

USAJOBS[®]

Program Brief

Version 4.6
Published February 16, 2017
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What we've learned

USAJOBS partnered with The Lab at OPM to use a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach to re-imagine the user experience on the website. In the fall of 2014, the integrated design team began to collect meaningful data from job seekers, hiring managers, Human resource (HR) specialists, and agency Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) through a series of qualitative interviews, behavioral observations, and analogous empathy experiences.

This chapter contains:

- Research
- Insights
- Design pillars

Research

The Team

- The Lab at OPM led the USAJOBS program office through the human-centered design research process. User interviews and focus groups started in September 2014 and we've completed several rounds of follow-up research focused on particular aspects since then.

Focus Groups

- The team conducted twelve focus groups (130+ people) across the country to capture a diverse user population.
- Focus groups included students at the University of Michigan, CHCOs, federal employees, veterans and non-feds.

User Interviews

- The team spoke with over 80 users individually to discuss their experiences, needs and pain points with USAJOBS.
- Every interview was recorded and transcribed so they could be examined further.

Outcome and Analysis

- Over 2400 pieces of data were transcribed and visualized down in the LAB at OPM.
- The joint team spent over two months synthesizing the data to identify six design pillars and 17 high level recommendations.
- The total user research phase took six months and laid the foundation for the USAJOBS redesign.



What we heard from job seekers

1. Guide me to the right job and then through the process.
2. Explain the job clearly.
3. Don't be a black hole.

Guide me through the process – Insight #1

USAJOBS falls short of applicant expectations because it presents itself as a one-stop shop for federal hiring, but in reality it is laid on top of a disjointed process spread among 129 agencies, which disorients, frustrates, and misleads users.

“About 3/4 of the time when you apply for a job, you get a message that says ‘we are taking you somewhere else in a system’ that flows differently, is structured differently. Why is this necessary? I am not left with a comfortable feeling that you wanted to get over there. Seems like a waste of money to have all of these systems in the Federal Government.” - Non-Federal Applicant

Guide me through the process – Insight #2

Users are overwhelmed by irrelevant and confusing hiring information on USAJOBS. This leads to doubt and frustrations that causes them to either over apply for jobs they aren't qualified for or abandon the application process all together.

“The application process is insanely complicated and frustrating. For example the vacancy ID number was hard to find and in a very obscure location relative to the job announcement number or control number. The vacancy announcement and the questions to match with numbers on the occupational questionnaire is nowhere to be found relative to the job announcement and job description. This is wasting my time. It makes the organization appear inept.”

- Application Abandoner

Guide me through the process – Insight #3

Applying for a government job is a long and arduous process. It is made even worse because the government doesn't set user expectations up front about what they need to apply and how long it will take them.

“When I apply for a job, I find that you have to come in with all your information but you have to keep going back to get information.” - College Student

Explain the job clearly – Insight #1

USAJOBS does not communicate eligibility and qualifications in a meaningful way. Applicants do not understand that there are prerequisites to being considered for a job. They apply to jobs they can't get resulting in increased applications, workload for the government, and frustration for multiple users in the system.

“Applicants get so frustrated because they apply to so many jobs but they are not applying for jobs they are qualified for. It is a waste of everyone’s time.” -HR Specialist

Explain the job clearly – Insight #2

USAJOBS isn't giving anyone everything they need so applicants, agencies and the USAJOBS Program rely on other websites and people to find jobs, get and give answers and post job information because they are more successful avenues. This further exacerbates the already fractured hiring process.

“I just hire contractors because it is so hard to hire who I want in this messed up government application system and then I can't fire them.” - Hiring Manager

“If you have questions about USAJOBS you have to figure it out on your own. I check with social media to get an understanding of the website.” - Non-Federal Applicant

