



# Expedited Hiring Plan

*September 30, 2015*

Fiscal Year 2015 Report to Congress



Homeland  
Security

*U.S. Customs and Border Protection*

# Message from the Deputy Commissioner of CBP

September 30, 2015

I am pleased to submit the following report, "Expedited Hiring Plan," which has been prepared by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

The report has been compiled pursuant to language set forth in the Explanatory Statement and Senate Report 113-198, which accompany the *Fiscal Year 2015 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act* (P.L. 114-4). The report provides a detailed plan to expedite the hiring of CBP personnel and reduce the hiring timeframe to the Office of Personnel Management standard of 90 days, or at least an average of 120 days, while maintaining the proper level of security.



Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable John R. Carter  
Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable John Hoeven  
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at (202) 344-2001 or the Department's Deputy Under Secretary for Management and Chief Financial Officer, Chip Fulghum, at (202) 447-5751.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. McAleenan". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Kevin K. McAleenan  
Deputy Commissioner  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

# Executive Summary

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) deploys more than 45,000 law enforcement officers at U.S. ports of entry, between the ports of entry, and at overseas locations. CBP's multi-step frontline hiring process intentionally is rigorous and promotes the appointment of only those candidates who are found to be medically and physically fit, trustworthy, and suitable for employment in a federal law enforcement position. The extensive screening of CBP frontline applicants includes a statutorily required polygraph examination, in addition to the background investigation, which extends the time-to-hire compared with other CBP and federal occupations.

Sustaining CBP frontline staffing levels requires annually attracting and assessing thousands of applicants to replace employee losses resulting from retirement and other attrition, as well as filling any new positions funded or authorized by Congress. CBP ended Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 below the frontline staffing levels authorized by Congress for the CBP Officer (CBPO) and Border Patrol Agent (BPA) occupations. Several factors contributed to the staffing shortfalls, and continue to affect CBP's ability to complete hiring of the 2,000 new CBPOs funded in the *FY 2014 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act* (P.L. 113-76) and maintain the congressionally mandated BPA staffing floor.

CBP is leveraging available technologies and implementing process changes to realize processing efficiencies, reduce the time and cost to hire, increase applicant processing yields, enhance the quality of applicant pools, and address requirements of the *Anti-Border Corruption Act of 2010* (P.L. 111-376). Over the last 4 years, CBP has implemented a number of hiring process improvements, most notably changes to the sequence of pre-employment and suitability determination processes. CBP continues to work aggressively on initiatives that will expedite the hiring process, increase processing capacity and throughput, and reduce the time to hire while continuing to ensure the hiring of quality candidates.



# FY 2015 Expedited Hiring Plan

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# I. Legislative Language

This document was compiled pursuant to the legislative language set forth in the Explanatory Statement and Senate Report 113-198 accompanying the *Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-4)*.

The Explanatory Statement states:

Both the House and Senate reports include extensive language about ways to reduce wait times at ports of entry. As always, this objective must be carefully balanced against U.S. security interests and the need to safeguard travelers and the general public from terrorism. To underscore the importance of these missions, the agreement highlights the following guidance in both the House and Senate reports. CBP shall carry out the following within 90 days of the date of enactment of this Act:

- 1) Develop a plan to accelerate the hiring process for CBP Officers, as directed in the Senate report.

Senate Report 113-198 states:

*Hiring Process.*—When asked directly, DHS and CBP officials concede the CBP hiring process is too cumbersome and agree that modifications need to be made. It should not take as long to hire and train trade specialists or mission support personnel as it does a weapon-carrying, law enforcement officer or agent. The Committee recognizes CBP must maintain a rigorous hiring process, including the use of polygraphs, to ensure bad actors or those who have been or could become compromised by drug traffickers and the like are not inadvertently employed. But CBP must take a fresh look at its hiring and training practices.

Additional CBPOs are required at short-staffed ports of entry now, not a year from now. The Committee directs CBP, working with the Deputy Secretary and the Chief Human Capital Officer, to develop a plan to expedite the hiring of CBP personnel while maintaining the proper level of security. On average, it currently takes CBP 278 days to hire its personnel when the Office of Personnel Management [OPM] standard is 90 days. CBP must strive to meet the OPM standard and, at a maximum, reduce its average to 120 days. The plan shall be submitted to the Committee not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this act.

