
Approved for Release
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Date

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) BULLETIN #274, FY26

SUBJECT: U.S. Tech Force Fellowship Program

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon release of this HR Bulletin

EXPIRATION DATE: Effective until canceled or superseded

SUPERSEDES: None

BACKGROUND: The U.S. Tech Force Fellowship strengthens the Federal Government’s technology and artificial intelligence (AI) workforce by placing highly skilled technologists in two-year appointments within Federal agencies. The December 15, 2025, “*Building the AI Workforce of the Future*” memorandum from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) establishes the framework for the program.

Through time-limited fellowships, the U.S. Tech Force provides agencies, including the Department of Commerce (Department), with top technical talent in emerging fields such as AI, cybersecurity, data science, software engineering, and product management. The program is designed to rapidly address critical skills gaps and accelerate digital modernization efforts across government.

The initiative supports the President’s AI Action Plan and Executive Order 14356, “*Ensuring Continued Accountability in Federal Hiring*,” by deploying cross-functional teams of technology professionals to lead digital modernization projects and accelerate AI adoption.

For participating U.S. Tech Force fellows, the program offers a structured opportunity to contribute to public-impact missions while gaining experience in federal policy, governance, and large-scale technical implementation in ways they could not do in the private sector.

PURPOSE: This Human Resources (HR) Bulletin establishes the Department’s policy and implementation procedures for participation in the U.S. Tech Force Fellowship program using Schedule A(r) hiring authority.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Office of Personnel Management (OPM): OPM leads the U.S. Tech Force Fellowship Program under the direction of the Technology Task Force. OPM is responsible for program oversight, recruitment, candidate assessment and selection framework, cross-agency coordination, management of the U.S. Tech Force Talent Network and TechForce.gov website, outreach campaigns, and program evaluation.

Technology Task Force (Governance Body): Chaired by the OPM Director and comprised of representatives from the Office of Management and Budget, the General Services Administration, the National Science Foundation, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, and White House leadership, the Technology Task Force provides strategic direction, ensures government-wide alignment, monitors program outcomes, and recommends program adjustments.

Department of Commerce: Although OPM provides centralized program oversight, U.S. Tech Force Fellows are appointed by and onboarded directly to the Department. The Department is responsible for:

- Identifying mission-critical projects and technical needs;
- Selecting and appointing fellows after screening by the U.S. Tech Force Fellowship Program Manager;
- Creating cross-functional teams to ensure technical leadership and mentorship;
- Assigning work and establishing performance objectives; and
- Managing and evaluating fellow performance.

Work assignments and objectives shall be established by the Bureau Head (or designee), in coordination with the Department's Chief Information Officer (CIO) and bureau CIOs, as appropriate, to ensure alignment with agency priorities and effective integration into technology teams. Fellows are subject to the ethics rules applicable to all Federal employees and to the criminal conflict of interest statutes.

Serving Human Resources Offices (SHROs): SHROs must designate points of contact for program coordination, reporting, and compliance with applicable hiring authorities.

COVERAGE: This HR Bulletin applies to all positions authorized under the U.S. Tech Force Fellowship Program. Positions currently covered include:

- Primary Occupational Series: Information Technology Management (2210); however, other relevant series (e.g., 1550 or 1560) may be used, as appropriate;
- Grade Level: GS-14 (or equivalent); and
- Positions recruited at the time of this HR Bulletin include: (i) Software Engineers, (ii) Data Engineers, and (iii) Product Managers. Functional areas may include:
 - AI: Development and implementation of AI systems, machine learning models, and governance frameworks.

- Software Engineering: Full-stack, backend, and frontend development; cloud and infrastructure engineering.
- Data Analysis: Data science, visualization, data pipeline engineering, and applied analytics.
- Cybersecurity: Network and systems security, zero-trust implementation, threat detection, and security compliance.
- Product Management: Program and project management, agile delivery, stakeholder engagement, and user-centered design.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION:

Recruitment

Recruitment shall occur through coordinated tracks managed by OPM.

1. Public Track (Tech Force Talent Network): Applicants shall express interest through TechForce.gov, which routes applicants to the U.S. Tech Force Talent Network hosted on USAJOBS. Individuals who register shall receive direct links to the applicable announcements.
2. Industry Track: Participating technology companies may nominate qualified candidates for consideration. Nominated applicants will receive direct links to custom USAJOBS announcements for the Industry Track. These announcements are accessible only via link and will not appear in public USAJOBS searches.
3. Additional Tracks: OPM may establish additional recruitment tracks over time, including partnerships with universities, nonprofit organizations, or other entities.

