



The Merit System's Front Line: A Profile of Federal Staffing Specialists and the Constraints They Face



U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board
Office of Policy and Evaluation
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THE CHAIRMAN



U.S. MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD

1615 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20419-0001

September 4, 2026

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In accordance with the requirements of 5 U.S.C. § 1204(a)(3), I am pleased to submit this U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) publication, *The Merit System's Front Line: A Profile of Federal Staffing Specialists and the Constraints They Face*. We are submitting this publication electronically, and it will be available on the Studies page of our website at www.mspb.gov/studies.

This report examines the role, experiences, and challenges of Federal human resources staffing specialists, who translate agency hiring needs into fair, lawful, and merit-based employment decisions. Drawing on a 2023 governmentwide survey, it describes the capacity and sustainability of the Federal staffing function.

The report finds that staffing specialists perform both operational and strategic work while facing heavy workloads, limited staffing and support, fragmented technology, uneven training access, and succession risks. It also identifies tension between demands for speed and merit-based hiring requirements, along with gaps in hiring managers' understanding of merit system principles, prohibited personnel practices, and Federal hiring rules.

MSPB offers this publication to assist policymakers, agency leaders, and human capital professionals as they strengthen staffing capacity, training, coordination, continuity, and technology. These efforts can help agencies meet mission needs while preserving fair and open competition, consistent application of hiring rules, and public trust. I believe you will find this report useful as you consider issues affecting the Federal workforce.

Respectfully,

James J. Woodruff II
Chairman

Henry J. Kerner
Vice Chairman

Enclosure

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Executive Summary



Study at a Glance

Who: Federal HR Specialists (GS-0201)

Where: 20 CFO Act agencies

When: Feb-June 2023

Focus: Staffing work, workload, training, support

Invited (34,000+)

Responded (29%)

Analyzed (3,299 respondents whose primary role was staffing)



This report examines the role, experiences, and challenges of federal Human Resources (HR) staffing specialists—frontline professionals responsible for translating agency hiring needs into fair, lawful, and merit-based employment decisions. Drawing on a 2023 governmentwide survey of approximately 3,300 staffing specialists across 20 Chief Financial Officer Act (CFO Act) agencies, the study provides a system-level view of the capacity and sustainability of the federal staffing function and its implications for mission delivery and merit system protection.

The findings show that staffing specialists play a far broader and more consequential role than is often recognized. In addition to executing high-volume operational tasks—such as issuing job announcements, reviewing applicant qualifications, and processing hiring actions—they serve as advisors to managers, develop recruitment and assessment strategies, and ensure compliance with complex legal and regulatory requirements. This dual operational and strategic role requires both technical expertise and judgment, positioning staffing specialists as key guardians of the merit system.

Despite their critical role, staffing specialists operate under sustained capacity constraints that affect their ability to carry out this work effectively. About half report that their workload is too high, and nearly half identify insufficient staffing and support as the single most important impediment to their jobs. Heavy workload, combined with limited staffing and fragmented technology environments, reduces the time available for careful, compliance-critical work and contributes to risks such as delays, errors, and burnout. These pressures also constrain the ability of staffing specialists to engage in higher-value strategic activities, reinforcing a largely transactional staffing model.

The report also highlights a persistent tension between expectations for speed and the requirements of merit-based hiring. While most staffing specialists report that their supervisors emphasize accuracy, compliance, and timeliness, more than one-third perceive pressure to achieve results regardless of rules. Even when not dominant, this perception is significant in a high-workload environment, as it can increase the likelihood of shortcuts and elevate the risk of prohibited personnel practices.

Another major finding is the role of hiring managers in shaping staffing outcomes. Although relationships between staffing specialists and hiring managers are generally positive, fewer than half of staffers believe that managers have a strong understanding of merit system principles, prohibited personnel practices, and federal hiring rules. These knowledge gaps contribute to inefficiencies, including rework, unrealistic expectations, and pressure on staffing specialists to correct issues late in the hiring process.

Workforce characteristics further underscore potential risks to staffing capacity. The staffing workforce is largely mid-career but relatively new to staffing roles, with more than 60 percent having less than five years of experience in their current position. At the same time, roughly one in five staffers is nearing retirement eligibility, raising concerns about knowledge transfer and succession. Limited delegated examining certification among staff also suggests that critical hiring expertise may be concentrated in a relatively small segment of the workforce.

Training and development gaps compound these challenges. While most staffing specialists report access to skill-building opportunities, many are unable to take advantage of training due to workload demands. Only a modest majority feel they receive the training needed to perform their jobs effectively, and gaps in training coverage—particularly in complex hiring rules—represent a vulnerability under conditions of high pressure.

Importantly, the report emphasizes that staffing specialists remain highly committed to their work and to public service. Most report that their work is meaningful and express strong engagement within their roles. However, this commitment exists alongside structural constraints—heavy workload, limited resources, uneven training access, and inconsistent expectations—that shape how effectively staffing specialists can uphold merit system principles in practice.

Overall, the study concludes that the federal staffing function faces systemic capacity challenges that, if left unaddressed, could undermine both agency performance and the integrity of merit-based hiring. Strengthening this function will require targeted investments in staffing levels, training, and technology, along with improved alignment between hiring managers and HR professionals. Ensuring that staffing specialists have the time, support, and clarity needed to apply rules consistently is essential not only for efficient hiring, but also for maintaining a fair, nonpartisan federal civil service.

The Merit of Staffing Specialists

Why Staffing Specialists Matter for Mission Delivery and Merit-Based Hiring

Bottom Line Up Front: Staffing specialists face immense challenges in the current federal workforce environment. Failure to address these pressures could undermine agencies' ability to meet mission needs and protect the integrity of federal hiring.

Federal leaders are responsible for ensuring agencies have the people they need to carry out their missions for the public. Whether shaping policy, overseeing programs, or managing operations, these leaders depend on a federal workforce that can deliver services, enforce laws, and respond to national priorities. Human Resources (HR) professionals make this possible. Among them, staffing specialists play a critical role by turning workforce needs into fair, lawful, and effective hiring decisions.

Staffing specialists help agencies bring the right people into government. They manage recruitment, review applicant qualifications, apply complex hiring rules, and ensure selections are fair, open, and based on merit. When this work is done well, agencies are better equipped to perform, and public trust is strengthened. When it is strained, delays, errors, and risks to the merit system can follow. Every hiring action that staffing specialists support has real consequences for mission delivery and the integrity of the federal civil service.

Today, this work is carried out under growing pressure. HR offices often operate with limited staff, heavy workloads, and frequent policy changes, even as expectations for speed, accuracy, and compliance continue to rise. Staffing specialists must interpret complex laws, advise managers, and make high-stakes decisions under tight deadlines. In doing so, they serve as front-line guardians of the merit system, protecting fair competition, equal opportunity, and freedom from improper influence.

To support informed decision-making, it is important to understand who federal staffing specialists are and the conditions under which they work. Our previous publication provided critical context on how staffing specialists' characteristics and roles compare to similar positions in the private sector. This report examines federal staffing specialists' work experiences and job-related challenges in depth. The findings offer insight into the capacity of the federal staffing function and highlight why sustaining this workforce is essential to helping agency leaders meet their missions and uphold merit-based hiring.

MSP #1

Recruitment should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve work force from all segments of society, and selection and advancement should be determined solely on the basis of relative ability, knowledge and skills after fair and open competition which assures that all receive equal opportunity. (5 U.S.C. § 2301(b)(1))

MSP #3

Equal pay should be provided for work of equal value, with appropriate consideration of both national and local rates paid by employers in the private sector, and appropriate incentives and recognition should be provided for excellence in performance. (5 U.S.C. § 2301(b)(3))

How the Federal Staffing Role Has Expanded and Why It Is Under Strain

Federal staffing specialists are often seen as transaction processors, but their role is far broader, and riskier, than it appears. Today's staffing specialists must simultaneously deliver timely hiring results, advise managers, and protect the integrity of the merit system. Understanding how this role has expanded helps explain why staffing work feels increasingly complex and constrained.

Federal staffing specialists perform both **operational** and **strategic** functions.

In their **operational role**, they recruit applicants, develop job announcements, review qualifications and eligibility, issue job offers, initiate background investigations, and support onboarding. These tasks require precision, consistency, and close attention to legal requirements.

In their **strategic role**, staffing specialists advise managers on hiring approaches, design recruitment strategies, conduct job analyses, develop assessment tools, and participate in compliance reviews. They also interpret and apply complex federal hiring laws and regulations.