Roadblocks to notifying applicants



HR Specialist



Talent Acquisition Systems

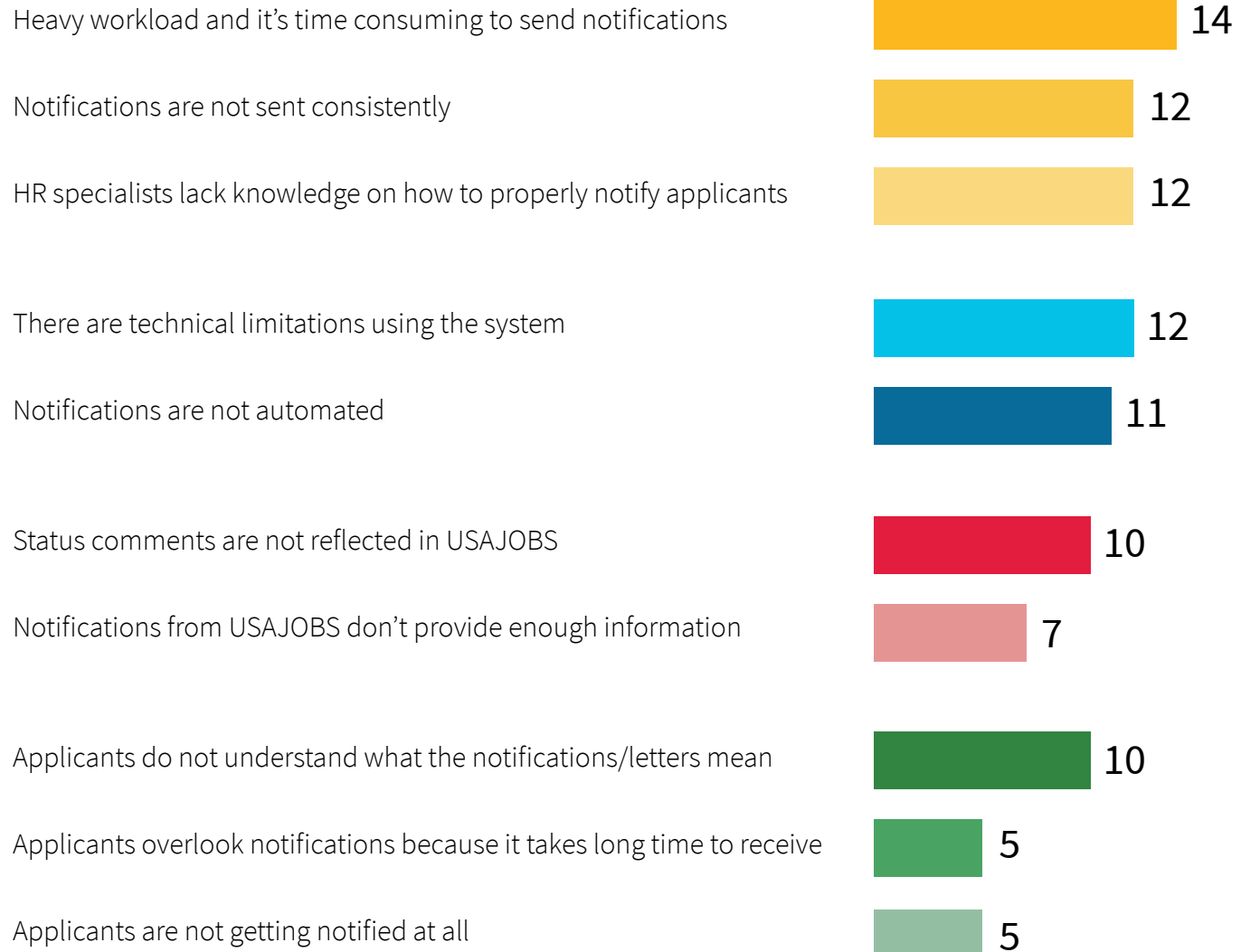


USAJOBS



Applicant

of mentions by HR specialist participants



Don't be a black hole – Insight #1

Notifications from USAJOBS and letters from agencies are not in plain language. This results in confused applicants calling HR offices. HR Specialists become frustrated and avoid communications with unselected candidates.

“Generic USAJOBS messaging equals (more) calls, because the status message is unclear. ‘Reviewed’ means nothing.”
- HR Specialist

Don't be a black hole – Insight #2

Applicants do not receive notifications in a timely manner. By the time an applicant receives notification they may no longer find it useful or applicable to their job search. This diminishes trust and reliability of the system.

“Many times applicants are getting notified...(but) getting a letter 30 days after applying to a job that says you were referred to the manager is an eternity to them.”

- HR Specialist

Don't be a black hole – Insight #3

The Talent Acquisition Systems and USAJOBS operate almost entirely independently and issue multiple, separate notifications at different points in the process, if at all. This is confusing to applicants.

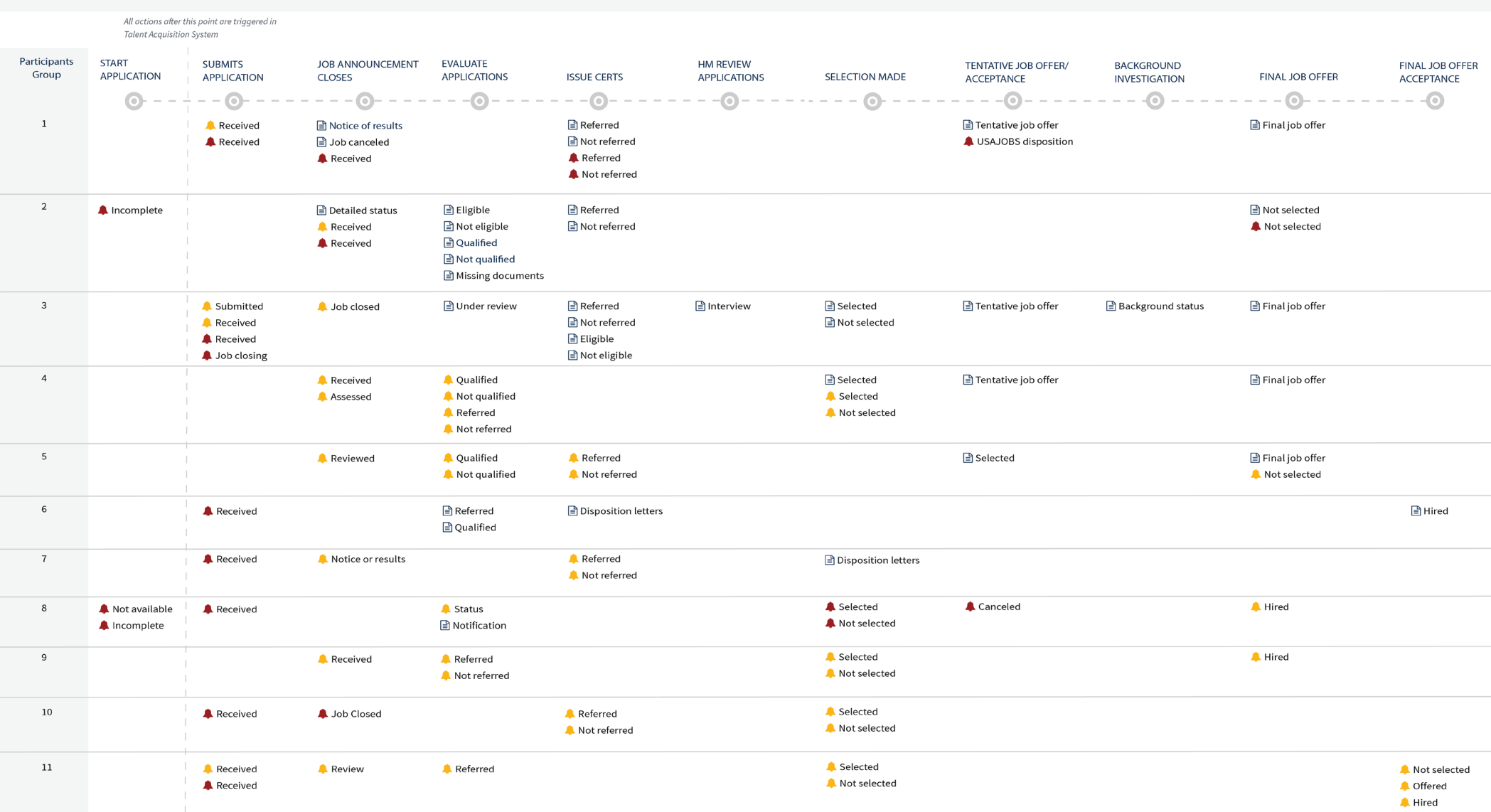
“I notice that when we change a status on an applicant and provide comments regarding the application, those comments do not reflect in USAJOBS.”

