

Assessment Work Group Q&A

February 2026

USA Hire/PATCO

1. **Question:** Is the PATCO expansion going to cover supervisory positions?
 - a. **Answer:** No, PATCO will only cover non-supervisory positions.
2. **Question:** Will the PATCO expansion have an additional cost?
 - a. **Answer:** The PATCO expansion is included in the USA Hire Standard Assessment pricing at no additional cost. If your agency already has access to the USA Hire Standard Assessments, PATCO will be added at no additional cost.
3. **Question:** Can we preview the USA Hire Assessments?
 - a. **Answer:** Practice Assessments are available at: <https://support-usahire.opm.gov/hc/en-us/categories/45382370966931-Practice-Assessments>
4. **Question:** Is there a new link to the USA Hire Competency Lookup Tool?
 - a. **A:** Yes, here's the new USA Hire resource center link: <https://resourcecenter-usahire.opm.gov/hc/en-us/> and the competency lookup tool specifically: <https://resourcecenter-usahire.opm.gov/hc/en-us/articles/45424515078419-Competency-Lookup-Tool>

General Assessment Questions

5. **Question:** Would the vacancy be considered erroneous if the incorrect template is used?
 - a. **Answer:** It depends on what parts of the template are incorrect. Please submit a helpdesk ticket if you run into this and we can advise on the specific situations where you might be able to recover your vacancy.
6. **Question:** Are we required to use the Competencies tab? Can we manually list the competencies along with the definitions on the job announcement?
 - a. **Answer:** No, you're not required to use the competencies tab, but if you do choose to list competencies there, the competencies-related data inserts in the announcement template are an efficient way to ensure applicants stay informed about how they'll be evaluated. You can manually list them in the announcement if you prefer.

7. **Question:** Can there be demos on what applicant pool considerations are needed when using hurdles in assessments, such as how veterans' preference works?
 - a. **Answer:** Yes, we'll do a multi-hurdle deep dive soon.
8. **Question:** When setting up hurdles in an assessment package, can multiple hurdles be used with only one used for rating or pass/fail?
 - a. **Answer:** You can use multiple hurdles with only one rated or pass/fail assessment. There are Veterans' Preference implications to this decision, so we recommend reviewing the Multiple Hurdle Guide to help you make the right one: <https://abrc-usastaffing.opm.gov/hc/en-us/articles/45424412807315-Multiple-Hurdles-Guide>
9. **Question:** Does OPM have a recommendation for an assessment strategy that provides a rating when you are unable to use USA Hire? Ex. You are recruiting for a supervisory position and your agency has not purchased the premium USA Hire assessment for supervisory positions.
 - a. **Answer:** OPM's website has resources on different assessment strategies, such as [Structured Interviews](#), as well as [other assessment methods](#), and is working on updating the [Assessment Decision Guide](#). We'll share these resources with this group as they're published.

Structured Resume Review/SME Evaluations/SMEQA

1. **Question:** Is the Structured Resume Review (SRR) process still pass/fail?
 - a. **Answer:** Yes, the SRR process only offers a pass/fail option.
2. **Question:** Do you have to use USA Hire to use the SME evaluation or resume review feature in USA Staffing?
 - a. **Answer:** No, you can use this process without USA Hire. Today's demonstration includes a screen-out questionnaire and USA Hire in the first hurdle and an SME Evaluation in the second hurdle, which is a common combination because both USA Hire and the SRR process (which uses the SME Evaluation assessment) are high-quality assessments that meet Merit Hiring Plan standards. If you don't want to use USA Hire, you would build the SME Evaluation assessment in the first hurdle.
3. **Question:** Is the requirement to use a third trained rater if SME evaluations are conflicting a requirement to be EO compliant or a USA Staffing requirement (based on system functionality)?
 - a. **Answer:** It's a requirement to be E.O. 13932 compliant. USA Staffing enforces the requirement if you pick the 'EO Compliant' assessment method option. If you prefer not to have a third trained rater, pick the 'Structured Resume Review' assessment method that does not contain '(EO Compliant)' and USA Staffing will not enforce any E.O.-related requirements.