## II. Background

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) ended FY 2014 below the staffing levels authorized by Congress for the CBP Officer (CBPO) and Border Patrol Agent (BPA) occupations. Several factors contributed to the staffing shortfalls and continue to affect CBP's ability to complete hiring of the 2,000 new CBPOs funded in the *FY 2014 DHS Appropriations Act* (P.L. 113-76) and maintain the congressionally mandated BPA staffing floor. CBP staffing and hiring challenges in FY 2014 included higher-than-expected BPA attrition rates, which increased BPA hiring requirements, and a data breach involving one of CBP's contract background investigation vendors, which delayed the assignment and completion of applicant background investigations. Additionally, lower-than-expected applicant clearance rates required processing more applicants to meet CBPO and BPA hiring requirements, and higher-than-anticipated job offer declination rates reduced applicant processing yields. These challenges were exacerbated by the residual effects of sequestration and the 16-day U.S. Government shutdown in October 2013, which restricted mission support hiring and delayed applicant processing and hiring. Finally, other factors such as the finite population of federally certified polygraph examiner resources, and the continuation of other external influences such as data breaches, continue to hamper CBP's ability to achieve its frontline hiring goals.

### III. Current Hiring Pipeline

The additional hiring required as a result of FY 2014 staffing shortfalls represents a significant challenge. FY 2015 staffing requirements include completing hiring of the 2,000 new CBPO positions, which began in FY 2014, as well as hiring to replace FY 2015 CBPO and BPA attrition losses. Modeling indicates that CBP will not achieve the CBPO and BPA staffing targets by the end of FY 2015.

Although the model’s projection is based on historic applicant processing time and assessment outcome trends, several additional factors will influence actual FY 2015 end-of-year (EOY) staffing levels. These include:

- Actual CBPO and BPA attrition rates, which will determine the number of new hires required to achieve the authorized staffing levels.
- Changes in applicant pre-employment and suitability screening clearance rates, which determine process yields and processing requirements.
- The impact of CBP’s recent, and ongoing, efforts to reengineer hiring operations and implement process improvements to reduce the time to hire, increase processing yields, and enhance process throughput.
- External dependencies for polygraph examination services and polygrapher training, which are required to enhance CBP’s polygraph capacity.
- Competition among other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies for entry-level applicants who are qualified and suitable for employment.

Table 1 shows current CBPO and BPA staffing levels.

<b>Table 1: FY 2015 Staffing Levels (as of July 25, 2015)</b>						
<b>Position</b>	<b>FY 2014 EOY Staffing</b>	<b>FY 2015 EOY Staffing Goal</b>	<b>Current Staffing</b>	<b>Current Staffing Delta*</b>	<b>FY 2015 Projected Attrition Rate</b>	<b>Annualized Year to Date Attrition Rate</b>
<b>CBPO</b>	22,274	23,775	22,915	(860)	3.2%	2.8%
<b>BPA</b>	20,824	21,370	20,379	(991)	5.0%	4.9%

\* The current staffing delta does not include additional attrition that will occur during the remainder of FY 2015.

CBP maintains a robust frontline hiring operation and conducts continuous outreach and recruitment activities. These include media advertising, participation in job fairs, and engagement with colleges and Department of Defense transition offices to inform prospective applicants of CBP career opportunities and current job openings. CBP will

issue multiple CBPO and Border Patrol Job Opportunity Announcements (JOA) throughout FY 2015 and FY 2016 to ensure that CBP has a steady supply of applicants available to enter the pre-employment process.

Academy training schedules have been established and amended to support FY 2015 CBPO and BPA hiring. In addition, FY 2016 training schedules are being developed to meet projected hiring requirements.

## IV. Hiring Process Improvements

CBP is using business process reengineering techniques, automation enhancements, and a program management approach to identify and resolve internal process bottlenecks, reduce the cycle-time to hire applicants, and increase its effectiveness throughout the hiring lifecycle. We also will look to strengthen the quality of applicant pools, while addressing the requirements of the *Anti-Border Corruption Act* (P.L. 111-376). A more detailed description of the agency's process improvement efforts can be found under Section B of this document.