- HR Specialist

Notifications at some agencies

Current notification process of various agencies

Legend: 📄 Notification letter from HR (Manual) 🟡 Application status from TAS (Automated) 🔴 Application status from/on USAJOB (Automated)



Don't be a black hole – Insight #4

Notifications sent through the TAS can be difficult, burdensome, and time consuming for HR specialists.

“Some automated systems have made the notification process cumbersome, where you have to go to different areas of the system to send them, or you're limited to only sending certain notices at one time instead of being able to send the same notice to people all at once .”

- HR Specialist

Don't be a black hole – Insight #5

While some agencies are required to send notifications within their system to create a trail for auditing, there are no consistent practices. Many agencies don't require notifications to be sent.

“The process is different for each agency, and sometimes even within agencies. I am not required to send out notifications to applicants beyond the ones selected to move forward.” - HR Specialist

“I believe one of our problems is the volume of vacancies. We are working on so many jobs at the same time, or one after another, so we don't have time to go back and issue notices.” - HR Specialist

Don't be a black hole – Insight #6

HR Specialists need the hiring manager to decide who is moving on before notifications can be sent which causes delays. They may wait on the selected applicant to accept the job offer and complete security requirements before notifying other applicants.

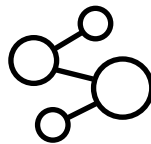
“It isn't our practice to change all of the non-selects at the time that we get in a selection. The managers typically want to wait in case the selection falls through for some reason. So, being the last status change, it's normally the one that is missed by our specialists.” - HR Specialist

Design pillars

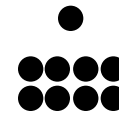
We've moved past the era of digitizing paper documents into focusing on the end-to-end user experience. These design pillars help us to keep our focus as we iterate on the core product and create new offerings.



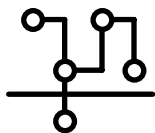
Clearly guide applicants to the information they need to make confident job search and application decisions.



Set clear application expectations and present a unified and simplified application process.



Provide opportunities for applicants to showcase their unique qualities.



Convey information in a language that every applicant can understand.



Serve as the most trusted resource for federal hiring.



Provide a thoughtfully crafted experience that helps applicants accomplish their intended goals.

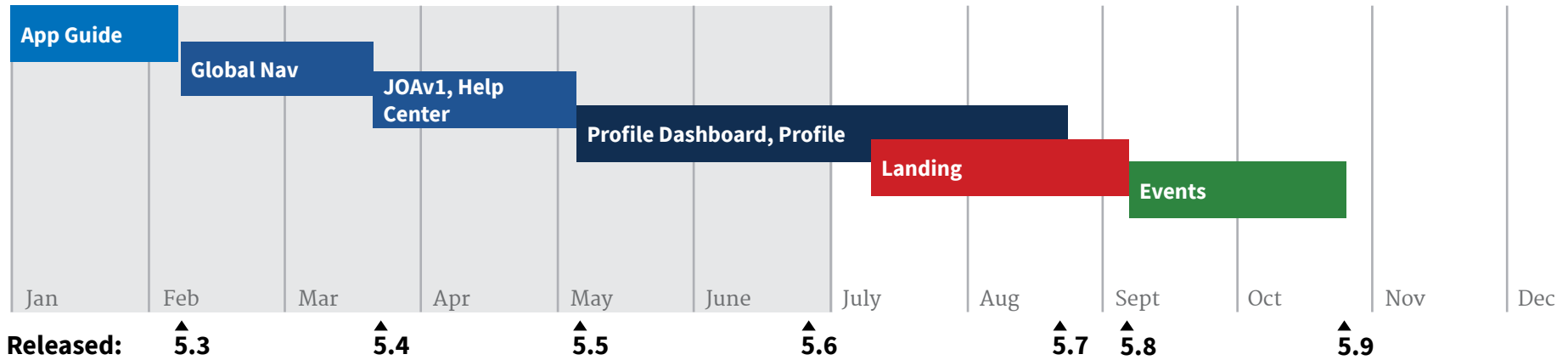
What we've delivered

The development, design, and program office teams worked together in 2016 to create five distinct upgrades of functionality.

This chapter contains:

- 2016 delivery timeline
- Application guide
- Help Center
- Profile dashboard
- Landing page

2016 Timeline of delivery



5.2 Responsive Website

- USAJOBS retired the mobile application and made the entire website responsive to a wide range of browsers and devices.
- Released October 24th, 2015.

5.3 Application Guide

- First major release based on user research.

5.4 Global UI

- Created a USAJOBS Design System that is shared with the public on Github.
- Adopted the design standards created by United States Digital Service.

5.5 Help Center

- Improve the structure and findability of help content
- Rewrite key content in plain language and adopt common content style guide
- Improve transparency around federal hiring process

5.7 Profile dashboard, Profile (eligibility, docs, credentials)

- Makes it easier to see what is happening with your application(s) with a dashboard that makes it easy to pick up where you last left off whether that is restarting an in-progress application, or finding a job announcement you saved to review later.
- Makes it easier and faster to find and apply to jobs with a profile that will assist you in completing your profile so that you are ready to apply as well as ensure your profile, and thus your application package, is complete and up-to-date.
- Will allow agencies to use your profile information and review your searchable resume.