Although Schedule A(r) appointments are not subject to competitive service public notice requirements, OPM will advertise these positions on USAJOBS and will apply veterans' preference procedures consistent with 5 CFR part 302.

Note: For "Industry Track" applicants, a detailed analysis of duties will need to occur to ensure there are no unmanageable conflicts of interest. Significantly, fellows may not work on matters that directly and predictably affect their financial interests or those of their nonfederal employer. 18 U.S.C. § 208. Applicants should coordinate with the Ethics Law and Program Office, EthicsDivision@doc.gov in advance of appointment to screen for potential conflicts of interest.

Selection

1. Application Submission: Applicants shall apply through the USAJOBS announcements corresponding to their recruitment track. Individuals who register through TechForce.gov or are nominated under an authorized track shall receive direct links to the applicable announcements.
2. Skills Assessment (Hurdle 1): Standardized technical assessments (e.g., CodeSignal or equivalent assessment tool approved by OPM).
3. Structured Résumé Review (Hurdle 2): Screening for minimum qualifications and specialized experience.
4. Screening Interview and Technical Interviews (Hurdle 3): Structured, pass/fail interview(s) confirming relevant experience and readiness for fellowship placement.

5. Final Rating and Referral: Veterans' preference shall be applied in accordance with 5 CFR § 302.304 using category rating in unranked order.
6. Selection and Appointment: Bureaus shall select from shared certificates and issue offers under Schedule A(r).
7. Ethics Obligations: Selected candidates will be notified of their ethical obligations, and their positions will be evaluated for financial disclosure reporting pursuant to HR Bulletin #267, FY23, "Human Resources Offices' Responsibilities Related to the Commerce Government Ethics Program."

AUTHORITY: Appointments are made under the authority of 5 CFR § 213.3102(r), Schedule A(r), which authorizes the appointment of participants in fellowship or exchange programs approved by OPM. Fellows shall be appointed to time-limited positions not to exceed two years, with the option to extend the appointment up to a maximum of four years total when program needs justify continuation. Appointments are made in the excepted service and confer no entitlement or right to further Federal employment in either the competitive or excepted service upon expiration of the appointment.

Positions are excluded from agency full-time equivalent (FTE) ceilings to the extent authorized by OPM. Each appointment must clearly state the time-limited nature of the assignment, the applicable hiring authority, and that continued employment beyond the appointment term is neither guaranteed nor implied.

COMPENSATION, PERFORMANCE AND BENEFITS:

Compensation

Fellows may be appointed at the GS-14 (or equivalent) level, with pay set in accordance with applicable Department compensation policies. The Department may apply superior qualifications and special needs pay-setting authority, as permitted under 5 CFR part 531, to set pay above Step-1 when justified. Fellows may be appointed at other GS (or equivalent) grade levels consistent with agency needs and position classification determinations.

Performance and Awards

Fellows are covered by the Department's performance management system for excepted-service employees. Fellows are eligible for within-grade increases, performance awards, and other incentives consistent with Departmental policy. Supervisors shall establish performance plans with clear outcomes aligned to modernization and AI priorities and may recognize high performance through existing Departmental award programs.

Benefits and Training

Fellows appointed to positions with an expected duration of more than one year are eligible for Federal employee benefits, including Federal Employees Health Benefits, Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance, and Thrift Savings Plan, subject to applicable regulations. Fellows appointed for more than 90 days accrue annual and sick leave beginning at the start of the appointment.

The fellowship may include structured professional development activities, such as leadership sessions, AI and digital skills training, certifications, and interagency networking opportunities.

TERMINATION: Appointments may be terminated prior to expiration for misconduct, unacceptable performance, administrative reasons, or completion of the assigned project or fellowship term. Termination procedures shall be consistent with applicable law and regulations governing excepted-service appointments.

REFERENCES:

- “[*Building the AI Workforce of the Future*](#),” December 15, 2025.
- Executive Order 14356: “[*Ensuring Continued Accountability in Federal Hiring*](#),” October 15, 2025.
- [5 CFR § 213.3102\(r\)](#).

OFFICE OF TALENT POLICY: TalentPolicy@doc.gov.