### A. CBP Frontline Hiring and Staffing Requirements and Challenges

Sustaining congressionally funded CBPO and BPA staffing levels requires attracting and assessing thousands of applicants annually to replace employee losses resulting from retirement and other attrition, and to fill any new positions funded or authorized by Congress.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) end-to-end hiring model does not address the variety in occupations or the depth and complexity of different agency hiring processes. CBP's multi-step frontline hiring process is intentionally rigorous. Only those candidates who are found to be medically and physically fit and trustworthy, and who have the character traits and conduct to protect the integrity and promote the efficiency of the service are promoted for appointment to a federal law enforcement position. This extensive applicant screening, including the statutorily mandated polygraph examination, extends the time to hire entry-level CBPOs and BPAs. Applicants who fully complete the CBPO and BPA hiring process will undergo a series of assessments that include:

- Qualifications Determination
- Cognitive Testing
- Structured Interview (CBPO)/Oral Hiring Board (BPA)
- Medical Exam
- Drug Screening
- Physical Fitness Testing
- Polygraph Examination
- Background Investigation

The *Anti-Border Corruption Act* requires CBP to administer a polygraph examination to all applicants seeking a CBP law enforcement position, prior to their employment. The inclusion of a polygraph examination in the selection process has added an additional step that many applicants fail to pass. The result is that CBP needs to process greater numbers of applicants in order to achieve targeted staffing levels, and specialize its

recruitment efforts to attract a high-caliber applicant who can pass the rigor of federal suitability guidelines. The introduction of the polygraph examination has allowed CBP to evaluate an applicant's suitability for a law enforcement position more thoroughly and accurately. The polygraph has uncovered instances of past criminal behavior or misconduct that otherwise may not have been revealed through the background investigation process. Consequently, many applicants are determined to be unsuitable because of admissions made during the polygraph examination.

In order to increase the agency's capacity to perform polygraph examinations, CBP has made great efforts to hire federally certified polygraph examiners. However, the limited pool of certified examiners nationwide has greatly affected CBP's ability to increase polygraph capacity. In addition to efforts to increase internal capacity, CBP awarded contracts to three vendors that provide polygraph examination services and sent letters to all 26 agencies that have federally certified examiners seeking their assistance in completing applicant polygraphs. However, both contractors and external agencies are similarly affected by the small population of certified examiners, and therefore are unable to supplement CBP's polygraph examination requirements sufficiently.

## **B. Hiring Process Improvements and Capacity Building Initiatives**

Over the past 4 years, CBP has made significant hiring process improvements; many of these are highlighted in this report. In enhancing hiring operations, CBP has collaborated with the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer as well as with OPM and the Office of Management and Budget. These efforts have included seeking approval for and using special hiring authorities to help meet CBP's frontline staffing requirements as well as implementing process changes that include collecting and storing applicant documents electronically, moving from OPM's proctoring of written entrance examinations to electronic testing delivered by a contractor, and collecting and transmitting electronic applicant fingerprint records. CBP also coordinated with other DHS Components and federal agencies to seek polygraph examination support to increase its processing capacity and to ensure a steady flow of applicants through the hiring process. With respect to the process improvement noted in this report, it is important to note that the length of time it takes to realize the impact of these improvements fully varies on the basis of the complexity of and time required to complete each step in the hiring process.

### **Summary of Improvements (FY 2011 – 2014)**

*Note: This is not an all-inclusive list.*

- We have included suitability questions as part of the initial application process. An applicant's affirmative response to a suitability "screen-out" question would result in the applicant later being found unsuitable for CBP employment. Such applicants are not allowed to complete their application. This allows CBP to focus processing resources on only viable applicants.