5.8 Landing

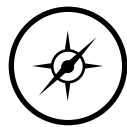
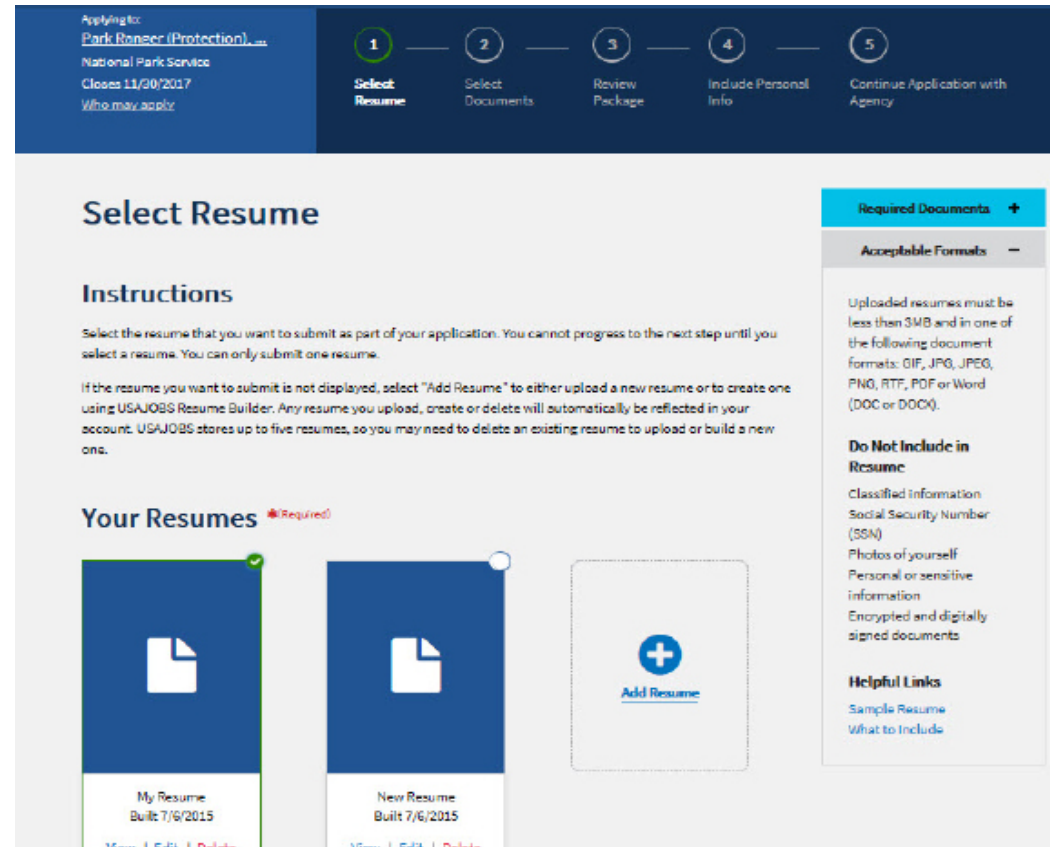
- Provides an overview of the federal hiring process.
- Clear calls to action to sign-in, create a profile, or begin a search.
- Highlights critical hiring needs across multiple agencies.

5.9 Events

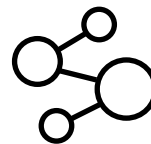
- Federal hiring events across the country.

Application Guide

- Make the application process easier for applicants (5 steps)
- Reduce the number of incomplete applications submitted to agencies
- Improve transparency about the contents of an application package
- First feature to incorporate the new U.S. Web Design Standards



Clearly guide applicants to the information they need to make confident job search and application decisions.



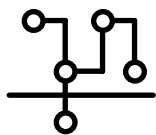
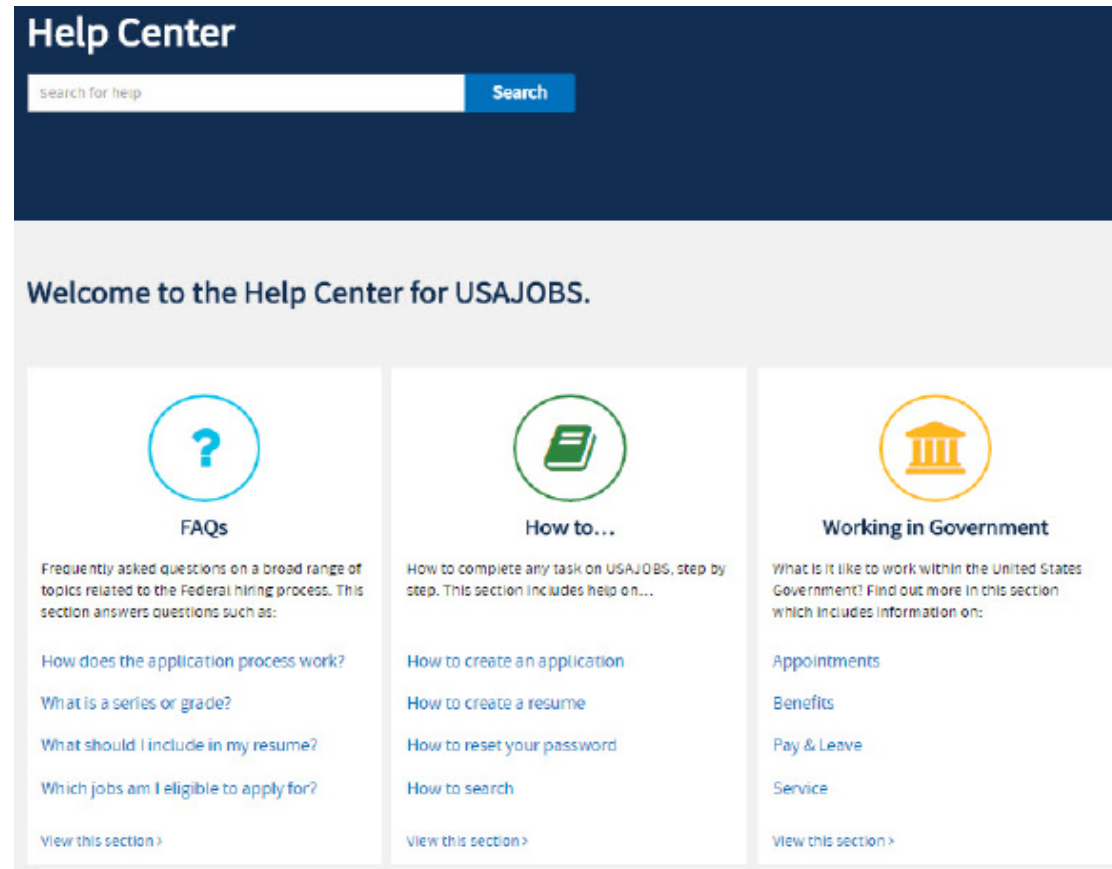
Set clear application expectations and present a unified and simplified application process.



Provide a thoughtfully crafted experience that helps them accomplish their intended goals.

