, a Federal agency, pursuant to a written contract with a third-party internship provider officially established to provide internship experiences to students that are comparable to the Internship Program; or
- Served as an active duty member of the armed forces (including the National Guard and Reserves), as defined in [5 USC 2101](#), provided the veteran's discharge or release is under honorable conditions (i.e., with a general or honorable discharge).

Student volunteer service under [5 CFR 308](#) and other Federal programs designed to give internship experience to students (e.g., fellowships and similar programs) may be evaluated, considered and credited when the experience is comparable to experience gained in the Internship Program. Agencies may also waive up to one-half (320 hours) of the 640-hour minimum service requirement when an Intern completes 320 hours of career-related work experience under an Internship Program appointment and demonstrates high potential by outstanding academic achievement and exceptional job performance.

- Outstanding academic achievement means an overall grade point average of 3.5 or better, on a 4.0 scale; standing in the top 10 percent of the student's graduating class; and/or induction into a nationally-recognized scholastic honor society.
- Exceptional job performance means a formal evaluation conducted by the student's Internship supervisor(s), consistent with the applicable performance appraisal program that results in a rating of record (or summary rating of record) of higher than "Achieved Results" or equivalent.

Agencies may not grant a credit or waiver (or a combination of a credit and waiver) totaling more than 320 hours of the 640-hour service requirement.

Restrictions

Interns cannot be non-competitively converted into the Recent Graduates or Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Programs, though they may apply to either of these Programs upon completion of their academic requirements or up to nine months prior to completing their academic requirements.

Interns who separate from Federal service before or during the 120-day period after they complete their academic requirements lose their eligibility for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the competitive service.

Conversions of Interns Not-to-Exceed

While intent to convert Interns NTE should be rare, it is possible. An Intern NTE may be non-competitively converted to the competitive service provided that she or he has met all academic and Program requirements, and that the JOA used to fill her or his position stated the possibility of conversion.

In order for Interns NTE who were hired without the possibility of non-competitive conversion to be converted to longer term, indefinite Interns, they must compete for these opportunities. For more information, please see your agency-specific policies.

IV. RECENT GRADUATES PROGRAM

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Recent Graduates Program is a dynamic, one-year developmental program that promotes careers in the Federal Government to recent graduates. Individuals must apply within two years of receiving a qualifying degree or certificate, with the exception of veterans, who have up to six years to apply due to military service obligations. Students may also apply up to nine months prior to completing their academic requirements, pending agency-specific policies.

Agencies may establish a Recent Graduates Program that lasts longer than one year for positions that require longer and more structured training schedules. An agency must identify in its Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) the duration of its Program, including the criteria used to determine the need for a Program that lasts longer than one year.

Participants in the Program receive training and professional development, complete an Individual Development Plan (IDP), and are assigned a mentor. Recent Graduates who successfully complete Program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the civil service.

The Recent Graduates Program appointing authority can be found in [5 CFR 213.3402\(b\)](#). The regulations that should be used to implement the Program can be found in [5 CFR 302](#) and [5 CFR 362, Subparts A and C](#).

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility Requirements

Recent Graduates must have completed, within the previous two years, a qualifying associate's, bachelor's, master's, professional, doctorate, vocational or technical degree or certificate from a [qualifying educational institution](#).

Exceptions are made for veterans, as defined in [5 USC 2108](#), who, due to military service obligations, were precluded from applying to the Program during the two-year eligibility period described above. These individuals have a full two-year period of eligibility upon their release or discharge from active duty. In no event, however, may their eligibility period extend beyond six years from the date on which they completed their academic requirements.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Program Extensions

Recent Graduates appointments may be extended for a period of up to 120 days under the employing agencies' procedures.

Appointment extensions should be used to cover rare or unusual circumstances or situations. The criteria for approving appointment extensions will be identified in each agency's Pathways MOU.