USA Staffing® Stage

VACANCY 10202421

USAJOBS Announcement Title: Archivist
 Pay Plan-Series-Grade: GS-1420-13
 Assessment ID: New

Assessment Information

Assessment Name: Archivist 2421 SRR

Assessment Type: SME Evaluation

Assessment Method: Structured Resume Review (EO Compliant)

Number of SME Evaluations Required: 2

Owner: Jenn Reaves

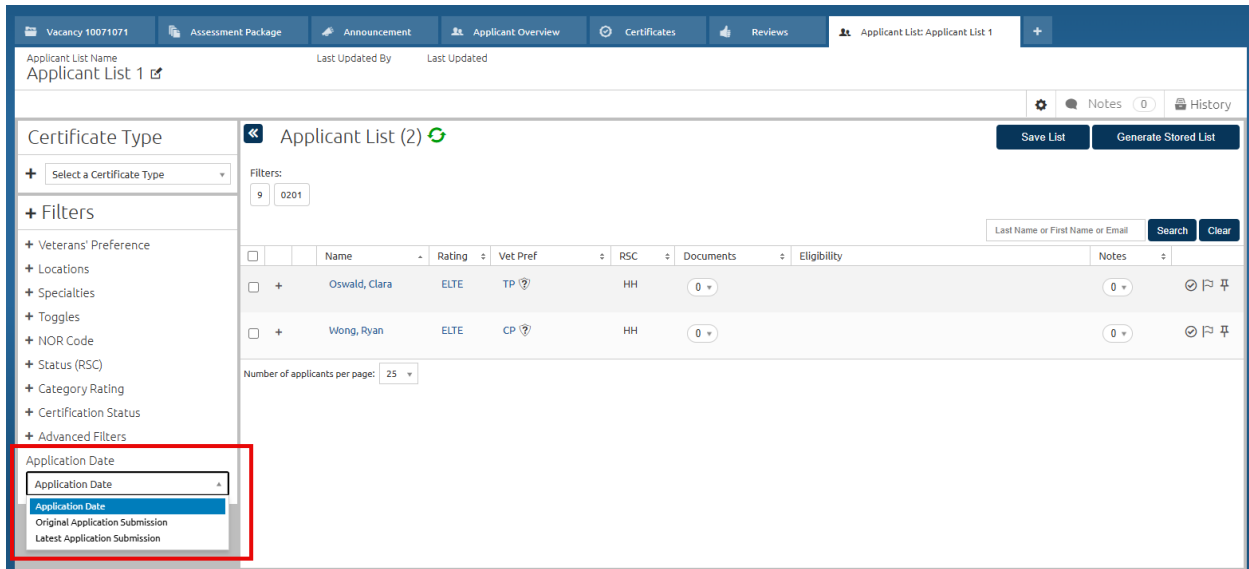
Hurdle: Hurdle 1: Default Hurdle

Screen-out: Rating:

Save Cancel

4. **Question:** Is there still an exception for small agencies or can there be an exception for small agencies with the number of SMEs? We may not be able to get 2 or more with small agencies.
 - a. **Answer:** In order to be compliant with E.O. 13932, three SMEs are necessary so ties can be broken in the event the first two SMEs disagree on whether the applicant possesses any one of the specialized experience requirements. USA Staffing has an option to avoid this requirement (see answer above), but the assessment would not be considered compliant with E.O. 13932.
5. **Question:** Does the Structured Resume Review assessment criteria have to come directly from the specialized experience within the announcement?
 - a. **Answer:** Yes, the SRR process is designed for SMEs to determine whether applicants possess the required specialized experience to successfully perform the job. They should be evaluating applicants against the same language used in the job announcement. This replaces the minimum qualifications review that HR would traditionally do.
6. **Question:** Is there any consideration to have a resume review process built in USAS to allow for a SME panel to provide a rating vs. pass/fail only?
 - a. **Answer:** USA Staffing is considering future development that would allow SMEs to evaluate applicants against benchmarks and provide ratings, whether it's resume reviews, accomplishment records, work samples, or any other evaluative assessment capability. The timeframe for this development has not been determined.