Help Center

- Improve the structure and find-ability of help content
- Rewrite key content in plain language and adopt common content style guide
- Improve transparency around federal hiring process
- Drive users to help content instead of depending on help desk support requests



Convey information in a language that every applicant can understand.



Serve as the most trusted resource for federal hiring.



Provide a thoughtfully crafted experience that helps them accomplish their intended goals.

Application Guide & Help Center results

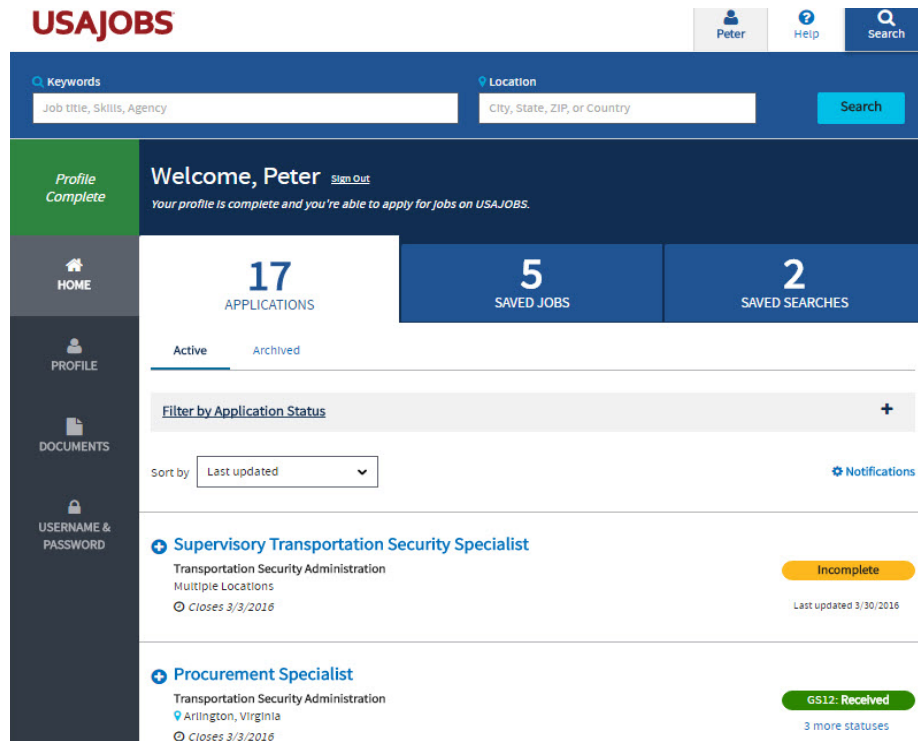
Application Guide results

INDICATOR	CHANGE	FROM	TO
ACSI Navigation Score	▲ increase	77	80
Decrease Application Process HD Tickets	▼ reduce	NA	-24.3%
Increase in CHCO Completer Survey	▲ increase	77.4	80
Increase Application Start Conversion	▲ increase	70%	79%
Exit rate from Application Guide	▼ reduce	7.3%	2.7%

Help Center results

INDICATOR	CHANGE	FROM	TO
Contact Us pageviews	▼ reduce	157,279	73,381 (53%)
Contact Us internal path pageviews	▼ reduce	46,002	32,426 (30%)
Bounce rate from Help Center	▼ reduce	64%	40%
Exit rate from Help Center	▼ reduce	55%	12%
Time on main Help Center page	▼ reduce	76 sec	38 sec (50%)
Time on Help Center pages	▼ reduce	135 sec	64 sec (53%)

Profile dashboard



What we heard

- Applicants want a “home base” that grounds them in the ongoing process.
- Users don’t understand the difference between eligibility and qualification.
- Users don’t understand or accurately claim the preferences they have.

What we’ve done

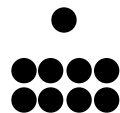
- Created a dashboard that provides an overview of applications that you have submitted and makes it easy to pick up where you last left off.
- A profile that assists the applicant ensuring that their profile, and thus their application package, is complete and up-to-date.
- Encourage applicants to opt-in to resume mining.

What we’re planning

- Collecting more eligibility and qualification data in the profile in order to provide improved resume mining and to recommend jobs to applicants.

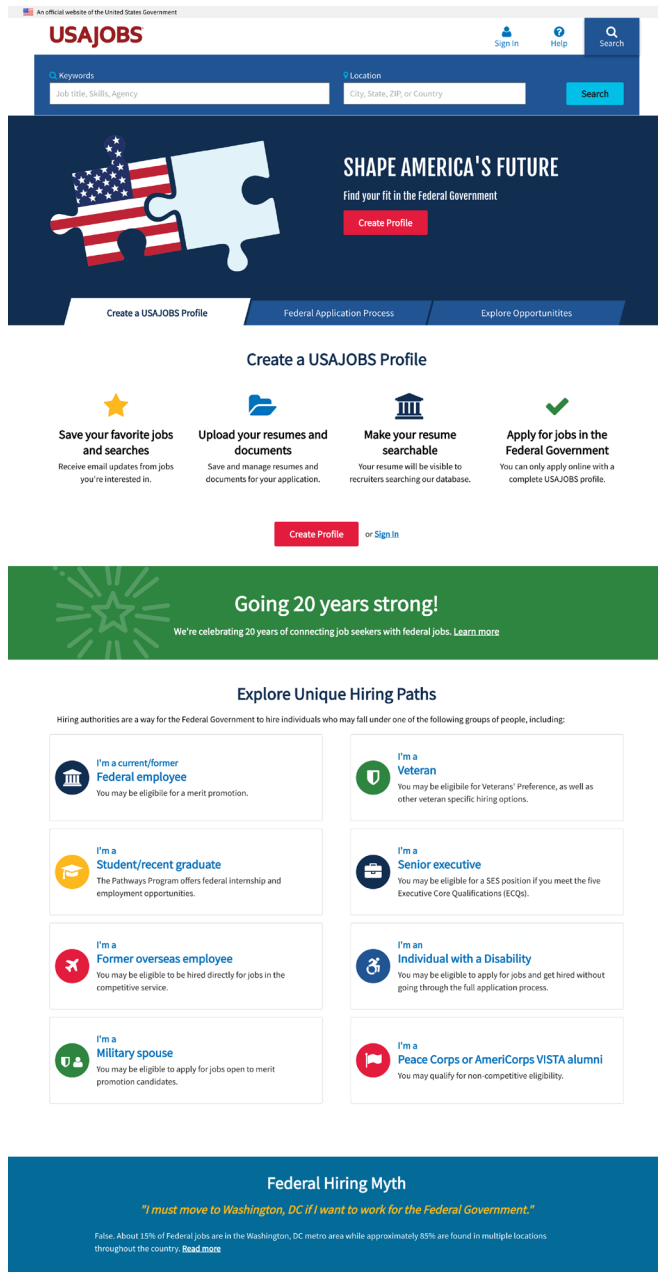


Provide a thoughtfully crafted experience that helps them accomplish their intended goals.