Promotions and Within Grade Increases

Recent Graduates are eligible for non-competitive career ladder promotions and within grade increases (WGIS) upon recommendation from their supervisors, qualifications determinations, satisfactory performance and fulfillment of mandatory training requirements, as appropriate. Recent Graduates' promotions are not automatic nor are they guaranteed, and depend on the participant and the quality of her or his on-the-job performance. Promotions and WGIS must be made in accordance with OPM regulations and agencies' excepted service policies.

For more information, please see [Promotions and Within Grade Increases](#) in the General Information section of the Pathways Handbook (Handbook).

Time-in-Grade Limitations

Please see [Time-in-Grade Limitations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Trial Periods

Please see [Trial Periods](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Movement between Agencies

A current Recent Graduate may apply for and accept a new Recent Graduates appointment with another agency at any time during her or his appointment. To move to the new agency, the participant must separate from her or his current employing agency, and the new employing agency must appoint the Recent Graduate without a break in service. Time served under the initial appointment counts toward the completion of Program requirements.

Reassignments

Please see [Reassignments](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Separations

Please see [Separations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Resignations

Please see [Resignations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Terminations

As a condition of employment, a Recent Graduates appointment expires at the end of the agency-prescribed Program period, plus any agency-approved extension, unless the participant is selected for non-competitive conversion under [5 CFR 362.306](#).

A termination based on the expiration of a Recent Graduates appointment effected under [5 USC Chapter 35](#), [5 USC Chapter 43](#) or [5 USC Chapter 75](#), is not a removal and the participant does not have appeal rights. In these instances, agencies should follow the termination-expiration of appointment procedures found in the [OPM Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#).

If a Recent Graduate is terminated at any time prior to the completion of the Recent Graduate's designated appointment, agencies must determine whether the action should be processed in accordance with [5 USC Chapter 35](#), [5 USC Chapter 43](#) or [5 USC Chapter 75](#), and the participant must be given appeal rights. In most cases, this determination will be based on whether the Recent Graduate meets the definition of "employee" as set forth in 5 USC 4301 or [5 USC 7511](#), as applicable.

Recent Graduates may also be terminated for reasons including, but not limited to:

- Failure to follow any of the terms and conditions identified in the Participant Agreement;
- Lack of available work or for budgetary reasons;
- Misconduct or performance issues;
- Determination that the candidate is unsuitable for Federal employment and/or adjudication that candidate is no longer eligible to hold a position that is sensitive from a national security perspective (see E.O. 10450; 5 CFR 1400);
- Failure to receive a favorable recommendation for conversion from the supervisor for conversion at the end of the Program; or
- Inability of the agency, for administrative reasons, to retain the participant in the job (e.g., reorganization).

For more information, please:

- Contact a representative from your Employee Relations (ER) or Labor Relations (LR) Office; and
- See [Terminations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Tenure Groups for Reduction in Force

Please see [Tenure Groups for Reduction in Force](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Appeal Rights

If a Recent Graduate is participating in her or his initial one-year appointment, then she or he will not have appeal rights. If a Recent Graduate is participating in a two-year appointment and meets the definition of “employee,” as defined in [5 USC Chapter 75](#), then she or he may have appeal rights for the duration of the appointment she or he is serving. If so, then the adverse action procedures outlined in [5 CFR 752](#) will apply to the action.

RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH

Please see [Recruitment and Outreach](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Announcing Pathways Opportunities

Please see [Announcing Pathways Opportunities](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Posting Job Opportunity Announcements

Please see [Posting Job Opportunity Announcements](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Managing Job Opportunity Announcements

Please see [Managing Job Opportunity Announcements](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Position Classification

Please see [Position Classification](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

SELECTION PROCESS

Assessing, Rating and Ranking Applicants

Please see [Assessing, Rating and Ranking Applicants](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Qualification Standards

Agencies must use the [OPM Qualification Standards](#) for the competitive service or OPM-approved qualification standards for Recent Graduates positions. For more information, please see [Qualification Standards](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Applying Veterans' Preference

Veterans' preference applies to the selection process for Recent Graduates. For more information, please see [Applying Veterans' Preference](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Passing Over Preference Eligibles