- We have added a practice test to the application process allowing prospective applicants to gain a better understanding of the entrance/cognitive test content and difficulty before completing their application. This has allowed CBP to avoid testing costs for individuals who begin but do not complete their application, and therefore do not register for the test. Additionally, the percentage of applicants passing the test has increased.
- CBP has updated the information (e.g., CBPO and BPA position duties, qualification requirements, employment disqualifiers, and the application process) included in JOAs and available on the CBP careers web page.
- We have established enhanced communication with applicants via e-mail messages, podcasts, webinars, and text messages throughout the hiring process to keep them engaged and informed of upcoming assessments and required actions.
- We have established the polygraph as condition of employment, which allows CBP to withdraw tentative offers of employment for applicants who fail to complete or pass the polygraph.
- CBP has reengineered the written entrance examination proctored by OPM at 20 sites nationwide, to online testing available delivered by a third-party contract vendor at 600 sites nationwide, which makes it easier for applicants to take the test (and has produced higher applicant yield rates).

## **FY 2015**

In February of 2015, CBP began to take a more integrated, holistic approach to improving the hiring process by establishing a Frontline Hiring Program Management Office (PMO), which includes representatives from across the agency. The main purpose of the PMO is to develop, implement, and monitor process improvements for frontline hiring, while also ensuring open lines of communication and collaboration between the multiple offices responsible for hiring frontline law enforcement officers. The PMO is centered on taking both a targeted and a strategic approach in assessing where in the hiring process CBP has bottlenecks or limited capacity that is affecting its immediate and long-term ability to hire officers and agents. The PMO has identified actions to increase capacity, reduce the hiring cycle-time, and increase the effectiveness of the hiring process.

### *Increasing CBP's Capacity*

- We have added additional resources to CBP's Hiring Center in the area of medical adjudications and personnel specialists to handle the increased workload from the hiring surge. This has reduced the median time for this processing step from approximately 60 days to fewer than 25 days.
- We have eliminated, in a limited setting, the need to develop a notice of proposed action when an applicant has self-admitted actions and/or behaviors that cannot be mitigated. Working in concert with OPM on this change, we have seen significant time savings in eliminating applicants in this segment of the hiring lifecycle.

- With assistance from suitability adjudicators, time is saved by curtailing some polygraph examinations when disqualifying admissions occur during the early phase of the process. This allows examiners to move on to other candidates awaiting a polygraph. As of August 5, 2015, 403 polygraph exams have been concluded early on the basis of this approach.
- We have drafted a National Frontline Hiring Recruitment Command construct and will be implementing a series of short- and long-term targeted recruitment efforts to pre-position the agency for success in FY 2016.
- We have awarded contracts to vendors who provide polygraph examination services, which has allowed CBP to increase its capacity to conduct more than 1,000 exams per month. The addition of the contract examiners has helped reduce processing backlogs and reduced processing time by approximately 66 percent.
- We have realigned staff to increase the number of examiners performing polygraphs, establishing a goal for each examiner to conduct two polygraph examinations per day.

#### *Reduce Cycle-Time*

- CBP re-sequenced the polygraph examination to occur before the background investigation. This allows CBP to identify unsuitable applicants more quickly, focus processing efforts on viable applicants, and lower screening and overall hiring costs.
- We have implemented an information technology system enhancement that automates a previously manual process of interoffice notifications of applicant polygraph examination results. This has reduced the notification timeframe from once per month to daily.
- We have begun use of electronic fingerprinting, which has reduced staff time and eliminated mailing costs associated with processing paper documents.
- We structured the background investigation contracts to offer an incentive to vendors that complete background investigations within 15 days (previously, investigations were generally completed within 40 days).
- Designated on-call duty adjudicators now provide real-time adjudications that allow polygraph examiners to end examinations when an applicant makes an admission of conduct that cannot be mitigated. This allows examiners to move on to other candidates awaiting a polygraph and helps to reduce overall processing time.
- We implemented “Mini Hiring Hubs” that integrate the polygraph, quality control, and suitability determination process, expediting the completion of applicant polygraphs and reducing the polygraph queue. The hubs offer the potential to cut processing time by approximately 50 percent. Two additional hubs that further integrate additional aspects of the hiring process, such as structured interviews and video based testing, are currently scheduled for July and August of this year.