Balancing these operational and strategic responsibilities creates significant role strain, even under stable conditions. During periods of rapid policy change, this strain increases, as staffing specialists must manage competing demands while knowing their decisions directly affect fair and open competition and the integrity of federal hiring outcomes.

Importantly, role strain does not stem from being asked to perform both operational and strategic functions, but from limited automation, staffing, and other supports that restrict staffing specialists' ability to balance these demands.

Balancing Act of Federal HR Specialists

HR staffing specialists are balancing competing demands,
with time weighted toward operational work

Operational Work

- Create & Post Position Announcements
- Screen Applicants for Eligibility
- Conduct Qualification Reviews
- Develop Hiring Certificates
- Applicant Communications
- Process Personnel Actions
- Initiate Background Investigations
- Provide Job Offers
- Onboard New Hires



Strategic Work

- Create Hiring Plans
- Develop Recruitment Strategy
- Conduct Job Analyses
- Design Occupational Questionnaires
- Develop/Select Assessments
- Design Organizational Structures
- Conduct Compliance Reviews

Although our survey was conducted in 2023, before major federal personnel policy changes in 2025, it captures a period when staffing specialists already experienced their role as complex, resource-constrained, and overwhelming.

At that time, staffing specialists were managing high hiring volumes, complex legal requirements, expanded use of delegated examining, and growing reliance on automated tools—often with limited staff capacity. Understanding how staffing work was structured before 2025 provides an essential baseline.

This baseline allows leaders to distinguish between challenges that are newly emerging and those that have been intensified by recent reforms. Without it, there is a risk of attributing longstanding structural strains to recent policy changes alone, limiting the ability to accurately assess how today’s workforce and policy transformations are reshaping the staffing role.

Why This Matters: *Staffing specialists are being asked to do more complex higher-risk work with limited capacity. When operational demands crowd out strategic and compliance-critical work, agencies face greater risk of hiring delays, errors, and weakened merit protections.*

How This Study Helps Explain Federal Staffing Work

As part of a broader research initiative conducted in 2023, the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) studied the federal HR workforce. To support this research, MSPB administered a governmentwide survey to federal HR specialists, including a targeted set of questions for those serving as staffing specialists.

Key Research Questions

This research brief draws on survey responses from staffing specialists to answer three core questions.

- 

1

Who are federal staffing specialists?
(Demographic composition of the workforce)
- 

2

How do staffing specialists experience their work?
(Day-to-day work conditions and organizational support)
- 

3

What challenges affect their ability to carry out staffing responsibilities?
(Workload, training, resources, and relationships)

Answering these questions is essential to understanding the capacity and sustainability of the federal staffing function and its role in upholding the merit system. Staffing specialists are responsible for applying hiring laws and rules in practice. Their ability to do this well depends not only on technical knowledge, but also on workload, training, supervisory support, and collaboration from hiring managers.

Examining workforce characteristics, such as education levels, age distribution, tenure, and functional focus (for example, competitive versus excepted service), provides insight into staffing capacity, succession risks, and potential vulnerabilities, including gaps in early-career pipelines or concentrations of retirement-eligible staff.

Equally important is understanding how staffing specialists experience their work. Access to training, manageable workload, supervisory support, and effective coordination with managers shape whether staffing specialists can consistently apply merit system principles under pressure.

Taken together, these factors help identify structural barriers that affect hiring performance and compliance. By examining who staffing specialists are, how their work is organized, and where challenges persist, this study provides evidence-based insights that can inform management, oversight, and policy decisions. The goal is not only to describe staffing challenges, but to clarify where risks to merit-based hiring may emerge—and where targeted action could strengthen the staffing function and protect the integrity of the federal civil service.



How the Study Was Conducted

This section explains how the data were collected and analyzed to ensure the findings are reliable, representative, and appropriate for oversight and decision-making.

Data Collection and Sample

As part of a broader study of the federal HR workforce, MSPB administered a survey to federal civilian HR employees in 2023. The survey targeted HR Specialists (GS-0201) and HR Assistants (GS-0203) working in 20 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies. Participation was voluntary.

More than 34,000 permanent federal HR employees were invited to participate. Data collection occurred between February and June 2023. After data quality screening, the final response rate was 29 percent. MSPB assessed both unit-level and item-level nonresponse bias and determined that nonresponse did not meaningfully affect the validity or interpretation of the results.

Analytic Sample

This research brief focuses on HR Specialists (GS-0201) whose primary work involved operational staffing activities. Respondents were classified as staffing specialists if they reported spending at least 25 percent of their work time on staffing-related duties.

Approximately 3,300 HR Specialists met this criterion. Although about 400 HR Assistants (GS-0203) also reported spending at least 25 percent of their time on staffing activities, they were excluded from the analyses. HR Assistants represent a relatively small share of the staffing workforce, and their roles differ in important ways from those of HR Specialists.

Measures

In addition to demographic and background items, the survey included 42 questions assessing key aspects of the staffing work environment. These items captured staffing specialists' perceptions of strengths and challenges across several areas, including job attitudes, training and development, workload manageability, and working relationships with supervisors and colleagues.

Analytic Approach

Survey data were analyzed using IBM SPSS statistical software. Analyses included descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, to describe the staffing workforce. Regression analyses were also conducted to examine relationships among key variables related to work experiences and perceived challenges.

The analyses were designed to identify patterns and associations, not to establish causation. Findings are used to inform discussion of workforce capacity, merit system risk, and the conditions under which staffing work is carried out.

What This Means for Readers: *The findings reflect the experiences of staffing specialists across large federal agencies and provide a reliable snapshot of staffing work as it existed in 2023. While individual agency conditions may vary, the results highlight system-level patterns that are relevant for oversight, management, and policy decisions.*

What the Data Show About Federal Staffing Specialists

We present key findings from the 2023 Federal HR Workforce Survey related to staffing specialists. The results highlight how staffing work is carried out in practice, where pressure points exist, and what conditions shape staffing capacity and merit system risk.

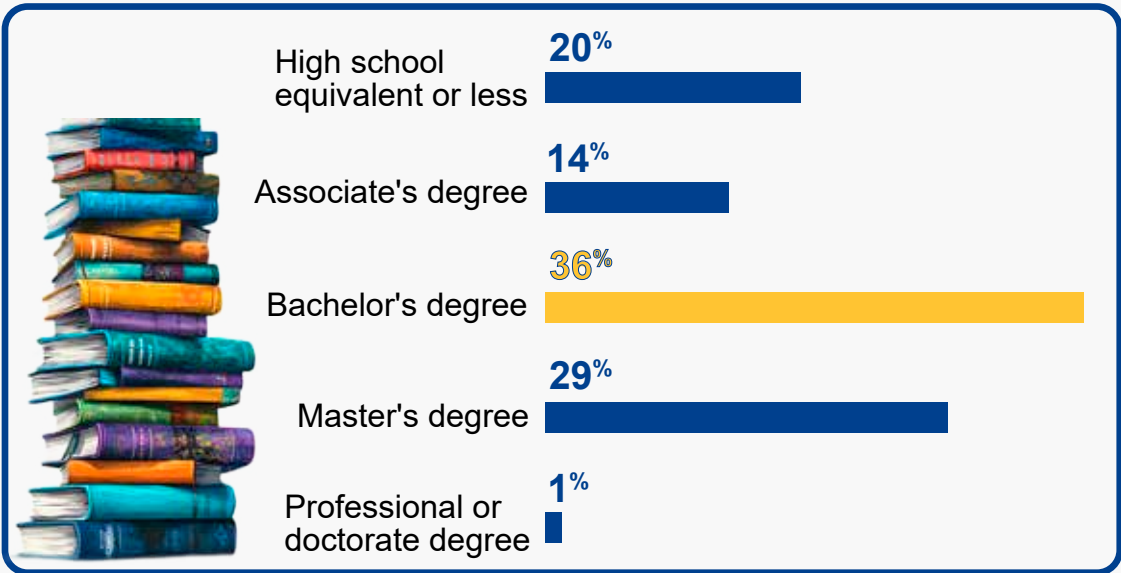
Who Federal Staffing Specialists Are

This section describes the characteristics of the federal staffing specialists’ workforce, providing context for understanding capacity, workload, and risk later in the report.

In terms of education, federal HR staffing specialists are generally well-educated. Two-thirds reported holding a bachelor’s degree or higher (66%), including nearly one-third with a master’s degree (29%). At the same time, more than 30% reported lower levels of formal education, reflecting the diversity of entry paths into federal HR careers [see Table 4 in Appendix].

