

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs



## Office of Talent Management (OTM)

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Utilizing Pathways Program Hiring Authority

Veterans Benefits Administration  
1800 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006

March 26, 2020

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<b>Document Location:</b>	
<b>Document Name:</b>	OTM SOP for Pathways Program Recruitment
<b>Original Creation Date:</b>	03/26/2020

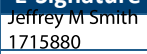
**Revision History**

This section is intended to record any changes made to the SOP and to implement document version control.

Revision Date	Revised By	Summary of Changes

**Approvals**

This document requires final approval from the following people:

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## 1.0 Introduction

The Pathways Program was established to recruit talented people to work in the Federal Government and targets students and graduates of all ages and backgrounds. Pathways Program replaces the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). Pathways consists of three distinct programs: the Internship Program - designed for current students, the Recent Graduates Program - designed for individuals who have recently graduated from qualifying institutions, and the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program, a unique leadership development opportunity for candidates who have earned a graduate or professional degree within the past two years.

## 2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Veterans Benefits Administration SOP is to clarify roles, responsibilities, and procedural requirements pertaining to the recruitment of Pathways Program participants, and the maintenance of the Pathways Program workforce.

## 3.0 Scope

This SOP applies to all activities involved in recruitment, onboarding, training, and conversion of Pathways Program participants in accordance with VA Handbook 5005.

## 4.0 Audience

The principal audience for this SOP is all OTM/VBA employees to include but not limited to; Hiring Managers (HM), Human Resources Liaisons (HRL), Human Resource Center (HRC) Specialists, and VBACO/Regional Office Leadership who utilize the Pathways Program to fill critical vacancies.



## 5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

	Role	Role Overview	Suggested Team Composition*
Create	OTM	A dedicated team of OTM employees that are assigned to the development and implementation of a comprehensive Pathways Program. The Pathways Program will be designed to educate Hiring Managers and VBA Leadership on the flexibilities of hiring Pathways Program participants, and the training and development obligations of Hiring Managers once program participants are onboarded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members of OTM Policy and Programs Staff</li> </ul>
Identify	Business Line POC	The Hiring Manager is responsible for identifying vacant positions that the Agency would benefit from utilizing the Pathways Program to fill. The Hiring Manager may wish to consult the Human Resources Liaison for technical advice when determining if the Pathways Program would be appropriate. The business line should properly identify Pathways Program as the hiring path on the OTM Recruitment Request form to ensure that a proper job announcement is constructed by the Human Resource Center Staffing Specialist.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hiring Manager</li> <li>HR Liaison</li> </ul>
Recruit	HRC	The Human Resource Center Staffing Specialist will draft a Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) open to those who meet the criteria of the Pathways Program Internship, Recent Graduates, or Presidential Management Fellow (PMF) dependent on the recruitment request from the business line. The Staffing Specialist will utilize standard recruitment procedures to carry out the recruitment request through to onboarding of the participant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human Resource Center</li> </ul>
Maintain	Hiring Manager	Upon onboarding a Pathways Program Participant, the Hiring Manager/Supervisor will fulfill training and development obligations required by the program for completion and prior to the participants conversion eligibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hiring Manager</li> </ul>
	OTM	The Office of Talent Management will maintain a current roster of all Pathways Program hires and participants and will conduct quarterly evaluations to ensure the participant is receiving the appropriate training and development, as well as to ensure that Hiring Managers are properly carrying out their responsibilities of the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OTM Policy and Programs and OTM Operations staff</li> </ul>
Convert	Hiring Manager	Upon completion of the Pathways Program requirements, participants will be eligible for career conversion. The Hiring Manager will track the status of training, development, and eligibility conversion and may consult with the HRL on items requiring clarification. Conversion of Pathways Program Participants requires a Request for Personnel Action (SF-52) which will be created at the local station and submitted into Manager Self Service (MSS) for processing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hiring Manager</li> <li>HRL</li> </ul>
	HRC	HRC Staffing Specialists will review the SF-52 and ensure that the participant meets all administrative requirements. If so, the SF-52 will be processed in HR Smart.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HRC Staffing Specialist</li> </ul>