7. **Question:** If this is a minimum qualifications review (pass or fail, so no score is given), how can it be used as a stand-a-lone with no other assessment to determine their numeric score in Rule of Many or Category Rating?
 - a. **Answer:** We recommend pairing it with an assessment that provides a rating and does a good job distinguishing between candidates. USA Hire is a great option, but structured interviews, accomplishment records, or other assessments administered outside of USA Staffing can also be used and the scores imported using manual assessments. Pages 2-3 of OPM's Guidance on the Use of Self-Reported Assessments provides recommendations assessment best practices- <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/merit-hiring-plan-resources/guidance-on-the-use-of-self-reported-assessments.pdf>
8. **Question:** Besides screening for documents and eligibilities, can HR screen out other applicants based on quals. Meaning, if there are "obvious" ones that don't meet the specialized experience, can we screen them out without sending them to the SME? Or do they have to review every applicant that meets the basic docs required and/or eligibilities?
 - a. **Answer:** We recommend treating applicants the same at each step in the process. If there are applicants who are missing documentation, it would be fair for HR to remove them, but if you're using a SRR process, SMEs should be reviewing min quals. Although HR Specialists are the experts on Federal hiring processes and systems, there may be positions for which SMEs are in a better position than HR professionals to interpret experience as described in applicants' resumes. By utilizing SMEs to perform a Structured Resume Review, agencies can leverage SME technical knowledge to improve the quality of candidates referred to the hiring official.
9. **Question:** Are there enhancements in the works for the Structured Resume Review feature to be able to use cut-off dates to refer the resumes to the SMEs?
 - a. **Answer:** No, there are no enhancements being worked related to Structured Resume Reviews. However, you might be able to achieve this using application date filters when pulling applicant lists.



10. **Question:** Can an HR Specialist be considered an SME to do the resume review if the division has provided training and/or given important keywords to check for on the resume?
- a. **Answer:** SMEs are generally high-performing incumbents and/or supervisors who are highly knowledgeable about the work performed in the occupation at the target grade level. SMEs need to be at or above the grade level they are representing. SMEs must SMEs have first-hand knowledge of the technical/specialized experience required and have been in the position for a minimum of 6 months.
11. **Question:** Can the SME's see the list of names that they are reviewing beforehand?
- a. **Answer:** They do not see the names beforehand. The applicants they review are dynamically presented to them based on applicants available, recusals, tiebreakers created, etc. Not every applicant will be reviewed by every SME - especially if more than three SMEs are involved.
12. **Question:** If using as a single hurdle, can we apply the (Using an "exceeds" score in resume review) which states use three levels in resume review: does not meet, meets, and exceed? Referring to this link: <https://smeqa.usds.gov/hiring-phases/resume-review/prep/#:~:text=Using%20an%20%E2%80%9Cexceeds%E2%80%9D%20score%20in%20resume%20review>
- a. **Answer:** This guidance and the process described were part of the SMEQA pilot. That tool is no longer supported by OPM. USA Staffing only offers a pass/fail distinction for applicant resumes. The best source for current Structured Resume Review guidance is: <https://abrc->

usastaffing.opm.gov/hc/en-us/sections/45382463007763-Structured-Resume-Review

13. **Question:** Anything you can do to help clarify the difference between this very specific SRR process and an SME panel review would be helpful.
 - a. **Answer:** The specific E.O. Compliant SRR process demonstrated here was created to give agencies a new option to meet E.O. 13932. The scope is solely to evaluate whether applicants possess the specialized experience required to perform the job. Background and support materials are [available here](#). An SME panel review may follow a similar process, but A) typically occurs after applicants have been reviewed for minimum qualifications, and B) is more often used to provide a rating based on an evaluation of more than a resume (i.e., a crediting plan, accomplishment record, or other work-based assessment).
14. **Question:** Are agencies able to meet with someone in OPM individually to discuss assessment questions/options?
 - a. **Answer:** Yes, absolutely! We recommend starting with your USA Staffing Account Manager, and they can help direct you to the right place depending on whether you're looking for policy, process, or system expertise.