Staffing Specialists Education

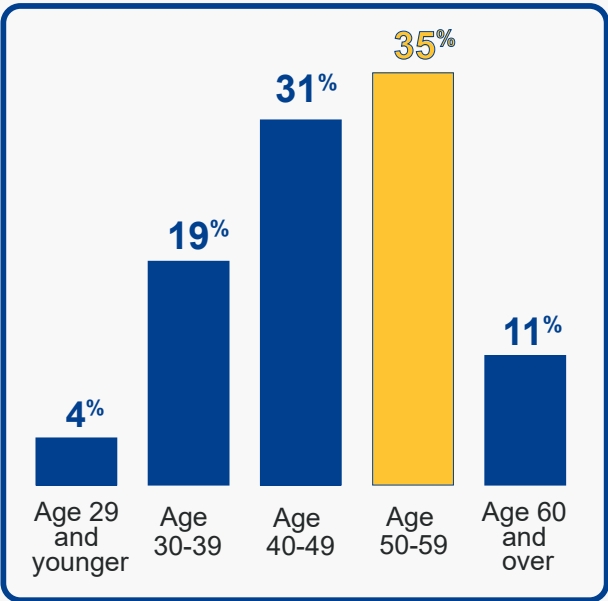
Staffing Specialists were asked: “What is the highest level of education you have completed?”



Two-thirds (66%) of staffers are between the ages of 40 and 59, while nearly one-quarter (23%) are 39 or younger. Only a small share are age 60 or older.

Staffing Specialists Age

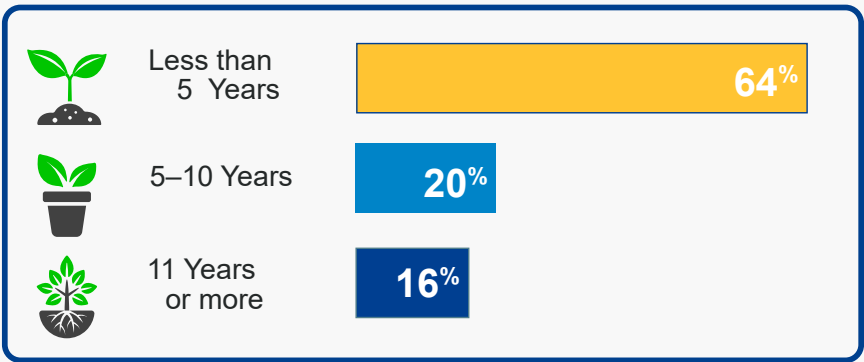
Staffing Specialists were asked “What is your age?”



Despite this mid-career age profile, many staffing specialists are relatively new to the staffing role itself. Sixty-four percent reported having been in their current staffing position for less than five years.

Years in Current Role

Staffing Specialists were asked “How long have you been in your current job?”

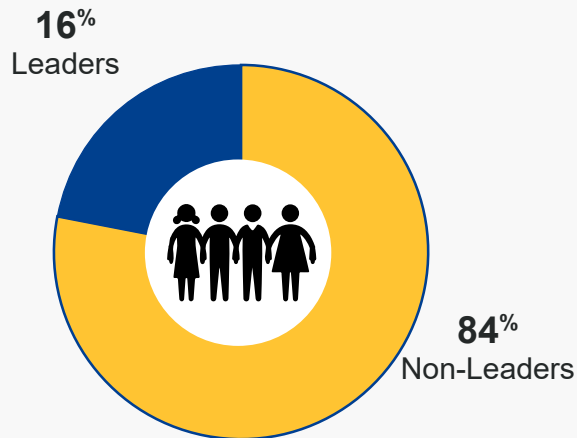


This pattern indicates that many staffing specialists are relatively new to their current positions, even though the workforce is predominantly mid-career. This pattern may also reflect the technical and regulatory complexity of staffing work compared with other HR functions [see Table 6 in Appendix].

Most staffing specialists are frontline, nonsupervisory employees. More than four-fifths reported that they do not hold leadership positions (84%), while a smaller share serve as supervisors, managers, or executives within the staffing function (16%).

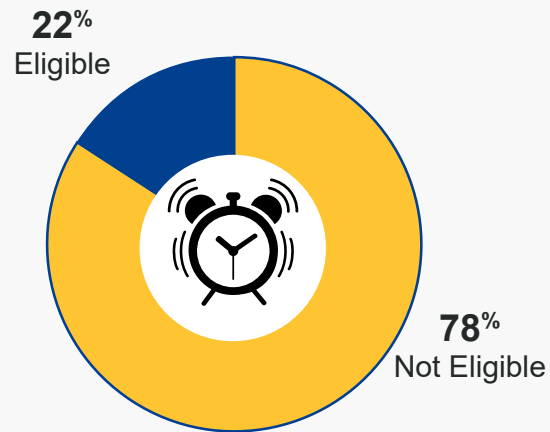
More than one in five staffing specialists reported being eligible or nearing eligibility for retirement, highlighting the importance of succession planning and knowledge transfer to preserve institutional expertise within staffing units [see Table 5 in Appendix].

Leaders vs. Non-Leaders



Q11. *What is your supervisor status?*

Retirement Eligibility



Q10. *Are you or will you become eligible to retire within the next 2 years?*

Together, these characteristics describe a workforce that is experienced but is still building staffing-specific expertise—context that helps explain the pressures and challenges discussed in the sections that follow.

How Staffing Specialists Work

Federal staffing specialists support a wide range of employees, organizations, and missions across government. Their work is both consultative and transactional, requiring them to balance high volumes of operational tasks with advisory and compliance-critical responsibilities.

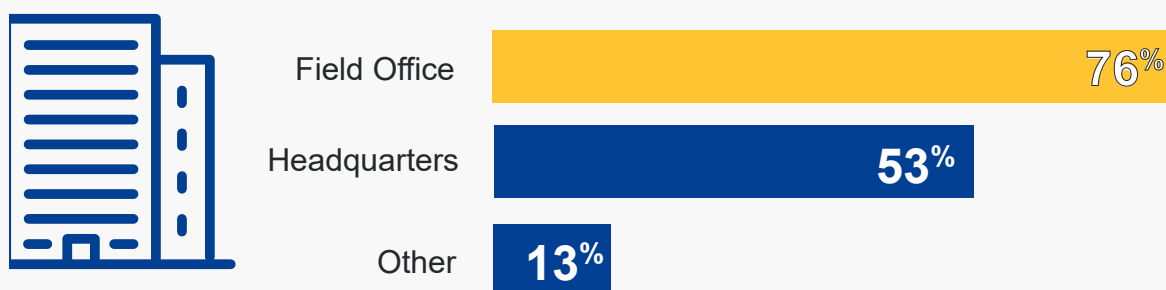
Most staffing specialists in this study primarily serve employees in the competitive service, with more than three-quarters reporting that the majority of the workforce they support falls into this category (77%). Smaller shares reported serving employees in the excepted service (18%), while very few primarily support the Senior Executive Service (SES) (2%), or other employee groups (4%) [see Table 9 in Appendix]. This distribution reflects the central role staffing specialists play in supporting the core competitive service workforce across federal agencies.

Staffing specialists' work is also distributed across different organizational settings. Just over three-quarters reported that their HR offices serve field offices (76%), while over half serve headquarters organizations (53%). A smaller share support other organizational structures (13%), and some staffing specialists indicated that they serve multiple types of organizations at the same time. In addition, many staffing specialists work in HR offices that support more than one department or independent agency (61%), underscoring the cross-cutting nature of staffing work and the complexity of the environments in which staffing specialists operate [see Table 10 in Appendix].

Geography further shapes the staffing specialist's role. More than four out of five respondents (82%) reported that the employees they support work outside the commuting area of the HR office, while a little more than half (56%) support employees in the same commuting area and roughly four out of ten (43%) support employees located in the same building [see Table 11 in Appendix]. These findings suggest that much of federal staffing work is performed at a distance, requiring staffing specialists to coordinate hiring actions across locations, time zones, and organizational boundaries.

Types of Offices Served

Staffing Specialists were asked “What type of organization does your HR office service?”



Another defining feature of the staffing specialists workforce is delegated examining (DE). Delegated examining certification is required for individuals who independently conduct competitive examining activities for certain federal hiring actions. Despite its importance for agencies that rely on competitive examining, relatively few staffing specialists reported holding DE certification. Roughly one-quarter reported being certified (26%), and similar shares reported having taken the DE certification assessment (31%) or formal DE training (24%) within the past three years [see Table 8 in Appendix]. Together, these findings suggest that DE responsibilities may be concentrated among a smaller subset of staffers, and that agencies may need to periodically assess whether they have sufficient DE-certified capacity—particularly as experienced staffers approach retirement.