Provide opportunities for applicants to showcase their unique qualities.

Landing page



What we heard

- Users are not guided into creating a profile
- Users don't understand the entire process
- Going directly to search results is a poor initial experience.

What we've done

- Created clear calls-to-action to sign-in, create a profile, or begin a search.
- Provided an overview of the federal hiring process.
- Identified and highlighted critical hiring needs across multiple agencies.
- Outlined the preferences available to certain users.
- Debunked commonly held myths.
- Highlighted federal hiring events across the country.

What we're planning

- Highlighting the depth and breadth of opportunities as we transition to become a federal career portal.

Profile dashboard and landing results

Profile Dashboard (released 8/20/2016)

Saved jobs per user

- Saved jobs are more prominent in the dashboard and this has had a positive impact in average saved jobs per month.
- 46% increase in average saved jobs per month.
- 21% increase in total jobs saved per month when compared against the same time last year.

Please note the difference between average saved jobs per month and total saved jobs per month. Average saved jobs per month is tallied from entire report range (pre-release range is October 2015 – August 2016, post-release range is September 2016 – December 2016), total saved jobs is tallied monthly and compared YoY (comparison periods are October to December 2015, October to December 2016).

Analysis range: 10/1/2015 – 12/31/2016

Data sources: DAP (user totals) and DW (saved jobs totals)

Application status exit rate

- Application status indicators are much clearer and more prominent on each application. This provided users with the necessary information they needed and thus users sign in, see the information they need, and leave USAJOBS.
- 12% increase in application status exit rate.

Analysis range: 4/1/2016 – 12/31/2016

Data sources: DAP

Landing Page (released 9/9/2016)

Offering more than just search

- New content is providing new and experienced users with important and valuable information.
- “Direct-to-search” traffic, those who come to the site and immediately begin perform a search, decreased by 16%.

Analysis range: 4/1/2016 – 12/31/2016

Data sources: DAP

Engagement with Federal Application Process and Explore Opportunities tabs

- 5.63% of monthly sessions interact with at least one of the new tabs which outline the overall process and highlight mission critical opportunities.

Analysis range: 10/1/2016 – 12/31/2016

Data sources: DAP

What's next

Some of the issues we are attempting to address in 2017.

This chapter contains:

- Bringing clarity to eligibility
- Improving the search experience
- Plain language job announcements

Bringing clarity to eligibility

The screenshot displays the 'Explore Unique Hiring Paths' section of the USAJOBS website. It features a grid of six cards, each representing a different hiring path with an icon and a brief description. Below the grid is a large green callout box for 'Veterans' with a detailed description. At the bottom, a sidebar shows a list of hiring paths with checkboxes and counts.

Explore Unique Hiring Paths

Hiring authorities are a way for the Federal Government to hire individuals who may fall under one of the following groups of people, including:

- I'm a current/former Federal employee**
You may be eligible for a merit promotion.
- I'm a Veteran**
You may be eligible for Veterans' Preference, as well as other veteran specific hiring options.
- I'm a Student/recent graduate**
The Pathways Program offers federal internship and employment opportunities.
- I'm a Senior executive**
You may be eligible for a SES position if you meet the five Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs).
- I'm a Former overseas employee**
You may be eligible for competitive service.
- I'm a Military spouse**
You may be eligible for promotion consideration.

Veterans

If you're a Veteran who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces and were separated under honorable conditions, you may be eligible for veterans' preference, as well as other veteran specific hiring options.

Hiring path filters:

- Open to the public (2,592)
- Federal employees (1,012)
- Veterans (446)
- Students & recent graduates (10)
- Individuals with disabilities (139)
- Former overseas employees (4)
- Military spouses (9)
- National Guard (5)
- Native Americans (219)
- Peace Corps & Vista (1)

Show options with 0 jobs

What we've learned

- Profile information is used to evaluate applicants rather than improve their experience.
- Users don't understand the difference between eligibility and qualification.
- Users don't understand or accurately claim the preferences they have.

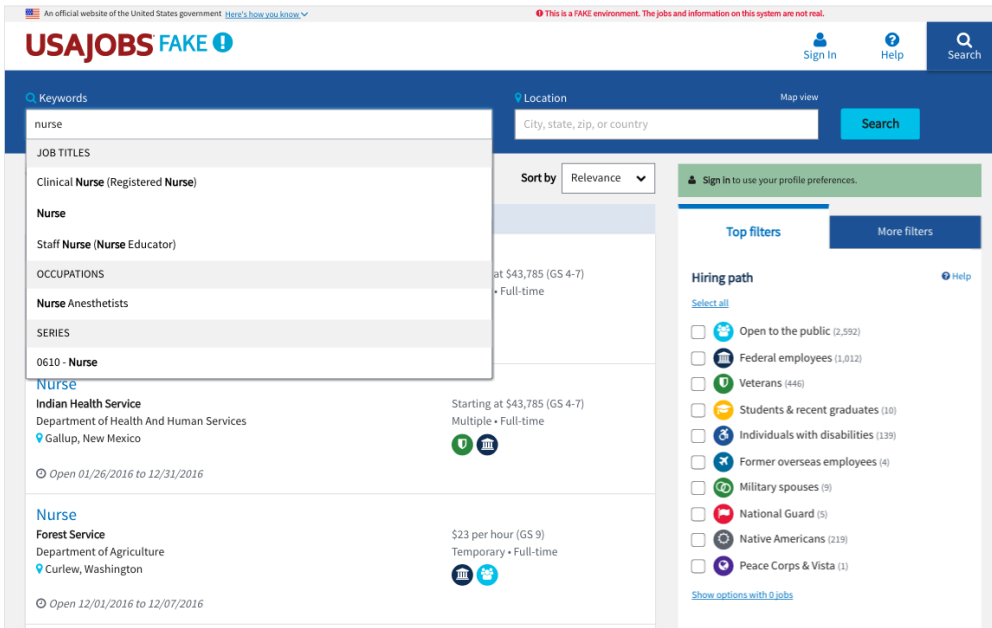
What we're doing now

- Using iconography and descriptions of hiring paths consistently throughout the core site and in the Agency Talent Portal.
- Working with Talent Acquisition System (TAS) vendors to convert the free-form text of "Who may apply" into a normalized data set.
- Unique hiring path pages written in plain language connecting users to valuable resources.
- Providing tips in search and profile to help users navigate their eligibility.

