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# The Challenge: Tech Talent Shortage in Federal Government



**John Binks, PMP®, AWS-CCP, AMA-CPM**   
Award-Winning / Best-Selling Author | Federal Growth &  
Business Development Executive | Federal Systems Integrato...



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The federal workforce, like the private sector, is confronting a pronounced shortage of technology skills. Amidst ongoing cyber threats, rapid digitization, and evolving mission needs, agencies struggle to recruit effectively. The OPM recognizes that the once-traditional hiring and classification systems are increasingly misaligned with today's technology demands. According to recent reporting, the OPM plans to launch a set of initiatives to bring more technology expertise into the federal government and centralize hiring across agencies.

## OPM's Response and Key Initiatives

OPM's vision involves several key components:

1. Early-career tech talent pipelines. The OPM is focusing on bringing in technology expertise early in people's careers to build flexibility and longevity within the workforce.
2. Centralized hiring for cross-agency technical roles. By reducing duplication and fragmentation, hiring will be consolidated, making it faster and more consistent to bring in tech talent across agencies.
3. Modernizing classification and job architecture for tech roles. Some job categories no longer reflect the nature of modern technology work, so OPM is exploring more agile models.
4. Emphasis on mission-critical roles: cyber, cloud, data science, and AI/ML. Given heightened risk and operational pressures, tech hiring

is prioritized in domains directly affecting security and service delivery.

### **Why This Matters**

For business leaders, HR strategists, and agency executives, the implications are significant. First, centralized hiring means fewer silos and more cross-agency agility. When tech skills are deployed where needed most, agencies can accelerate modernization. Second, for the workforce, it signals a shift toward adaptiveness. Tech professionals accustomed to the fluidity of the private sector may find federal careers more accessible. Third, for the broader mission of government, it means improved resilience in the face of cyber threats and evolving digital citizen expectations.

### **What Agencies Should Do**

To position themselves for success in this environment, agencies (and their leaders) should take proactive steps:

1. Review internal tech job architectures. Map current roles against the new frameworks OPM is likely to establish. Identify roles that may become outdated or misclassified and develop transition plans.
2. Build or expand early-career and rotational tech talent programs. Engage interns, apprentices, and entry-level candidates with exposure to real mission work before relying exclusively on senior hires.
3. Cultivate central-agency coordination. Because hiring is being centralized, agencies should align with OPM's processes, share talent pipelines, and avoid duplicating recruitment efforts.
4. Invest in internal upskilling and reskilling. As tech evolves rapidly, hiring alone won't suffice. Agencies should build continuous learning paths for existing staff to align with new frameworks.
5. Monitor metrics and adapt. Keep an eye on time-to-hire, quality-of-hire, retention rates, and mission outcomes tied to tech hiring. Utilize data to refine your strategy and justify your investment.

### **What HR and Talent Leaders Should Consider**

HR and talent leaders must rethink their role from transaction to transformation. The shift toward centralized tech hiring means HR must:

- Partner deeply with mission and technology leaders to understand evolving competency requirements (for example, AI/ML, cloud native, zero-trust).
- Design more agile job families for technology practitioners, rather than relying exclusively on static classifications.
- Facilitate mobility across agencies and mission areas; centralized hiring enables talent to move more fluidly to where the need is greatest.
- Develop employer-brand strategies targeted to tech talent, for example, by highlighting mission impact, innovation opportunities, and career mobility.
- Coordinate with OPM and peer agencies to support shared talent pools, ensuring hiring workflows are efficient and candidate

experience is strong.

### **What Technology Professionals Should Know**

If you're a tech professional considering a career in federal service, this is a strong indication. The OPM's initiative suggests:

- There may be more opportunities for tech careers in government than in the recent past.
- Roles may be defined more flexibly, aligned with current tech demands rather than legacy classifications.
- Agencies are likely to invest more in career development, early-career talent, and rotational programs.
- The mission focus may shift, tech professionals will increasingly be expected to contribute to strategic priorities such as cyber resilience, cloud adoption, data analytics, and AI.

### **Risks and Considerations**

The rollout of centralized hiring brings change and risks. Potential issues include:

- The danger of over-centralization, where individual agencies lose flexibility to hire mission-specific experts.
- Candidate experience may suffer if central systems become bureaucratic or slow.
- Change management within agencies: legacy HR systems, classification schemes, and culture may resist the new model.
- The broad definition of "tech talent" risks diluting focus; specialization remains essential, so focusing too broadly may undermine the goal of deeper capability building.

### **Recommendations**

Agencies and stakeholders should act deliberately:

1. Align job classifications and competency frameworks with contemporary tech requirements.
2. Develop shared talent pipelines and rotational programs to create a flexible, mission-ready tech workforce.
3. Engage HR and tech leaders together early to ensure hiring, classification, and workforce development are tightly integrated.
4. Establish clear metrics for success, speed, quality, retention, and impact on mission goals.
5. Communicate transparently with candidates about career paths, mobility, and mission impact to strengthen recruitment.
6. Invest in upskilling existing staff so new hire reliance is balanced with internal development.

### **Final Thoughts**

The OPM's initiative marks a pivotal moment for federal technology hiring. It signals a strategic shift toward aligning talent more tightly with mission,

breaking down agency silos, and embracing more modern workforce practices. For agencies, HR leaders, and tech professionals alike, this is not just an operational change; it is an opportunity to reposition how government attracts, develops, and mobilizes technology talent in service of national priorities.

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Award-Winning / Best-Selling Author | Federal Growth & Business Development Executive |  
Federal Systems Integrator (FSI) | AI & Emerging Technology | Public Speaker / Podcaster |  
Former FEMA Technology Executive

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