What Staffing Specialists Experience on the Job

This section describes how staffing specialists experience their day-to-day work, including workload, support, and the conditions that shape their ability to carry out staffing responsibilities.

Survey results provide a detailed picture of what federal staffing specialists experience in their day-to-day work. Staffing specialists consistently report strong commitment to accuracy, timeliness, and compliance, as well as high levels of engagement in their work. At the same time, many report operating under sustained pressure related to workload, limited time, and competing demands.

What Supervisors Emphasize in Staffing Work

Staffing specialists report that supervisors emphasize accuracy, timeliness, and compliance—but some also perceive pressure to prioritize results over rules.

Staffing specialists overwhelmingly report that supervisors emphasize outcomes closely aligned with merit-based staffing. Nearly nine in ten staffing specialists say their supervisors stress accuracy, timeliness, compliance, production, results, and customer satisfaction, indicating a clear expectation that staffing work be both correct and efficient [see Table 33 through 42 in Appendix]. Most staffing specialists also report that supervisors emphasize achieving the results hiring managers want while following the rules, reinforcing the importance of balancing service delivery with compliance.

However, the survey also reveals an important area of concern. Nearly four in ten (38%) staffing specialists agree that their supervisors emphasize achieving results regardless of the rules, while fewer than half (46%) explicitly disagree with that framing [see Table 37 in Appendix]. From a merit system perspective, this is a notable signal. Even a perception that results are prioritized over rules can create pressure to shortcut compliance-critical steps and could increase the risk of prohibited personnel practices.

Supervisory Emphasis on Staffing Outcomes



Staffing Specialists were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the following question: *"To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes?"*
(Question 57 Series)

	Agree*	Neither	Disagree*
Timeliness	90%	7%	3%
Customer Satisfaction	90%	7%	3%
Results	89%	7%	4%
Accuracy	89%	7%	4%
Production	88%	8%	4%
Compliance	88%	8%	4%
Achieving results hiring managers want while following rules	84%	11%	5%
Innovation	62%	25%	14%
Achieving results hiring managers want regardless of rules	38%	16%	46%

*Agree column includes both Agree and Strongly Agree

*Disagree column includes both Disagree and Strongly Disagree

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Sixty respondents provided written comments about which outcomes their supervisors emphasize. Of these, eleven comments did not fit any of the existing response categories and were marked as "Other." In these "Other" responses, staffing specialists most often described supervisors emphasizing: how employees work with others (e.g., teamwork, communication, and setting expectations); professional conduct (e.g., ethical behavior and professionalism); growth and training (e.g., development and training); and employee well-being.

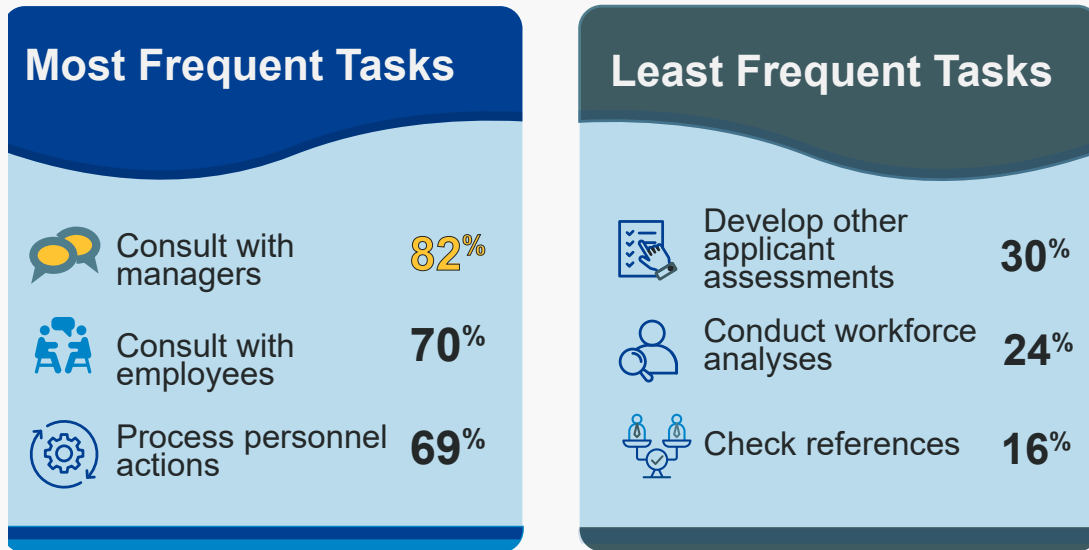
How Staffing Specialists Spend Their Time

Staffing specialists balance consultative and operational work, but day-to-day demands limit time for higher value, strategic activities.

On a typical day, most staffers report consulting with hiring managers, consulting with employees, and processing personnel actions. These activities reflect the dual role staffing specialists play as both technical experts and service providers supporting managers through complex hiring processes.

Fewer staffing specialists report regularly engaging in analytical tasks such as developing applicant assessments, conducting workforce analyses, or conducting thorough prior employment reference check interviews [see Table 13 in Appendix].

Staffing Tasks Most and Least Frequently Performed on a Typical Day



When asked what they would choose to spend more time on if given the opportunity, staffing specialists most often point to consulting with hiring managers, followed by conducting qualification reviews and assessments and developing recruitment plans and materials [see Table 14 in Appendix]. Staffing specialists were asked: “In a perfect world, what one set of tasks would you be able to spend more time on?” and respondents could *select one* option out of eight.

Tasks Staffing Specialists Would Prefer to Spend More Time On



The gap between what staffing specialists do most often and what they would like to spend more time doing helps explain why HR staffing has struggled to fully evolve into a strategic business partner role. Staffing specialists appear to value consultative, forward-looking work, but day-to-day demands leave limited time to engage at that level. Notably, this pattern mirrors findings from MSPB’s 2020 HR workforce study, suggesting a persistent and systemic constraint rather than a short-term fluctuation (MSPB, 2020).

How Staffing Specialists Work with Hiring Managers

Staffing specialists generally report positive working relationships, but the data reveal important knowledge gaps that affect hiring efficiency and compliance.

Overall, staffing specialists report strong working relationships with the hiring managers they support. Most say they have close working relationships, feel that managers value their advice, and believe managers are satisfied with the services they provide. These results indicate a generally healthy service relationship.

However, the survey also reveals a significant knowledge gap. Fewer than half of staffers (42%) agree that hiring managers have a good understanding of merit system principles, prohibited personnel practices, and federal HR rules and procedures. This gap poses a direct risk to merit-based hiring, as misunderstandings can lead to inappropriate requests, unrealistic timelines, or pressure to bend rules.

Encouragingly, most (81%) staffing specialists report that their supervisors would support them if they refused to take an action that would result in a prohibited personnel practice. At the same time, nearly two in ten staffing specialists agree that if they reported a prohibited personnel practice it could be viewed as poor customer service. This mixed signal suggests the need for clearer supervisory messaging that compliance and reporting concerns are expected and supported behaviors.

Staffing Specialists' Perceptions of Hiring Manager Relationships and Merit System Support



Staffing Specialists were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the following statements: (Question 67 Series)

	Agree*	Neither	Disagree*
The managers I service are satisfied with the services I provide.	84%	13%	3%
If a customer asked me to take an action that would result in the commission of a prohibited personnel practice, my supervisor would support me if I refused.	81%	10%	9%
The managers I service value my advice and guidance.	78%	16%	5%
I have a close working relationship with the managers I service.	76%	19%	5%
The managers I service have a good understanding of MSPs, PPPs, Federal HR laws, rules and regulations.	42%	33%	25%
If I reported that one of my customers had committed a prohibited personnel practice, my supervisor would consider the reporting to be bad customer service on my part.	18%	15%	67%

*Agree column includes both Agree and Strongly Agree

*Disagree column includes both Disagree and Strongly Disagree

Training Access and Skill Development Gaps

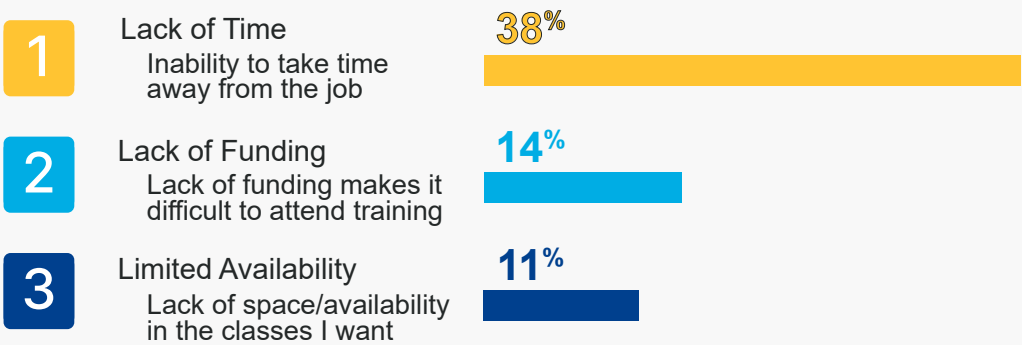
Gaps in training access and skill development present a potential vulnerability for the staffing function, particularly under high workload conditions.