## 6.0 Detailed Process

### 1.0 Identify Vacancy for Potential Pathways Program Recruitment

Target Completion Time: 2 Business Days

#### 1.1 Hiring Manager

- The hiring manager (HM) will determine if the Agency can benefit from utilizing the Pathways Program to fill the vacancy.
  - Some examples of when Pathways Program utilization would be ideal; there are no best qualified internal candidates or internal candidates have been exhausted; entry level GS positions that are hard to fill, local labor market shows positive outlook for career series; Agency desires to onboard new talent.
- Once the HM elects the Pathways Program as the appropriate recruitment strategy, the HM will annotate Pathways on the Recruitment Request Form.

POSITION TYPE (check if yes)		ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (check if yes)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Permanent		<input type="checkbox"/> Bargaining Unit	BUS Code
<input type="checkbox"/> Full-Time		<input type="checkbox"/> Telework Eligible	
<input type="checkbox"/> Part-time (hrs/pay period)		<input type="checkbox"/> Travel Required	Frequency:
<input type="checkbox"/> Term NTE		<input type="checkbox"/> Relo Expenses or Bonus Incentives Offered	
<input type="checkbox"/> Temp NTE		<input type="checkbox"/> Security Level	
<input type="checkbox"/> Temp Promo/Detail NTE		<input type="checkbox"/> Hours of Duty (a.m./p.m.)	
<b>RECRUITMENT STRATEGY (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)</b> *requires District approval.			
<i>Internal</i>	<i>Non-Competitive</i>	<i>External</i>	<i>Public (DEU)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Facility/Station Employees	<input type="checkbox"/> Schedule A	<input type="checkbox"/> VEOA	<input type="checkbox"/> All U.S. Citizens
<input type="checkbox"/> VBA-Wide*	<input type="checkbox"/> VRA	<input type="checkbox"/> Military Spouses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pathways Intern
<input type="checkbox"/> VA-Wide*	<input type="checkbox"/> ≥30% Disabled	<input type="checkbox"/> Reinstatement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pathways Recent Grad
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (include comment)		<input type="checkbox"/> Transfer	
Comments:			

- The HM will then properly construct a Pathways Participant Agreement to be submitted with the recruitment request. The Pathways Participant Agreement:
  - Is a contract between the supervisor and the participant.
  - Identifies requirements and expectations for the program.
- The HM will ensure an appropriate development plan for the program participant that includes:
  - Established learning goals and objectives.
  - A plan for meeting the goals and objectives.
  - A measure to track development and completion.
- If the HM is using the Pathways Recent Graduates Program the HM will also ensure a **Formal Training Program** is in place that includes 40 hours of formal, interactive training during the program. This is a requirement and the Formal Training Program must be established prior to utilizing the Pathways Recent Graduates recruitment.



- Once the HM has the program requirements in place, the Participant Agreement, Development Plan, and Formal Training Plan will be submitted as part of the Recruitment Request.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS (ATTACH)	
<p><i>All Requests</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Signed Recruitment SF-52</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> PD for every grade with signed OF-8</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Job Analysis (VA Forms 0938a,b,c)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Best-Qualified/Crediting Plan</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Signed Org. Chart (showing vacancy/float doc.)</li> </ul>	<div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>For Pathways</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participant Agreement</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Development Plan</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Formal Training Program (Recent Grad Only)</li> </ul> </div> <p><i>For Relo Expenses and Other Incentives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Relocation Expenses/PCS Approval (Appx. A)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recruitment/Relo Bonus Incentive (VAF 10016)</li> </ul>
PD Review Date: <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/>	Job Analysis Confirmation Date: <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/>
Reviewed by a classifier within 2 years of request (unless national PD).	

- The HM, in collaboration with the HRL, will submit the recruitment request into MSS.