What we're planning

- Bringing that same iconography and text into job announcements.
- Collecting more eligibility details in a user's profile.

Improving search



What we've learned

- Search results include jobs the applicant is not eligible or qualified to apply for.
- Search results include language users don't understand.

What we're doing now

- Transition to elasticsearch to improve results.
- Eligibility (hiring paths) is a new top filter and is no longer limited to just Public and Federal employees.
- Simplified search results to drive users into the job announcement.
- Combine advanced, map, and basic search into one clear interface.

What we're planning

- MVP search release April 8, 2017.
- Leverage user profile eligibility information to refine results.
- Leverage O*Net APIs and other sources of information to translate government job titles to more common titles.

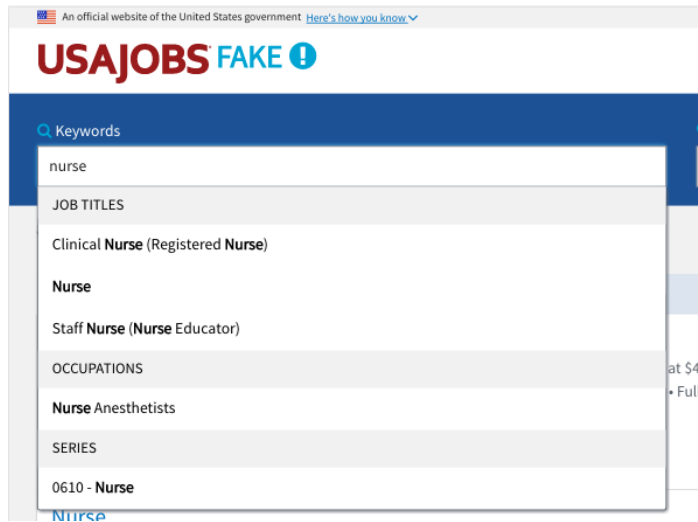


Clearly guide applicants to the information they need to make confident job search and application decisions.



Provide a thoughtfully crafted experience that helps them accomplish their intended goals.

Improving search – Series to SOC map



OPM Series to Bureau of Labor Statistics Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System

- The Information Technology Management (2210), Management Program Analysis (343), and Miscellaneous Administration and Program (301) series are catch-all buckets of vastly different jobs. 2210 contains mission critical occupations such as cyber security.
- Position descriptions are difficult to create or change and thus job titles have stagnated. Therefore job seekers who search for common private sector titles may not find jobs that match their query.
- Our goal is to map the 5,000+ SOC titles to the OPM series and job announcements so that job seekers can narrow their search to specific titles. The example at left shows a prototype where a query for “nurse” returns the broader series and the more specific occupation(s).

Plain language job announcements

The screenshot shows a USAJOBS job announcement for a Landscape Architect position. The page includes a header with the USAJOBS logo and navigation links (Sign In, Help, Search). The job title is "Landscape Architect" at the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. It lists 1 vacancy in Washington, DC, starting at \$64,650 (GS 11), and is a permanent full-time position open from 03/25/2016 to 12/31/2016. The job is open to federal employees, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and Peace Corps & Vista members. It is also being announced to the public. A "Preview Questionnaire" button is visible. The "Job Responsibilities" section lists tasks like identifying and researching historic landscapes, planning preservation, and applying NEPA and ADA provisions. The "Salary & Qualifications" section shows a salary range from \$66,510 to \$103,639 per year, with GS 11 and GS 12 levels. A table shows basic qualifications for GS-11 and GS-12. A "What you need to have" box lists requirements: a bachelor's or higher degree in landscape architecture or design, or a related field with 60 semester hours of course work, including 30 hours of architectural design and 6 hours in structural technology, properties of materials, etc. The "Requirements" section includes a "Documents" list and a "Travel Required" checkbox.

What we've learned

- Job seekers cannot determine their eligibility by looking at the announcement.
- Job seekers are ineffective at determining if they are qualified for the job.
- Non-federal job seekers need help understanding government language.
- Job announcement contains duplicative information.
- Job summary is often a summary of what the agency does.

What we're doing now

- Revising the design to highlight eligibility, connecting salary/GS/qualifications, reducing duplicated content, and providing a place for agencies to highlight their mission on a page dedicated to that purpose.

What we're planning

- A pilot of the new job announcement.
- Presenting design variations to agencies and collecting their feedback.