Most staffing specialists believe their units can hire HR staff with the right skills (69%), but nearly one-third express uncertainty or disagreement (31%). Similarly, while a majority report satisfaction (68%) with their future growth prospects, a sizable minority do not or are uncertain (32%). These findings warrant attention because a notable minority of staffing specialists expressed uncertainty or dissatisfaction regarding staffing capacity and future growth opportunities.

We asked staffing specialists what training would help them grow—and they had a clear answer. About six out of ten people responded, and most said they want more hands-on training in core HR skills. The biggest need was staffing (49%). Others asked for training in position classification (13%), HR technology like USAJOBS and USA Staffing (8%), and learning more about other HR areas so they can handle a wider range of work. This means agencies should carve out time for training and focus on the building blocks: staffing, how classification shapes job announcements, and how to use key hiring systems well. Stronger skills in these areas can cut down on rework and help hiring run more smoothly and fairly. A smaller but important group also asked for leadership training (12%), pointing to the need for a clear, step-by-step path for new supervisors—including the rules for hiring and merit system protections. These findings suggest opportunities to strengthen HR staffing units by clarifying career pathways, development opportunities, and advancement criteria.

Training access emerges as a persistent challenge. The most commonly reported barrier to training is inability to take time away from the job (38%), followed by lack of funding (14%) [see Table 43 in Appendix]. Nearly two-thirds of staffers agree that their organizations provide sufficient opportunities to build new skills (65%), and fewer agree that they receive the training they need to perform their jobs effectively (58%).

Most Common Training Barriers of Staffing Specialists



We analyzed the open-text responses to the survey item that asked barriers to getting the training they need. Sixty-six text responses included descriptions of barriers that did not fit the response choices provided by this question. The most common barrier was access to training itself, such as travel requirements, training location, and schedules that do not match their duty hours. For example, one respondent wrote, “Trainings only offered for stateside CONUS employees which are not available for OCONUS employees. In addition, times outside of regular business hours for OCONUS employees. Those OCONUS do not have many options for virtual training. This needs [to be] addressed by leadership.” Other reported issues included concerns about training quality, such as inconsistent content or online formats that were less effective than in-person training. Lack of training information and slow training approval, limited training opportunities in their organization, and restriction on eligibility or approval for certain courses were also reported as barriers to receiving training.

Training on merit system principles and prohibited personnel practices is more common than training in other areas, but even here, participation is not universal. Given that staffing specialists’ role includes ensuring that MSPs are applied and PPPs are avoided, the absence of near-universal training coverage in these areas represents a potential vulnerability—particularly under high workload conditions where errors are more likely.

Staffing Specialists Training on MSPs and PPPs			
 Staffing Specialists were asked to what extent have you been trained on: (Question 26 Series)			
	Greater Extent	Some Extent	Less Extent*
Merit System Principles	56%	32%	12%
Prohibited Personnel Practices	60%	31%	9%

**Less Extent column includes both No Extent and Less Extent*

What Makes Staffing Work Difficult and What Would Help Them Most

Staffing specialists consistently point to capacity-related barriers—limited staff, heavy workload, and gaps in hiring manager knowledge—as the main obstacles to effective staffing work. Heavy workload is one of the clearest signals of risk in the staffing function, with implications for burnout, turnover, and error.

Workload remains one of the most striking findings in the survey. Half of staffing specialists report that their workload is too high, a level that research consistently links to burnout and turnover risk (Bes et al., 2023).¹ While most staffing specialists feel they have enough resources to perform day-to-day tasks, far fewer believe their organizations are making sufficient long-term investments in the HR workforce.

Technology presents a mixed picture. Most staffers say technology has improved their job performance, but many report low levels of automation and heavy system fragmentation. The majority (79%) use six or more HR systems in a typical week, suggesting that technology may add complexity even as it provides benefits.

When asked about obstacles that make staffing work difficult, staffing specialists consistently point to capacity-related barriers. The most frequently cited challenges are insufficient staff resources, heavy workload, and hiring managers’ lack of knowledge of HR rules and procedures [see Tables 18, 20 and 28 in Appendix]. Roughly two thirds of staffing specialists report that each of these factors causes difficulty to at least some extent.²



¹ Bes, I., Shoman, Y., Al-Gobari, M. et al. Organizational interventions and occupational burnout: a meta-analysis with focus on exhaustion. Int Arch Occup Environ Health 96, 1211–1223 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-023-02009-z>
² Note: Results shown in the visual represent the combined percentage of respondents who reported “Some Extent” and “Great Extent.”

These barriers reinforce one another. Limited staffing and heavy workload reduce the time available for consultative work and training, while gaps in hiring manager rule literacy increase rework, conflict, and the likelihood that staffers must correct or slow down actions late in the process.

When staffing specialists were asked to identify the single factor that makes their jobs more difficult, nearly half selected low resources and support [see Tables 15 through 29 in Appendix]. This finding aligns closely with the barriers identified above and underscores that staffers see capacity as the primary constraint on effective staffing work.

A smaller, but meaningful, number of respondents selected HR laws, rules, and procedures or issues with hiring managers and customers as their top concern, suggesting that process complexity and rule literacy remain important pain points. Fewer staffing specialists selected poor technology and systems, although technology concerns appear again in other parts of the survey.

Taken together, these findings suggest that agencies seeking to reduce merit system risk should focus first on ensuring staffing specialists have sufficient time, staffing, and support to complete compliance-critical work accurately. Investments in automation, job aids, and streamlined procedures are most likely to be effective when paired with realistic workload expectations and protected time for high-risk decisions.

Single Change Staffers Say Would Most Improve Their Job



Commitment and Meaningful Work—Despite Constraints

Staffing specialists are highly motivated and engaged, but mixed expectations and recognition shape their day-to-day experience. An overwhelming majority say their work is meaningful, and most report respectful treatment, teamwork, and cooperation within their work units. These are significant strengths that leadership can build upon.

Staffing Specialists' Perceptions of the Workplace			
 Staffing Specialists were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the following statements: (Question 53 Series)			
	Agree*	Neither	Disagree*
The work I do is meaningful to me	91%	6%	3%
Overall, I am satisfied with my supervisor	79%	11%	10%
My job makes good use of my skills and abilities	76%	12%	12%

*Agree column includes both Agree and Strongly Agree
*Disagree column includes both Disagree and Strongly Disagree

At the same time, slightly more than half of staffing specialists believe hiring managers have realistic expectations about what HR can accomplish within existing rules. Combined with mixed satisfaction around recognition, this points to areas where improved communication, expectation setting, recognition, and training for hiring managers could strengthen morale and retention.

Discussion

This study provides a detailed picture of the federal HR staffing specialists' workforce and the conditions under which staffing work is carried out. Taken together, the findings show a workforce that is highly committed to merit-based hiring and public service, but one that operates under sustained capacity pressures. Heavy workload, limited staffing, and uneven understanding of HR rules among hiring managers shape how staffing specialists carry out their work and affect agencies' ability to safeguard the merit system.



Key Findings

Several findings stand out.

First, workload and staffing shortages are central challenges. About half of staffing specialists report that their workload is too heavy, and many identify low resources and support as the single change that would most improve their jobs. These pressures limit time for careful, compliance-critical work and increase the risk of burnout and turnover.

Second, staffing specialists report strong commitment to accuracy, timeliness, and compliance. Most believe their supervisors emphasize these outcomes, which is a clear strength for the merit system. However, more than one-third perceive that supervisors emphasize achieving results regardless of the rules. Even when this view is not held by most staff, its presence matters. Under high workload conditions, such perceptions can create pressure to move faster than rules allow.