## 2.0 Recruit for Vacancy

*Target Completion Time: 6 Business Days*

### 2.1 Human Resources Center Specialist: Review Recruitment Request and Complete Assessment Package

- Upon notification of a Recruitment Request submitted into MSS the HRC Staffing Specialist will review the recruitment package to ensure all required documents are included
  - o Position Description
  - o Job Analysis Forms
  - o Crediting Plan
  - o Request for Personnel Action, SF-52
  - o Organizational Chart
  - o Relocation Documents (if applicable)
  - o Pathways Participant Agreement
  - o Development Plan
  - o Formal Training Plan (if applicable)
- Once all documents have been verified the Staffing Specialist will draft an appropriate Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) catered to the Pathways Program.
- Program eligibility requirements for **Pathways Internship** will include:
  - o Be a U.S. Citizen or national or be lawfully permitted to the U.S. as a permanent resident or otherwise authorized to be employed.
  - o Accepted for enrollment or be enrolled and seeking a degree (diploma, certificate, etc.) from a qualifying educational institution as defined in 5 CFR 362.102, on a full- or half-time basis as defined by the institution in which the student is enrolled.
  - o Position is related either to the student’s academic field of study or the student’s career interests unless the student is hired under a time-limited appointment.
- Program eligibility requirements for **Pathways Recent Graduates** will include:
  - o Be a U.S. Citizen or national or be lawfully permitted to the U.S. as a permanent resident or otherwise authorized to be employed.
  - o Have completed, within the previous two years, a qualifying associate, bachelor’s, master’s, professional, doctorate, vocational or technical degree, or certificate from a qualifying educational institution.



- Veterans unable to apply within two years of receiving their degree, due to military service obligation, have up to six-years after degree completion to apply.
- Program eligibility requirements for **Pathways Presidential Management Fellows** will include:
  - Be a U.S. Citizen or national or be lawfully permitted to the U.S. as a permanent resident or otherwise authorized to be employed.
  - Have completed a qualifying advanced degree within the two-year period preceding the PMF Program announcement or be a student currently attending a qualifying educational institution who expects to complete the advanced degree by August 31 of the academic year in which the competition is held
- The Staffing Specialist will send the draft JOA to the HM through the USA Staffing system for review and approval prior to posting on USAJOBS.GOV

### 3.0 Pathways Program Maintenance Obligations

*Target Completion Time: Completion Time Will Vary for Internships. Completion Time for Recent Graduates is One Year. Completion for PMF is Two Years.*

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#### 3.1 Hiring Manager Onboards Participant:

- Within **10 business days** of onboarding the new Pathways Program participant the HM will:
  - Complete Pathways Orientation with the new hire
  - Review and sign the Program Participant Agreement with the new hire.

#### 3.2 Program Requirements for Completion of Pathways Internship:

- Within **45 Business days** of onboarding the Pathways Program participant the HM will develop and assign the Individual Development Plan (IDP) with the new hire
- Comply with the criteria (as defined by the academic institution) for enrollment as either a full-time or half-time student in good standing
- Maintain good academic standing in accordance with requirements specified in the position description
- Keep supervisor or hiring official informed of academic progress including the provision of copies of class schedules, most recent grade reports or transcripts, and other information requested with respect to eligibility and status as a student-trainee

#### 3.4 Program Requirements for Completion of Pathways Recent Graduates:

- Within **45 Business days** of onboarding the Pathways Program participant the HM will develop and assign the Individual Development Plan (IDP) with the new hire
- Within **90 Business days** the HM will assign a mentor *not* in the direct chain of command to the participant
- The HM will ensure that the participant completes 40 hours of formal interactive training throughout the one-year program.
- The Participant is responsible for demonstrating successful job performance under VA's approved performance appraisal system and receives a rating of record (or summary rating) of at least Fully Successful or equivalent.

