



PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF WAR  
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

APR 21 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP  
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOW FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Department of War Contact-to-Contract Strategies

Reference: Executive Order 14170 "Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service," January 20, 2025

In today's era of strategic competition, victory relies on both our warfighters and the civilian employees who drive our technological edge, industrial strength, and overall lethality.

For civilians, the Department's average Time-to-Hire (TTH) of 100 days, with significant variability, does not meet our needs. As emphasized in the reference, we must accelerate hiring to attract top talent to the Federal workforce and serve the Nation. To address these challenges, I am directing transformative changes to the Department's recruitment and hiring processes, including the development of a modernized, artificial intelligence-driven solution to automate and streamline hiring, covering—advertising, screening, scheduling, interviewing, and decision-making—with a goal of reducing TTH to under 30 days.

While this solution is being developed, all DoW Component heads are directed to implement the attached Contact-to-Contact strategies and the following procedures:

- **Strategic Recruitment Plan:** Components will use a Strategic Recruitment Plan to ensure timely recruitment actions. Selecting officials must make a selection and notify their servicing Human Resources Office within 15 days of receiving a referral list.
- **Drug Testing Flexibility:** Components will not delay entrance on duty dates due to pending drug test results. Applicants must sign a statement acknowledging that verified positive results may be considered for adverse action or other administrative purposes.

All DoW Components must maintain records of the use and results of these strategies. My point of contact is Mr. Michael Cogar, Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Civilian Personnel Policy, at michael.a.cogar3.civ@mail.mil.

  
Anthony J. Tata

Attachment:  
As stated

## CONTACT-TO-CONTRACT STRATEGIES

### 1. Purpose and Background.

To provide the Department of War (DoW) Components with strategies for implementing significant time-to-hire reductions.

The Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service led an effort with the Components in retooling a variety of current civilian hiring practices to achieve an average 30-day timeline, beginning at the notice of referral (NOR) for competitive recruitments; or at the tentative job offer (TJO) for non-competitive recruitments with both ending at the final/firm job offer (FJO), known as Contract-to-Contract (C2C) strategies. Executive Order 14170, "Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service," January 20, 2025, further reinforced this need and is intended to bring to the civilian workforce only highly skilled and talented individuals.

### 2. Strategies.

a. **Drug Testing Flexibility.** This strategy allows an individual to enter on duty before confirmation of successfully passing a drug test. It requires a negative drug test result to be received by Human Resources (HR) no later than 30 calendar days after the Entrance on Duty (EOD) date.

(1) Inability to successfully pass or refusal to conduct the drug test may result in:

(a) If prior to EOD, the tentative or final job offer being withdrawn; or

(b) If after EOD, being removed from Federal service for failure to meet a condition of employment.

(2) Failure to receive results within 30 calendar days of EOD are to be reviewed by the authorized HR and management officials on a case-by-case basis. Certain circumstances outside of HR, management or the individual's control may warrant additional time to meet the drug test requirement.

(3) HR Procedures:

- HR initiates the drug test request no later than 2 business days after TJO acceptance.
- HR completes the applicable information on the "Drug Test Statement of Understanding" template (Appendix A) and assigns it within USA Staffing/Onboarding Manager for the selectee to complete and upload the signed document.
- HR will issue the FJO and establish an EOD date once pre-employment requirements have been completed. This may be prior to receipt of drug test results.

(4) Standard Statements. HR practitioners use language that captures the intent of the following for applicable drug testing recruitments:

(a) Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) Statements:

- This position is subject to an initial drug screening, and random testing thereafter. A negative drug test result must be received by HR within 30 calendar days after the EOD (i.e., start date). The selectee's inability to successfully pass; or refusal to conduct the test may result in: 1) the tentative or FJO being withdrawn during the recruitment process; or 2) subsequently being removed from Federal service for failure to meet a condition of employment.
- You may be required to sign a "Drug Test Statement of Understanding" if you are selected for this position.

(b) TJO Statements:

- Once you accept the TJO, HR will provide you with instructions on how and where to conduct the drug test. A negative drug test result must be received by HR no later than 30 calendar days after your EOD (i.e., start date).
- Please sign and return the "Drug Test Statement of Understanding."

(c) FJO Statements:

- You have successfully completed all drug testing requirements for appointment.

***OR***

- A negative drug test result must be received no later than 30 calendar days after your EOD (i.e., start date) per your signed "Drug Test Statement of Understanding."

b. Strategic Recruitment Plan (SRP).

(1) Pre-Actionable Request for Personnel Action (aRPA). The following actions will be completed prior to the creation and submission of an aRPA for recruitment.

(a) Interim Suitability or Fitness Determinations. Determinations are made on whether an eligible position can be authorized for an interim suitability or fitness determination in order to not delay the EOD for eligible selectees.

(b) Temporary (or Interim) National Security Eligibility. Determinations are made on whether an eligible position can be filled by an individual who is granted interim national

security eligibility, in accordance with Department of Defense Manual 5200.02, “Procedures for the DoD Personnel Security Program (PSP),” in order to not delay the EOD for eligible selectees.

(c) Hiring Incentives. While some incentives may require additional information from a selectee, identifying whether an incentive may be offered and minimum/maximum amounts should be provided for all eligible incentives to the greatest extent possible prior to the aRPA.

- All eligible incentives are identified and approved by the proper authorizing official.
- For competitive recruitments, any approved incentives will be identified and advertised within the JOA.

(d) Interviews and Evaluation. Hiring Managers will take the following steps in advance of issuance of the certificate to eliminate delays in beginning interviews:

- Candidate interview questions and where appropriate, rating rubrics are developed.
- Hiring panel members are identified and designated.
- To the greatest extent possible, interview time blocks are identified and reserved by hiring panel members.

(2) Post-aRPA: Hiring Managers must make timely selections. After receipt of a certificate of eligible candidates, the following timelines facilitate an average 30-day timeline. Hiring Managers will:

(a) Follow these timelines:

- Return certificates to HR within 15 business days of receipt.
- When the selection cannot be made within 15 business days, request, from HR, a 5 business day certificate extension in accordance with local criterion. Only one extension will be approved.

(b) Identify alternate selections to the greatest extent possible.

(c) Consult with HR when a selection is not made to either:

- Close the certificate and generate a new RPA; or
- Re-announce the opportunity.

### 3. Tracking and Reporting.

The following categories were tracked when developing the C2C strategies and continued tracking will provide useful data as DoW continues to strive for an average 30-day C2C timeline. Most are available in HR information systems, yet some will need to be tracked manually (M).

Component	Recruitment method
Command/Organization	Nature of action
Geographic location/installation	Legal authority code
Pay plan	Were there one or more declinations?
Series	Date NOR sent to applicant
Grade	Date certificate issued to hiring manager
Date interim suitability identified (M)	Date certificate returned by the hiring manager
Date interim security identified (M)	Date TJO issued
Date interview questions and rubric, if applicable, finalized (M)	Date TJO accepted
Date hiring panel finalized (M)	Date drug test initiated
Date interview times finalized (M)	Date drug test results received
Date hiring incentives were pre-approved (M)	Drug test results
Recruitment incentive	Date final job offer issued
Relocation incentive	Date final job offer accepted
Student loan repayment incentive	Date EOD
Were all SRP items completed/approved prior to RPA initiation? (M)	
RPA Number	
Date HR action was initiated	