Third, there is a gap between daily tasks and desired work. Staffing specialists spend most of their time on operational and consultative tasks, such as advising managers and processing actions. Fewer regularly engage in higher-order work like workforce analysis or developing assessments. When asked how they would prefer to spend their time, staff most often pointed to consultative and analytical activities. This gap helps explain why staffing functions struggle to fully act as strategic partners.

Fourth, relationships with hiring managers are generally positive, but knowledge gaps remain. Fewer than half of staffing specialists believe hiring managers understand merit system principles and HR rules well. These gaps contribute to rework, delays, and pressure to correct issues late in the hiring process.

Finally, the staffing workforce is predominantly mid-career, geographically dispersed, and often new to their position, with limited delegated examining coverage. Almost a quarter of staff were retirement eligible or nearing retirement, and the concentration of specialized knowledge among a smaller group of experienced staff highlights the need for planning and training.

Staffing Specialists and Merit System Protection

Understanding the challenges and day-to-day experiences of federal HR staffing specialists is critical to protecting the merit system. Staffing specialists are the professionals who apply merit system principles in practice, using technical knowledge and judgment to ensure hiring laws and rules are followed. Historically, the merit system has been protected not only by statutes and oversight, but by the careful work of staffing specialists who ensure fair competition, consistent decisions, and proper use of veterans' preference.

Today, this role is under increased strain. Workforce reductions, hiring freezes, automation, and centralized service models may have reduced staffing capacity, making errors more difficult to absorb or correct. Without sufficient staff, time, and training, there is a risk that merit protections become procedural checklists rather than meaningful safeguards. Examining the pressures staffing specialists face helps identify early warning signs of risk and supports efforts to maintain a federal civil service that is fair, nonpartisan, and worthy of public trust.

The study's findings point to system-level risks rather than individual failings. When staffing specialists face heavy workloads, limited training time, and mixed messages about priorities, the likelihood of error or rule-bending increases—even when staff are committed to doing the right thing. Capacity constraints, unclear expectations, and uneven rule knowledge can weaken merit protections over time, particularly during periods of policy change or increased demand.

Recommendations to Strengthen Merit-Based Hiring

For Agency Leadership

- Communicate clear merit protection priorities.
- Build HR staffing capacity.
- Support staffing units when they raise concerns.
- Use technology to reduce burden.

For Hiring Managers

- Engage HR early in the hiring process.
- Learn the basics of merit system principles.
- Balance speed with fairness.
- Provide complete position information.

For CHCOs* & Hiring Directors

- Protect time for training.
- Set realistic hiring expectations.
- Encourage speaking up.
- Plan for coverage and continuity.

For Staffing Specialists

- Keep merit and compliance at the center of your work.
- Partner early with managers.
- Use standardized tools and job aids when possible.
- Build skills and share knowledge.

* Chief Human Capital Officer

For Agency Leadership

- ❑ **Communicate clear merit protection priorities.** Send consistent messages that merit system principles come first in hiring and reinforce this by reviewing compliance data alongside production metrics in operational meetings.
- ❑ **Invest in HR staffing capacity** through adequate staffing, expertise, and career growth.
- ❑ **Support staffing units when they raise concerns.** Support HR staff when they identify improper or high-risk hiring actions and reinforce that stopping risky actions is expected.
- ❑ **Use technology to reduce burden.** Align technology investments with workload reduction and simplification, not added steps or system complexity.

For CHCOs and Hiring Directors

- ❑ **Protect time for training.** Ensure staffing specialists have time to learn merit rules, assessment practices, and proper rule application.
- ❑ **Set realistic hiring expectations.** Emphasize quality and accuracy in hiring, not just speed and output.
- ❑ **Encourage speaking up.** Create a climate where raising compliance concerns is expected, supported, and monitored by supervisors.
- ❑ **Plan for coverage and continuity.** Regularly assess delegated examining capacity and succession needs to maintain coverage over time.

For Hiring Managers

- ❑ **Engage HR early in the hiring process.** Early coordination helps set realistic timelines and select the appropriate hiring approach.
- ❑ **Learn the basics of merit system principles.** Understanding the rules builds trust, supports HR's role in safeguarding fair hiring, and avoids rework.
- ❑ **Balance speed with fairness.** Hiring quickly should not come at the expense of quality or equity.
- ❑ **Provide complete position information.** Clear requirements and timely input reduce errors, delays, and rework.

For Staffing Specialists

- ❑ **Keep merit and compliance at the center of your work.** Accurate and fair decisions protect applicants and the agency.
- ❑ **Partner early with managers.** Early guidance helps prevent mistakes and unrealistic expectations.
- ❑ **Use standardized tools and job aids when possible.** Consistent processes support accuracy and help manage heavy workloads.
- ❑ **Build skills and share knowledge.** Ongoing training and peer learning strengthen staffing capacity over time.

Areas for Additional Research

This study highlights several areas where additional research would help deepen understanding of staffing work and merit system risk. Future research could examine:

- ❑ How workload levels affect error rates, rework, and merit system risk.
- ❑ How hiring manager training influences staffing efficiency and compliance.
- ❑ How automation and system integration affect staffing quality and workload.

Future research should also examine the long-term effects of the 2025 workforce reduction initiatives on HR staffing specialists' workload, role strain, and retention.³ Future studies could investigate how large-scale workforce reduction activities influenced the quality, consistency, and fairness of personnel decisions during periods of rapid organizational change. Specifically, future research could examine how contemporaneous policy changes are affecting specific issues related to HR staffing and merit system protections with research questions such as:

- ❑ How have the 2025 hiring freeze, deferred resignation program, and workforce reduction initiatives affected the workload, job demands, and retention of federal HR staffing specialists?
- ❑ What effects have the loss of experienced HR personnel and the concentration of specialized expertise among fewer staff had on agencies' capacity to carry out staffing functions and maintain compliance with merit system principles?

These questions are important because they connect policy and operational changes to the day-to-day realities of staffing work—where merit system protections are applied in practice. Changes such as shifts in hiring volume, new hiring authorities, hiring freezes, reorganizations, shared service models, and increased automation can affect not only what staffing specialists do, but also the conditions under which they do it. These conditions include workload, time pressure, access to training, and oversight. Examining how these factors influence error risk, rework, and staffing capacity—and how well hiring managers understand and apply merit system rules—can help identify where the staffing function is most vulnerable during periods of change. In turn, this research can inform which interventions are most likely to protect fairness, compliance, and service quality.

In short, answering these questions can help clarify whether recent reforms are strengthening hiring outcomes, shifting risk, or unintentionally weakening the expertise and controls that support merit-based hiring.

³ Beginning in January 2025, a series of governmentwide actions substantially reshaped the federal workforce and had pronounced effects on human resources staffing functions. A Presidential Memorandum issued on January 20, 2025, imposed a freeze on the hiring of federal civilian employees across the executive branch, with exemptions for positions related to national security, immigration enforcement, public safety, and other exemptions approved by the Office of Personnel Management (90 FR 8247). Joint guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) required agencies to halt most hiring activity, remove vacancy announcements, document and report exempted hiring actions, and support planning for workforce reductions through efficiency improvements and attrition (OMB-OPM, 2025a).

Although the initial hiring freeze was time-limited, it marked the beginning of a broader and sustained workforce reduction strategy. In late January 2025, OPM implemented a governmentwide Deferred Resignation Program (DRP), allowing eligible employees to voluntarily resign effective September 30, 2025, while generally remaining on paid administrative leave during the interim period (OPM, 2025). Agencies were required to reassign or eliminate duties, process large volumes of separation actions, and submit recurring workforce reports, significantly increasing administrative and compliance demands on HR staff.

In addition to voluntary resignations and retirements, workforce reductions also occurred through **involuntary actions**. Agencies were directed to review and identify employees in probationary or trial periods who they determined should not be retained, resulting in removals early in 2025. Agencies also undertook **reductions in force (RIFs)** and other directed separations as part of reorganization and workforce optimization efforts, consistent with applicable law and OPM guidance (OMB-OPM, 2025b).