Please see [Passing Over Preference Eligibles](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Order of Consideration, Referral and Selection

Please see [Order of Consideration, Referral and Selection](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Entitlement of Restoration Rights

Please see [Entitlement of Restoration Rights](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Employment of Relatives

Please see [Employment of Relatives](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Citizenship

Please see [Citizenship](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Qualifying Educational Institutions

Please see [Qualifying Educational Institutions](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Selection and Appointment

Please see [Selection and Appointment](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

APPOINTMENTS

Appointments to the Recent Graduates Program will be made under the Schedule D appointing authority and pursuant to agencies' Pathways MOUs. The following chart notes the initial appointment requirements for Recent Graduates.

GRADE LEVEL	QUALIFICATION
Up to the GS-9 or equivalent	Any position for which the Recent Graduate qualifies.

GRADE LEVEL	QUALIFICATION
GS-11 or equivalent	Science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) occupations, if the Recent Graduate possesses a Ph.D. or equivalent degree directly related to the STEM position to which she or he is being appointed. Scientific and professional occupations that are research-related, if the Recent Graduate possesses a master’s degree or equivalent graduate degree directly related to the position to which she or he is being appointed.
GS-12	Scientific and professional occupations that are research-related, if the Recent Graduate possesses a Ph.D. or equivalent degree directly related to the STEM position to which she or he is being appointed.

For more information, please see [Appointments](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Documenting the Appointment

A Recent Graduate must provide documentation to verify her or his degree completion prior to initial appointment. Such documentation may be in the form of an official copy of a school transcript. For more information, please see [Documenting the Appointment](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Duration of the Appointment

Appointments to the Program are typically for a period of one year, but may be for a period of up to two years, depending on the agency and position. The duration of appointments to the Program will be identified in each agency’s Pathways MOU.

ONBOARDING

Please see [Onboarding](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Orientation

Agencies are encouraged to provide orientations for Recent Graduates. These sessions may address Program requirements and expectations; tips for maximizing participation in the Program; and/or agency stakeholders, processes and culture. The hours spent in this training may count toward the required 40 hours of formal interactive training per year. For more information, please see [Orientation](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Participant Agreements

Please see [Participant Agreements](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Individual Development Plans

Recent Graduates are required to complete IDPs within 45 days of their appointments. For more information, please see [Individual Development Plans](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Performance Management and Evaluation

Agencies should establish performance goals and evaluation criteria with Recent Graduates. Agencies should complete evaluations annually and hold mid-year reviews. Agencies are also expected to provide

regular feedback and identify any deficiencies or areas of improvement for Recent Graduates. For more information, please see [Performance Management and Evaluation](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Awards

Recent Graduates are eligible to receive awards. For more information, please see [Awards](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Training

Recent Graduates should be provided with at least 40 hours of formal interactive training per year (while in the Program) that advances the goals and competencies outlined in their IDPs. Mandatory annual training (e.g., security and ethics training) does not count toward the 40-hour requirement.

Rotational Assignments

Recent Graduates are eligible to participate in one- to six-month rotational assignments in their employing agencies or other agencies. Agencies may use these assignments to provide Recent Graduates with valuable knowledge, skills and experiences; broaden their perspectives of the Federal Government; and aid in their retention.

Mentors

Mentors must be assigned to Recent Graduates within 90 days of their appointments. Mentors should be current agency employees, at the journeyman level or above, outside of the participants' chain of command. For more information, please see [Mentors](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

CONVERSIONS

Recent Graduates are eligible for non-competitive conversion to term or permanent positions in the competitive service, provided that they have met all Program requirements. A Recent Graduate must be converted within her or his employing agency. But, conversion is *not* mandatory or guaranteed for participants.

If a Recent Graduate is converted to a term position in the competitive service, she or he may subsequently be non-competitively converted to a career or career-conditional appointment without further competition. The conversion must be made effective prior to the expiration of the competitive service term appointment.