### *Increase Effectiveness*

- We are in the process of implementing process improvements related to scheduling management activities in the area of structured interviews and polygraph examinations.
- The hiring center has enhanced its communications with applicants by requesting, when necessary, additional more precise, medical information to support a more expedient adjudication process when medical issues are identified.
- We have developed a new modeling tool that provides predictive analysis of our process improvements, and assesses cost-efficiencies and impacts on cycle-time prior to implementing any process change.
- On the basis of lessons learned from the U.S. Border Patrol hiring surge in years past, CBP developed a targeted National Recruitment Strategy to promote applicant quality and to ensure that required numbers of applicants are in the hiring pipeline to meet staffing needs.
- We have enhanced our vacancy announcements, which now list the specific ports for which applicants can apply for CBPO positions, giving the applicants additional clarity on where an actual vacancy resides. This change is expected to reduce the frequency of applicant declinations of final job offers based on location because candidates will have certainty as to where they will be deployed upon successful completion of the hiring process.

### C. Looking Ahead

CBP hiring operations are geared toward filling positions as expeditiously as possible to achieve and sustain the congressionally funded frontline staffing levels. CBP continues to work aggressively on initiatives that will expedite the hiring process, increase processing capacity and throughput, and strengthen the quality of applicant pools while continuing to ensure the rigorous assessment and screening of applicants. Additionally, CBP has established several milestones related to efforts to enhancing CBP's frontline hiring operations. These include expanding the hiring hub concept to reduce the time to process and hire candidates, performing a comprehensive review of the frontline hiring lifecycle to identify additional opportunities to reduce the cycle-time of the hiring process, and implementing components of the National Recruitment Strategy to enhance the quality of applicants in the hiring pipeline.

In addition to addressing the frontline hiring process, CBP also must address the challenges it faces when it comes to recruiting qualified candidates to achieve and maintain targeted frontline staffing levels. In establishing a National Frontline Recruitment Command (NFRC), CBP will build the organizational structure to address the recruitment challenges faced by many law enforcement agencies today that include differentiating themselves and their unique enforcement mission, attracting female applicants, and producing pools of diverse and highly qualified candidates to fill

positions located throughout the Nation. By partnering with a forward-leaning advertising and marketing firm and leveraging field resources at Sector, Field Office, and Air and Marine sites, CBP will enhance its ability to recruit proactively within its operational footprint. In institutionalizing the NFRC, CBP can create a transformative, cohesive, and scalable business process prepared to meet future hiring requirements.

The NFRC will provide a centrally coordinated system of proactive planning and recruitment in order to establish a pipeline of highly qualified and diverse candidates to fill CBP mission-critical frontline positions. The NFRC will be responsible for administering and executing CBP's recruitment strategy and will have the responsibility of ensuring that the agency has a continuous pipeline of qualified individuals to occupy frontline (CBPO, BPA, Marine Interdiction Agent, Air Enforcement Agent, and Air Interdiction Agent) positions.

CBP will continue to collaborate with the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to explore options to recruit and expedite the hiring of individuals separating from military service and veterans. This includes conducting Veterans Recruitment Appointment "Mini Hiring Hubs" through FY 2016 and exploring options for reciprocity of certain employment qualifications. CBP also will collaborate with the Department of Veterans Affairs to look at ways to incentivize hiring by certifying CBP basic academy training programs enabling veterans to obtain GI Bill housing allowance benefits while in training status.

## V. Conclusion

Meeting CBPO and BPA staffing targets requires continual vigilance and a disciplined approach to attract and assess the thousands of applicants required to replace employee attrition losses and fill any new positions funded or authorized by Congress. CBP's multi-step hiring process for its law enforcement officer occupations intentionally is rigorous and involves extensive applicant screening that extends the time to hire. To achieve and sustain targeted frontline staffing levels, CBP has implemented multiple hiring process improvements and is committed to seeking additional methods to reduce the time and cost to hire, while continuing to ensure that accepted candidates meet the technical, physical, and integrity demands of these important law enforcement positions.

## VI. Appendix – List of Acronyms

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>BPA</b>	Border Patrol Agent
<b>CBP</b>	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
<b>CBPO</b>	CBP Officer
<b>DHS</b>	Department of Homeland Security
<b>EOY</b>	End of Year
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>JOA</b>	Job Opportunity Announcement
<b>NFRC</b>	National Frontline Recruitment Command
<b>OPM</b>	Office of Personnel Management
<b>PMO</b>	Program Management Office