Subsequent analysis by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) confirms both the scale and composition of these workforce reductions. GAO found that from January through June 2025, staffing declined at nearly all major CFO Act agencies. During that period, approximately 134,000 employees separated from federal service and there were about 66,000 hires. GAO further reported that most separations were voluntary (resignations or retirements), but that agencies also reported involuntary separations, including terminations of probationary employees and reductions in force (GAO, 2026). GAO noted that nearly one-fifth of reported separations during the first half of 2025 were attributable to involuntary actions, including probationary removals and other agency-directed separations.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from the survey of staffing specialists in 2023 show a staffing workforce that is engaged, professional, and deeply committed to merit-based hiring, but constrained by limited capacity and growing demands. Now that there is a smaller number of existing federal employees and reduced hiring, it is unknown to what degree the staffing workforce is constrained. The findings also point to a persistent gap in hiring managers' understanding of merit system principles, prohibited personnel practices, and HR rules and procedures. Fewer than half of staffing specialists think hiring managers understand key HR rules and merit principles. Even in a better resourced environment, these knowledge gaps could continue to create rework, delays, unrealistic expectations, and pressure on staffing specialists to correct problems late in the process. The research also suggests an ongoing tension between achieving results and following the rules. Both goals matter, but when speed or customer satisfaction is perceived to outweigh compliance, the risk to merit-based hiring increases. Strengthening the merit system therefore does not require changing staffing specialists' values. It requires giving them the time, tools, support, and clear expectations needed to apply the rules fairly and consistently, while also improving hiring manager understanding and reinforcing that results must be achieved within the rules. Addressing all of these conditions is essential not only for effective hiring, but also for maintaining trust in the federal civil service.

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Appendix A: Technical Tables for Staffing Specialists Report

A. Demographic Characteristic Tables

Table 1 - 25% or More Time Spent in Staffing

Question 55: Do you spend 25% or more of your time doing operational staffing?	Percent
Yes	100%

Table 2 - Job Title (% Specialist vs. Assistant)

Question 3: What is your job title or series? This variable includes coded items.	Percent
HR Specialist (0201)	100%

Table 3 - Age Distribution

Question 9: What is your age?	Percent
29 and younger	4.0%
30 to 39 years	19.0%
40 to 49 years	30.7%
50 to 59 years	34.9%
60 and over	11.4%

Table 4 - Education

Question 8: What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Percent
High school equivalent or less	20.4%
Associate's degree	13.7%
Bachelor's degree	35.9%
Master's degree	28.9%
Professional or doctorate degree	1.2%

Table 5 - Retirement Eligibility

Question 10: Are you or will you become eligible to retire within the next 2 years?	Percent
Yes	22.1%
No	77.9%

Table 6 - Tenure in Job Role

Question 20: How long have you been in your current job?	Percent
Less than 5 years	64.4%
5 - 10 years	20.0%
11 years or more	15.6%

Table 7 - Supervisory Status (leader/non-leader distribution)

Question 11: What is your supervisory status?	Percent
Non-supervisor - You do not supervise others.	71.7%
Team Leader - You provide employees with day-to-day guidance on work projects, but do not have supervisory responsibilities.	12.6%
Supervisor - You assign work, evaluate employee performance, and approve or disapprove leave requests, but you do not supervise other supervisors.	11.0%
Manager - You are in a management position and you supervise other supervisors.	4.5%
Executive - You are in the Senior Executive Service or equivalent and you supervise managers or other executives.	0.2%

Table 8 - Delegated Examining (3 items)

	Yes	No	Don't Know/ NA
Question 68: Are you certified in delegated examining?	25.9%	69.2%	4.9%
Question 69: Have you taken the delegated examining certification assessment in the past 3 years?	30.8%	65.2%	4.0%
Question 70: Have you taken formal delegated examining training in the past 3 years?	24.2%	71.5%	4.3%

Table 9 - Type of Employee Typically Served

Question 58: The majority of employees I service are:	Percent
Competitive Service	76.5%
Excepted Service	18.0%
SES	1.5%
Other*	4.1%

*There were 128 respondents who provided valid descriptions of "Other."

*Other responses include serving more than one main service category (e.g. competitive, excepted, SES), or special service categories such as non-appropriated fund employees.

Table 10 - Type of Organization Served

Question 59: What type of organization does your HR office service? Select all that apply.*	Percent
Headquarters	53.1%
Field Office	76.3%
Other	13.3%

*Multiple Response Set: this means that participants can select all options and the total percent can exceed 100%

Table 11 - Number of Offices Served

Question 60: Does the HR office in which you work service organizations in more than one department or independent agency?	Percent
Yes	61.4%
No	28.7%
I don't know	9.9%

Table 12 - Location of Employees Served

Question 61: Where are the organizations for which you provide staffing services located? Select all that apply.*	Percent
Outside commuting area	81.5%
Same commuting area	55.6%
Same building	43.1%

*Multiple Response Set: this means that participants can select all options and the total percent can exceed 100%

B. Work and Climate Perception Tables

Table 13 - a. Full Daily Staffing Task List

All 17 tasks (Frequency)

Question 62: What staffing-related tasks do you carry out in a typical day? Select all that apply*	Percent
Consult with managers	82.2%
Consult with employees	70.2%
Process personnel actions	69.1%
Rate resumes/questionnaires	68.4%
Talk to applicants and answer questions	66.9%
Draft job announcements	65.6%
Consult with SMEs	62.5%
Onboard new hires	60.3%
Develop certificates of eligibles	59.4%
Perform job analyses	53.7%
Develop recruitment plans	47.5%
Develop assessment plans	44.7%
Develop occupational questionnaires	39.9%
Develop other applicant assessments	30.1%
Conduct workforce analyses	23.6%
Check references	16.1%
Other*	7.9%

*Multiple Response Set: this means that participants can select all options and the total percent can exceed 100%

*There were 210 valid descriptions of "Other." Examples of some "other" responses include tasks that are outside of staffing work such as leadership tasks, benefits, classification, and developing training.

Table 14 - b. One Preferred Task to Spend More Time On

Question 63: In a perfect world, what one set of tasks would you be able to spend more time on?	Percent
Onboarding new hires	9.3%
Conducting qualification reviews and assessments	18.6%
Conducting workforce analyses	10.9%
Consulting with hiring managers	19.8%
Helping applicants	10.5%
Developing recruitment plans and materials	13.9%
Developing assessment plans and materials	6.6%
Other*	10.4%

**There were 174 valid descriptions of "Other." Within the "Other" responses, the most frequent set of tasks they want to spend more time on was related to training (24%). About one in ten respondents (12%) reported wanting to spend more time on multiple sets of tasks (rather than one set). Leadership tasks and working to improve internal work process were both mentioned by 8% of respondents.*

Table 15 - c. Full Barrier Item List

All 14 barriers (Full extent scale)

Question 64_1: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Complexity of HR policies and procedures.	Percent
No Extent	13.4%
Less Extent	23.7%
Some Extent	43.8%
Great Extent	19.1%

Table 16

Question 64_2: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Rigidity of HR policies and procedures.	Percent
No Extent	14.3%
Less Extent	29.0%
Some Extent	40.0%
Great Extent	16.7%

Table 17

Question 64_3: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Lack of information about new laws, rules, and/or regulations.	Percent
No Extent	17.5%
Less Extent	31.2%
Some Extent	35.3%
Great Extent	15.9%

Table 18

Question 64_4: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Lack of sufficient staff resources in the HR office.	Percent
No Extent	13.1%
Less Extent	19.9%
Some Extent	30.5%
Great Extent	36.6%

Table 19

Question 64_5: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Lack of training for HR staff.	Percent
No Extent	15.0%
Less Extent	24.4%
Some Extent	32.1%
Great Extent	28.5%

Table 20

Question 64_6: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Hiring managers' lack of knowledge about HR rules and procedures.	Percent
No Extent	13.5%
Less Extent	19.9%
Some Extent	36.4%
Great Extent	30.3%

Table 21

Question 64_7: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Hiring managers' lack of concern with HR rules and procedures.	Percent
No Extent	17.7%
Less Extent	20.4%
Some Extent	31.1%
Great Extent	30.8%

Table 22

Question 64_8: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Hiring managers' lack of engagement in hiring process.	Percent
No Extent	20.3%
Less Extent	27.6%
Some Extent	30.4%
Great Extent	21.7%

Table 23

Question 64_9: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Lack of respect from hiring managers.	Percent
No Extent	33.2%
Less Extent	26.7%
Some Extent	21.3%
Great Extent	18.8%

Table 24

Question 64_10: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Lack of support from HR leadership.	Percent
No Extent	37.7%
Less Extent	26.2%
Some Extent	19.5%
Great Extent	16.6%

Table 25

Question 64_11: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Employees needing assistance.	Percent
No Extent	22.2%
Less Extent	32.7%
Some Extent	28.6%
Great Extent	16.5%

Table 26

Question 64_12: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? HRIS/Payroll system issues.	Percent
No Extent	31.4%
Less Extent	33.6%
Some Extent	22.7%
Great Extent	12.3%