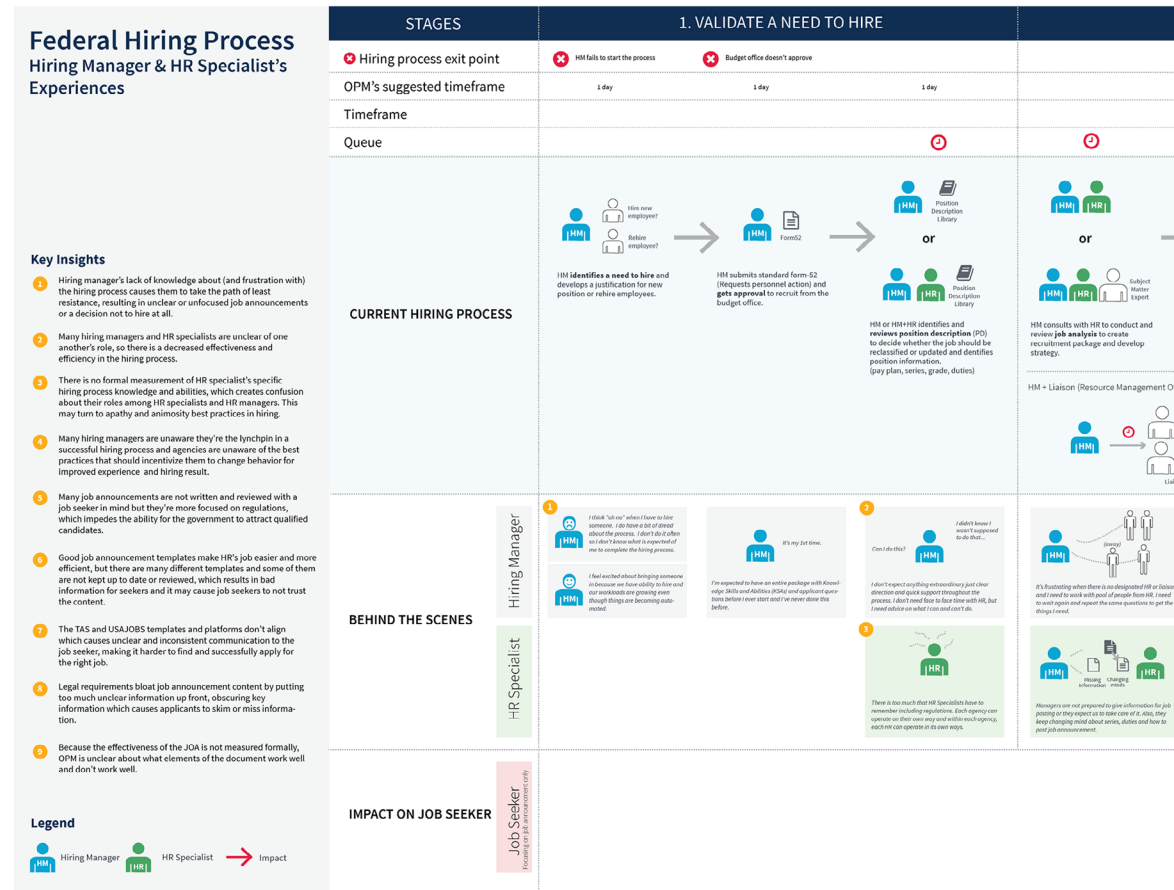
Evolving beyond a job board

We see USAJOBS evolving into a Federal career portal that will provide context about working for the Federal Government and clarity into the federal hiring process.

This chapter contains:

- Federal hiring
- Federal recruitment
- Agency Talent Portal

Federal hiring (cont.)



Detail of HR Specialist Experience Map

What we're planning

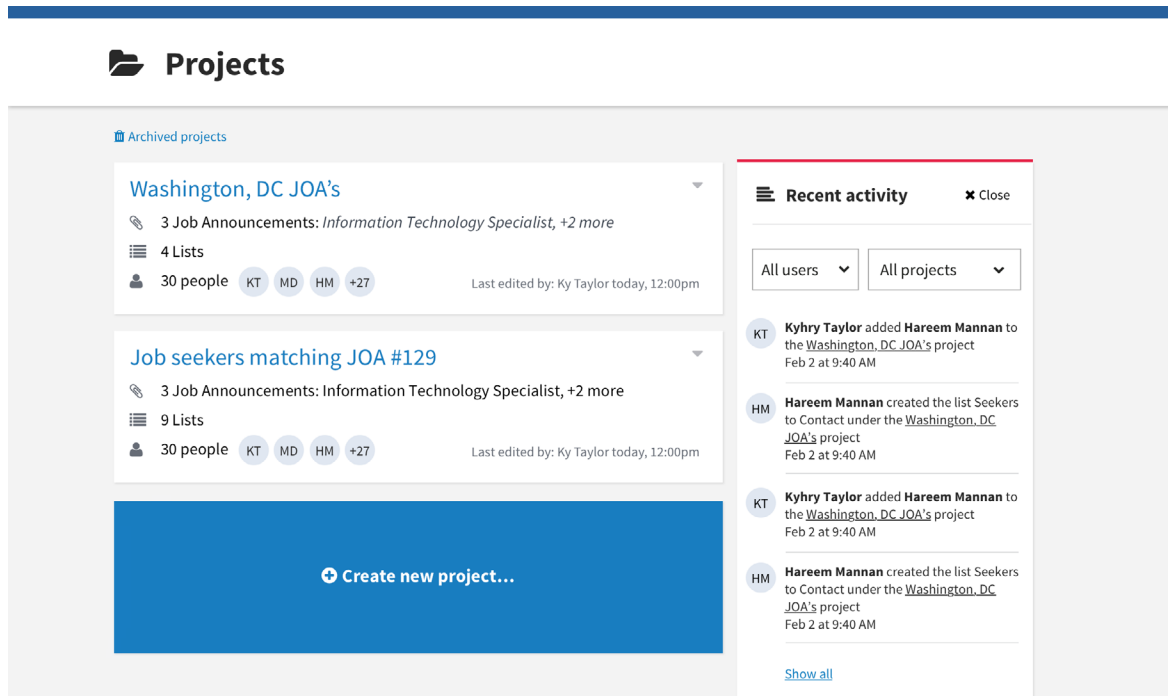
- Transitioning usajobs.gov to become a federal career portal that will provide context about working for the Federal Government and clarity into the Federal hiring process.
- Connect applicants to the right opportunities and clearly guide them through the application process.
- Help federal employees find development opportunities towards career path milestones.

Federal recruiting

What we've learned

- The Federal Government lacks the skills and resources to strategically recruit talent. We suffer from the public's lack of understanding of the missions and value the Federal Government provides U.S. citizens.
- Recruiters and HR specialists lack knowledge and tools to perform strategic recruitment that markets jobs, builds talent pipelines, and engages with the talent to build relationships.
- Hiring managers have limited tools and access to information to help them define the jobs, articulate skills and competencies, and recruit the talent.
- Recruitment partners have limited access to agencies contacts to aid in building the talent pipeline.

Agency Talent Portal



Detail of ATP projects screen

What we're planning

- Releasing the Agency Talent Portal to assist HR Specialists in using resume mining to find talent and collaborate on refining their list of candidates.