For more information, please see [Conversions](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Conversion Eligibility

To be eligible for conversion, a Recent Graduate must:

- Be a United States citizen;
- Complete at least one year of continuous service, in addition to all Program requirements;
- Demonstrate successful job performance consistent with the applicable performance appraisal program established under her or his agency's approved performance appraisal system that results in a rating of record (or summary rating) of at least "Fully Successful" or equivalent;
- Meet the [OPM Qualification Standards](#) for the competitive service position to which she or he will be converted;

- Meet any other agency-specific requirements outlined in her or his Participant Agreement; and
- Receive a recommendation for conversion from her or his first-level supervisor.

V. PRESIDENTIAL MANAGEMENT FELLOWS PROGRAM

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program is the Federal Government's premier, two-year leadership development program for advanced degree candidates who demonstrate academic excellence, possess management and leadership potential, and have a clear interest in and commitment to public service. Individuals must apply within two years of receiving a qualifying advanced degree. Students may also apply in the fall of their final year of graduate school.

Participants in the Program take part in an orientation session, receive training and professional development, complete an IDP, are assigned a mentor, and have at least one developmental assignment. PMF Fellows who successfully complete Program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent position in the civil service.

The PMF Program appointing authority can be found in [5 CFR 213.3402\(c\)](#). The regulations that should be used to implement the Program can be found in [5 CFR 302](#) and [5 CFR 362, Subparts A and D](#).

For more information, please see the [PMF Website](#) or consult a [representative in the PMF Program Office](#) at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility Requirements

In order to apply to the Program, individuals must have obtained an advanced degree from a [qualifying educational institution](#) within the two-year period preceding the opening date of the PMF Program's annual job opportunity announcement.

Students attending a [qualifying educational institution](#) who expect to complete a qualifying advanced degree by August 31 of the academic year in which the competition is held may also apply to the Program.

An individual may apply to the Program more than once as long as she or he meets the eligibility criteria. However, if an individual becomes a PMF Finalist and subsequently applies to the Program during the next open announcement, she or he will forfeit her or his status as a PMF Finalist.

Please note that applicants may apply to either the [PMF Program](#) or the [PMF STEM Track](#), but not both.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Program Extensions

PMF Fellows' appointments may be extended for a period of up to 120 days under the employing agencies' procedures. Appointment extensions should be used to cover rare or unusual circumstances or situations. The criteria for approving appointment extensions will be identified in each agency's Pathways Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Promotions and Within Grade Increases

PMF Fellows must meet the requirements outlined in the [OPM Qualification Standards](#) for the next higher grade level and series for the position, and have one year of specialized experience equivalent in difficulty to the next lower grade level (time-in-grade does not apply to the excepted service). PMF Fellows will be required to demonstrate satisfactory performance of at least “Achieved Expectations” or its equivalent during the performance period covered prior to becoming eligible for promotion.

Promotions are permitted up to the GS-13 grade level (if the GS-13 full performance level (FPL) is established in the position description) while under the Program. Promotions above the GS-13 grade level can occur only on or after the date of conversion to a position in the competitive service following successful completion of the Program. Accelerated promotions are not permitted under the Program.

For more information, please see [Promotions and Within Grade Increases](#) in the General Information section of the Pathways Handbook (Handbook).

Time-in-Grade Limitations

Please see [Time-in-Grade Limitations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Trial Periods

Please see [Trial Periods](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Movement between Agencies

A PMF Fellow may accept a new PMF appointment with another agency at any time during the Program. To move to the new agency, the PMF Fellow must separate from her or his current employing agency, and the new employing agency must appoint the PMF Fellow without a break in service. Time served under the initial appointment counts toward the completion of Program requirements.

If a PMF Fellow moves between agencies within the first six months of her or his appointment, the current employing agency may request reimbursement for one-quarter of the OPM reimbursement fee for the Program from the new employing agency.

Separations

PMF Coordinators must provide written notification to their Pathways Programs Officers (PPOs), as well as to OPM through the [PMF Talent Acquisition System \(TAS\)](#) when PMF Fellows are separated for any reason. For more information, please see [Separations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Resignations

Please see [Resignations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Terminations

As a condition of employment, a PMF Fellow’s appointment expires at the end of the two-year Program period, plus any agency-approved extension, unless the participant is selected for non-competitive conversion under [5 CFR 362.408](#).