#### 3.5 Program Requirements for Completion of Pathways Presidential Management Fellows:

- Within **45 Business days** of onboarding the Pathways Program participant the HM will develop and assign the Individual Development Plan (IDP) with the new hire





- Within **90 Business days** the HM will assign a mentor *not* in the direct chain of command to the participant
- Complete 80 hours of formal, interactive training per year or a total of 160 hours over two years
- Complete at least one developmental assignment of four to six months in duration with full-time management and/or technical responsibilities consistent with the PMF's IDP (Additional short-term rotational opportunities can be added as an option)
- Complete annual performance plan and an annual performance evaluation in accordance with VA performance management rules
- Demonstrate successful job performance under VA's approved performance appraisal system and receives a rating of record (or summary rating) of at least Fully Successful or equivalent.

#### 4.0 Conversion Eligibility Upon Completion of Program

*Target Completion Time: Upon Completion of the Pathways Program*

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##### 4.1 Conversion Eligibility Requirements for Completion of Pathways Internship:

- The HM will ensure the following conversion eligibility requirements have been met by the program participant before submitting the Request for Personnel Action, SF-52, to the HRC for processing:
  - Be a U.S. Citizen
  - Meet VA requirements as specified in the Participant Agreement
  - Complete 640 hours of work prior to, or concurrent with, completion of degree program\*
  - Complete a course of academic study, within the preceding 120-day period, at a qualifying educational institution conferring a diploma, certificate, or degree
  - Be converted to the competitive service within 120 days after completing the course of academic study at a qualified academic institution for interns without a time-limited appointment
  - Meet the OPM Qualification Standard for the position the Intern may be converted to
  - Maintain acceptable performance as described in VA's approved performance management system
  - Receive favorable recommendation by an official of VA

##### 4.2 Conversion Eligibility Requirements for Completion of Pathways Recent Graduates Program:

- The HM will ensure the following conversion eligibility requirements have been met by the program participant before submitting the Request for Personnel Action, SF-52, to the HRC for processing:
  - Be a U.S. citizen
  - Meet VA requirements as specified in the Participant Agreement
  - Meet the OPM Qualification Standard for the position the Recent Graduate may be converted to
  - Maintain acceptable performance as described in VA's approved performance management system
  - Receive favorable recommendation by an official of VA
  - VA must make the noncompetitive conversion effective on the date the service requirement is met, or at the end of a VA-approved extension, if applicable.
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##### 4.3 Conversion Eligibility Requirements for Completion of Pathways Presidential Management Fellows:



- The HM will ensure the following conversion eligibility requirements have been met by the program participant before submitting the Request for Personnel Action, SF-52, to the HRC for processing:
  - Be a U.S. citizen
  - Meet VA requirements as specified in the Participant Agreement
  - Verify completion of training requirements and submit an approved and signed IDP at the end of appointment
  - Demonstrate successful job performance according to VA performance appraisal system
  - Meet the OPM Qualification Standards for the position to which the PMF may be converted to
  - Receive favorable recommendation for conversion from supervisor
  - Obtain Executive Review Board (ERB) or equivalent, certification prior to conversion\*

\*The agency must make the noncompetitive conversion effective on the date the service requirement is met, or at the end of an agency-approved extension, if applicable. Appointments must be effective on or before the expiration of the individual's PMF appointment, including extensions. No permanent appointments are allowed prior to full completion of the 2-year fellowship. The deadline for an ERB to certify that a Fellow has successfully completed all program requirements is 30 days prior to the Fellow's two-year anniversary date. ERB certification is required prior to conversion. ERB certifications must be forwarded to OPM.

## 7.0 Related Handbooks, Procedures, and Guidelines

[5 CFR 213.3402](#)

[VA Handbook 5005](#)

[Pathways at VA](#)

[VA Pathways Recent Graduates Program](#)

[VA Pathways Programs Requirements](#)

[OPM Pathways Overview](#)

[OPM Recent Graduates Program](#)

## 8.0 Additional Information

### 8.1 Acronyms

HM – Hiring Manager

HRC – Human Resources Center

HRL – Human Resources Liaison

MSS – Manager Self Service

OTM – Office of Talent Management

PMF – Presidential Management Fellow