Table 27

Question 64_13: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Lack of automated systems.	Percent
No Extent	33.8%
Less Extent	31.9%
Some Extent	19.8%
Great Extent	14.5%

Table 28

Question 64_14: To what extent do the following factors cause difficulties in carrying out your staffing related responsibilities? Workload is too heavy.	Percent
No Extent	15.1%
Less Extent	19.6%
Some Extent	26.8%
Great Extent	38.4%

Table 29 - d. One Thing They Would Fix

Question 65: If you could fix one of the following, what would it be? Select only one.	Percent
Low Resources and Support	47.7%
HR Laws, Rules, Policies, Procedures	26.5%
Issues with Hiring Managers and Customers	15.2%
Poor Technology and Systems	10.5%

Table 30 - e. Relationships with Managers Serviced (Q67 1-3 and Table 31 Q49_3)

Level of Agreement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Question 67_1: I have a close working relationship with the managers I service	1.5%	3.9%	18.5%	46.9%	29.1%
Question 67_2: The managers I service value my advice and guidance	1.7%	3.6%	16.3%	48.2%	30.1%
Question 67_3: The managers I service are satisfied with the services I provide	0.8%	1.9%	12.9%	52.5%	31.9%

Table 31

Question 49_3: Indicate level of agreement: The managers I service have realistic expectations about what HR outcomes I can achieve for them given existing HR rules, regulations and processes.	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10.0%
Disagree	17.5%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20.4%
Agree	39.3%
Strongly Agree	12.8%

Table 32 - f. Management MSP Adherence

3 Questions (Agreement scale distribution)

Level of Agreement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Question 67_4: The managers I service have a good understanding of: MSPs, PPPs, Federal HR laws, rules and regulations.	6.8%	18.1%	32.9%	32.1%	10.0%
Question 67_5: If I reported that one of my customers had committed a prohibited personnel practice, my supervisor would consider the reporting to be bad customer service on my part.	36.2%	30.9%	14.9%	10.4%	7.7%
Question 67_6: If a customer asked me to take an action that would result in the commission of a prohibited personnel practice, my supervisor would support me if I refused.	5.5%	3.2%	10.2%	27.2%	53.9%

Table 33 - g. Full Supervisory Emphasis Item Set

Question 57_1: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes... Production	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1.3%
Disagree	2.2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	8.3%
Agree	48.2%
Strongly Agree	40.0%

Table 34

Question 57_2: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes... Compliance	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1.5%
Disagree	2.1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	8.3%
Agree	41.4%
Strongly Agree	46.6%

Table 35

Question 57_3: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes... Innovation	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4.9%
Disagree	8.8%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	24.5%
Agree	39.0%
Strongly Agree	22.8%

Table 36

Question 57_4: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes... Achieving results hiring managers want while following rules	Percent
Strongly Disagree	2.1%
Disagree	3.1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	11.0%
Agree	44.3%
Strongly Agree	39.6%

Table 37

Question 57_5: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes... Achieving results hiring managers want regardless of rules	Percent
Strongly Disagree	23.2%
Disagree	23.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	16.1%
Agree	21.8%
Strongly Agree	15.9%

Table 38

Question 57_6: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes... Accuracy	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1.4%
Disagree	2.3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7.2%
Agree	42.9%
Strongly Agree	46.3%

Table 39

Question 57_7: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes...Timeliness	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1.0%
Disagree	1.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6.8%
Agree	45.9%
Strongly Agree	44.4%

Table 40

Question 57_8: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes...Customer Satisfaction	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1.0%
Disagree	1.8%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7.3%
Agree	42.1%
Strongly Agree	47.9%

Table 41

Question 57_9: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes...Results	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1.1%
Disagree	1.2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	8.4%
Agree	45.5%
Strongly Agree	43.8%

Table 42

Question 57_10: To what level do you agree that your supervisor emphasizes the following outcomes...Other	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0.0%
Disagree	0.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0.0%
Agree	9.1%
Strongly Agree	90.9%

Table 43

Question 32: The biggest challenge I face in getting the training I need is: Select only one	Percent
Inability to take time away from the job	37.7%
Lack of funding	13.5%
Lack of space/availability in the classes I want	10.6%
I don't know what training would help me improve my skills or performance	8.9%
Appropriate training not offered	8.8%
Lack of support from superiors	5.5%
COVID-19 pandemic	3.1%
Other*	11.8%

*There were 66 valid descriptions of "Other."

Table 44

To what extent... _	No Extent	Less Extent	Some Extent	Great Extent
Question 26_1: ...have you been trained on the merit system principles.	3.5%	9.2%	31.7%	55.6%
Question 26_2: ...have you been trained on the prohibited personnel practices.	1.8%	7.3%	30.6%	60.3%

Table 45

Question 25_1: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. I am satisfied with the prospect for future personal and professional growth in my organization.	Percent
Strongly Disagree	7.9%
Disagree	10.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	14.3%
Agree	38.8%
Strongly Agree	29.0%

Table 46

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Question 33_1: I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization	5.9%	9.0%	20.6%	39.9%	24.6%
Question 33_2: I receive the training I need to perform my job effectively	6.9%	11.6%	23.1%	38.7%	19.6%

Table 47

Able to hire effectively

Question 24: My work unit is able to hire HR staff with the right skills.	Percent
Strongly Disagree	10.5%
Disagree	5.4%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	14.8%
Agree	38.8%
Strongly Agree	30.5%

Table 48

Question 39: How would you describe your current workload?	Percent
Too low	0.7%
Reasonable	49.6%
Too high	49.7%

Table 49

Question 41_1: Please indicate your level of agreement: I have the resources to do my job well.	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4.6%
Disagree	10.1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	12.5%
Agree	46.6%
Strongly Agree	26.2%

Table 50

Question 41_2: Please indicate your level of agreement: I am satisfied with the extent my organization invests in the HR workforce.	Percent
Strongly Disagree	11.6%
Disagree	16.7%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	18.4%
Agree	32.4%
Strongly Agree	20.9%

Table 51

Question 41_3: Please indicate your level of agreement: Technology has had a positive effect on my job performance.	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4.9%
Disagree	6.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	15.8%
Agree	39.7%
Strongly Agree	33.6%

Table 52

Question 43: What percentage of your workflows or tasks have been automated in the past 3 years?	Percent
0 - 24%	28.9%
25 - 49%	14.4%
50 - 74%	11.3%
75 - 99%	13.9%
100%	14.5%
Don't Know/NA	17.0%

Table 53

Question 44: How many HR systems do you use in a given work week?	Percent
Less than 5	20.3%
6 - 10	56.8%
11 - 15	14.6%
16 - 20	3.8%
21 or more	3.3%
Don't Know/NA	1.2%

Table 54

Meaningful work

Question 53_3: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... The work I do is meaningful to me	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1.1%
Disagree	1.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6.4%
Agree	39.4%
Strongly Agree	51.2%

Table 55

Question 53_5: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... Overall, I am satisfied with my supervisor	Percent
Strongly Disagree	5.0%
Disagree	5.1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	10.8%
Agree	31.7%
Strongly Agree	47.5%

Table 56

Question 53_7: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... My job makes good use of my skills and abilities	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4.8%
Disagree	7.6%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	11.5%
Agree	42.2%
Strongly Agree	33.8%

Table 57

Question 53_8: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... I have sufficient opportunities (such as challenging assignments or projects) to earn a high performance rating	Percent
Strongly Disagree	5.4%
Disagree	7.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	14.8%
Agree	37.7%
Strongly Agree	35.1%

Table 58

Question 54_2: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... I am satisfied with the recognition and rewards I receive for my work	Percent
Strongly Disagree	9.7%
Disagree	14.3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	18.8%
Agree	33.7%
Strongly Agree	23.5%

Table 59

Question 54_3: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... I am treated with respect at work	Percent
Strongly Disagree	3.6%
Disagree	4.1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9.9%
Agree	41.5%
Strongly Agree	40.9%

Table 60

Question 54_4: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... My opinions count at work	Percent
Strongly Disagree	5.8%
Disagree	7.3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	16.1%
Agree	38.9%
Strongly Agree	31.8%

Table 61

Question 54_5: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... A spirit of cooperation and teamwork exists in my work unit	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4.6%
Disagree	5.4%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	10.2%
Agree	40.3%
Strongly Agree	39.5%

Table 62

Question 54_6: Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements... I am satisfied with my job	Percent
Strongly Disagree	5.1%
Disagree	6.4%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	15.2%
Agree	43.0%
Strongly Agree	30.3%