A termination based on the expiration of a PMF Fellow’s appointment is not effected under [5 USC Chapter 35](#), [5 USC Chapter 43](#) or [5 USC Chapter 75](#), and the participant does not have appeal rights. In these instances, agencies should follow the termination-expiration of appointment procedures found in the [OPM Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#).

If a PMF Fellow is terminated at any time prior to the completion of the Fellow's designated appointment, agencies must determine whether the action should be processed in accordance with [5 USC Chapter 35](#), [5 USC Chapter 43](#) or [5 USC Chapter 75](#), and the participant must be given appeal rights. In most cases, this determination will be based on whether the PMF Fellow meets the definition of "employee" as set forth in 5 USC 4301 or [5 USC 7511](#), as applicable.

PMF Fellows may also be terminated for reasons including, but not limited to:

- Failure to follow any of the terms and conditions identified in the Participant Agreement;
- Lack of available work or for budgetary reasons;
- Misconduct or performance issues;
- Determination that the candidate is unsuitable for Federal employment and/or adjudication that candidate is no longer eligible to hold a position that is sensitive from a national security perspective (see 5 CFR 1400);
- Failure to receive a favorable recommendation for conversion from the supervisor for conversion at the end of the Program; or
- Inability of the agency, for administrative reasons, to retain the participant in the job (e.g., reorganization).

PMF Fellows who meet the definition of "employee" under 5 USC 4301 or 5 USC 7511, as applicable, are subject to [5 CFR 432](#) and [5 CFR 752](#), respectively, for performance and conduct-based actions if the termination occurs prior to the completion of their designated appointment. Appeal rights would only be considered for the remainder of the current appointment.

For more information, please:

- Contact your PMF Coordinator or a representative from your Employee Relations (ER) or Labor Relations Office (LR); and
- See [Terminations](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Withdrawals

A PMF Fellow may withdraw from the Program at any time. Such a withdrawal will be treated as a resignation from the Federal service. However, an obligation established upon admission and appointment (e.g., as a result of accepting a recruitment incentive) still applies and must be repaid by the PMF Fellow.

A PMF Fellow who held a permanent competitive service position immediately before entering the Program and who withdraws for reasons that are not related to misconduct, poor performance or suitability may, at the agency's discretion, be placed in a permanent competitive service position. The agency's determination in this regard is not subject to appeal.

PMF Coordinators must provide written notification to their PPOs, as well as to OPM through the [PMF TAS](#) when PMF Fellows withdraw from the Program.

Readmissions

If a PMF Fellow withdraws from the Program for reasons related to misconduct, poor performance or suitability, as determined by the agency, she or he will not be readmitted to the agency as a PMF Fellow at any time.

If a PMF Fellow withdraws from the Program for reasons that are *not* related to misconduct, poor performance or suitability, she or he may petition the agency for readmission and reappointment to the Program. Such a petition must be in writing and include an appropriate justification. The agency may approve or deny the request for readmission. The PMF Coordinator must submit a written notification of the approved request for readmission to OPM. The PMF Fellow's status in the Program upon readmission and reappointment should be addressed as part of the agency's submission.

The OPM Director may overrule the agency's decision to readmit and reappoint the participant—this decision is not subject to appeal.

Tenure Groups for Reduction in Force

Please see [Tenure Groups for Reduction in Force](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Appeal Rights

PMF Fellows are excepted service employees under [5 USC Chapter 43](#) and [5 USC Chapter 75](#), and have appeal rights as provided therein. For systems not covered by [5 USC Chapter 43](#) and [5 USC Chapter 75](#), PMF Fellows have appeal rights as provided by the equivalent authorities under those systems. Appeal rights are only considered for the remainder of the current appointment.

RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND SELECTION

The recruitment, assessment and selection of PMF Finalists is administered by OPM. Upon official selection, OPM announces the list of PMF Finalists on the [PMF Website](#) for agencies to consider for appointment as PMF Fellows. PMF Finalists have 12 months to obtain a PMF appointment upon their selection.

After the list of PMF Finalists is announced, agencies are responsible for recruiting, assessing and selecting PMF Fellows.

Posting PMF Opportunities

Agencies are strongly encouraged to post all PMF opportunities on the [PMF TAS](#). The postings should contain sufficient information (e.g., job titles, duties and locations) for PMF Finalists to determine their interest in applying to the positions.

Filling PMF Opportunities

Agencies must have a process in place for accepting applications from PMF Finalists who express an interest in their PMF positions. "Express an interest" means that the PMF Finalists have initiated contact with an agency in person or by other direct communication and asked for consideration for appointment to a specific position, and includes dropping off a resume at the annual PMF Job Fair.

Position Classification

Please see [Position Classification](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Assessing, Rating and Ranking Applicants

Applicants to the Program are assessed, rated and ranked by OPM, which determines the list of PMF Finalists.

When seeking to fill PMF positions from among the list of PMF Finalists, agencies are free to select any candidate in the finalists group who expresses an interest, subject to appropriate application of veterans' preference rules.

Qualification Standards

Agencies must use the [OPM Qualification Standards](#) for the competitive service or OPM-approved qualification standards for PMF positions that are filled above the GS-9 level or for positions that have an individual occupational Requirement at the GS-9 level. For more information, please see [Qualification Standards](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Applying Veterans' Preference

Veterans' preference is applied by OPM during the assessment process that results in the group of PMF Finalists. A PMF Finalist's preference status will be annotated on the list of PMF Finalists and the selecting agency must exhaust or pass over those preference eligibles who express an interest in that agency before moving on to non-preference eligibles.

Passing Over Preference Eligibles

Please see [Passing Over Preference Eligibles](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Order of Consideration, Referral and Selection

Please see [Order of Consideration, Referral and Selection](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Entitlement of Restoration Rights

Please see [Entitlement of Restoration Rights](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Employment of Relatives

Please see [Employment of Relatives](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Citizenship

Please see [Citizenship](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Qualifying Educational Institutions

Please see [Qualifying Educational Institutions](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Selection and Appointment

Please see [Selection and Appointment](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

OPM Reimbursement Fee

The OPM reimbursement fee, \$7,000 per PMF Fellow, includes the recruitment, assessment, selection and placement of PMF Fellows; Program-sponsored events (e.g., job fair, orientation, forums and graduation); and training and support for agencies and PMF Fellows. Agencies must ensure that the appointment reimbursement fee is submitted to OPM no later than 30 days from PMF Fellows' entrance on duty (EOD) dates.

APPOINTMENTS

Appointments to the PMF Program will be made under the Schedule D appointing authority and pursuant to agencies' Pathways MOUs.

PMF Finalists are pre-qualified at the GS-9 level, but may be initially appointed at the GS-9 to GS-12 levels or equivalent based on their qualifications. For more information, please see [Appointments](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Documenting the Appointment

A PMF Fellow must provide documentation to verify her or his graduate degree completion prior to initial appointment. Such documentation may be in the form of an official copy of a school transcript. For more information, please see [Documenting the Appointment](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Duration of the Appointment

Appointments to the Program are for a period of two years.

ONBOARDING

Please see [Onboarding](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Orientation

OPM offers online orientations for PMF Fellows periodically throughout the year. These sessions, which are presented via webinar, last for approximately two hours and address Program requirements and individual questions. The hours spent in this training may count toward the required 80 hours of formal interactive training per year.

Agencies are also expected to provide orientations for PMF Fellows. These sessions may address Program requirements and expectations; tips for maximizing participation in the Program; and/or agency stakeholders, processes and culture. The hours spent in this training may count toward the required 80 hours of formal interactive training per year.

For more information, please see [Orientation](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Participant Agreements

Please see [Participant Agreements](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Individual Development Plans

PMF Fellows are required to complete IDPs within 45 days of their appointments. They may utilize the [OPM IDP Template](#) or one developed by their agencies. For more information, please see [Individual Development Plans](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Performance Management and Evaluation

Agencies should establish performance goals and evaluation criteria with PMF Fellows. Agencies should complete evaluations annually and hold mid-year reviews. Agencies are also expected to provide regular feedback and identify any deficiencies or areas of improvement for PMF Fellows. For more information, please see [Performance Management and Evaluation](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Awards

PMF Fellows are eligible to receive awards. For more information, please see [Awards](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Training

PMF Fellows should be provided with at least 80 hours of formal interactive training per year that advances the goals and competencies outlined in their IDPs. Mandatory annual training (e.g., security and ethics training) does not count toward the 80-hour requirement.

Developmental Assignments

PMF Fellows are required to participate in one four- to six-month developmental assignment with management and/or technical responsibilities consistent with their IDPs. The developmental assignment may take place within the employing agency, but outside of the participants' chain of command, or in another agency.

As an alternative, PMF Fellows may participate in agency-wide initiatives or other residential or Administration initiatives that will provide them with the experience that they would have gained through the four- to six-month developmental assignment.

Rotational Assignments

PMF Fellows are eligible to participate in one- to six-month rotational assignments in their employing agencies or other agencies.

Mentors

Mentors must be assigned to PMF Fellows within 90 days of their appointments. Mentors should be current managerial employees inside of participants' agencies, but outside of their chain of command. For more information, please see [Mentors](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

CONVERSIONS

PMF Fellows are eligible for non-competitive conversion to term or permanent positions in the competitive service, provided that they have met all Program requirements and been certified by their agencies' Executive Resources Boards (ERBs). Approved conversions are effective on the date of the expiration of a PMF Fellow's appointment, including extensions. A PMF Fellow must be converted within her or his employing agency, meaning the agency where she or he completed Program requirements and was certified by an ERB. But, conversion is *not* mandatory or guaranteed for participants.

If a PMF Fellow is converted to a term position in the competitive service, she or he subsequently may be non-competitively converted to a career or career-conditional appointment without further competition. The conversion must be made effective prior to the expiration of the competitive service term appointment.

For more information, please see [Conversions](#) in the General Information section of this Handbook.

Conversion Eligibility

To be eligible for conversion, a PMF Fellow must:

- Be a United States citizen;
- Complete all Program requirements;

- Demonstrate successful job performance consistent with the applicable performance appraisal program established under her or his agency's approved performance appraisal system that results in a rating of record (or summary rating) of at least "Fully Successful" or equivalent;
- Meet the [OPM Qualification Standards](#) for the competitive service position to which she or he will be converted;
- Meet any other agency-specific requirements outlined in her or his Participant Agreement;
- Receive a recommendation for conversion from her or his first-level supervisor; and
- Receive a receipt of certification of Program completion from an ERB or equivalent.

Executive Resources Board Certification

Upon completion of the Program, but prior to conversion, PMF Fellows are evaluated by their agencies' ERBs to determine whether they have successfully fulfilled all Program requirements. As part of this process:

- The PMF Coordinator reviews the conversion package for accuracy and forwards it to the ERB after any necessary adjustments and/or corrections have been made.
 - The ERB must receive the conversion package no later than 45 calendar days from the PMF Fellow's two-year anniversary.
- The ERB then determines whether to certify the PMF Fellow.
 - The ERB must make this decision no later than 30 calendar days prior to the expiration of the PMF Fellow's appointment.
- If the ERB decides not to certify the PMF Fellow, the PMF Fellow may request that the OPM Director reconsider the decision.
 - Such a reconsideration has to be requested by the PMF Fellow, in writing, within 15 calendar days of the ERB's decision. It should include appropriate documentation.
 - The PMF Fellow may continue in the Program pending the outcome of her or his request for reconsideration. Agencies must continue to provide appropriate developmental activities during this period.
 - The OPM Director's decision is final and cannot be overridden by agencies.



U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Employee Services

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