

## Research Service Onboarding Policy

1. Research Service onboarding policy is informed by VA hiring practices and rules governing eligibility for Federal employment.
2. Currently, four onboarding options exist for personnel engaged in research activities at the Minneapolis VA: VA paid employment, Interagency Personnel Agreement (IPA) employment, Without Compensation (WOC) employment, and Contract employment.
3. Each onboarding option falls under different rules in terms of eligibility, allowed funding source, and timeline for hire. All onboarding mechanisms require prospective employee to complete all required training and to be added to all affected study protocols, subject to approval from subcommittee of record, prior to initiating any research activities.
4. The outline below provides an overview of each option. Prior to initiating an onboarding action, PI should consult the information here, and determine whether the prospective employee will meet all necessary requirements. PI should also consider the estimated timelines for each onboarding option. For questions regarding this process, PI should contact the Research AO.

### VA paid employment:

Prospective employee must be a U.S. citizen eligible to work, and must pass background check. PI must have VA funds available. A valid, current position description (PD) must be available or created for the position. Employee must provide verification of education. Hire can be a direct appointment (temporary position, if employee has a 4-year scientific degree) or can be a competitive hire (term position). All Research hires are term or temporary; career positions are not available on grant funding. VA career employees who accept a term or temporary position will lose career status.

- Term positions must be posted as open hires (DEU/USAJobs) for Title 5 positions; PIs intending to hire a Title 38 should contact Research AO for posting guidelines. Term positions are generally 2-4 years max. Term positions are competitive, and do not allow PI to select a specific individual for hire – HR determines eligibility of applicants, and PI must select from the prospective employees HR has identified. Employees must re compete for hire at the end of the term appointment. Hiring on a term position requires the PI to provide employment for the duration of the stated term; as such, hiring action should not be used unless sufficient funds are available to cover the entire term.
- Temporary positions (HRML direct hiring authority) do allow PI to specifically select a desired employee, provided the employee meets education requirements. Position must be tied to a specific research project. Part-time temporary hires are limited to a hard cap of one year, for the duration of an employee's Federal career, and cannot be extended or renewed. Full-time temporary positions can be used up to 6 years max. Full-time positions can be extended an additional 3 years if additional funding exists, with hospital director approval; additional extensions are possible if funds remain available. Temporary positions under a HRML are subject to availability of funds, and temporary employees can be released from employment with 30 day notice if funds are not available.

**Onboarding timeline is 12-16 weeks for direct hire, or 4-6 months for competitive hire,** provided PD is already available; creating a new PD can add 4-6 months or more to the hiring timeline. If employees need to be boarded prior to hire, an additional month should be added to timeline.

**Without Compensation (WOC) employment:**

WOC appointments are not paid but are still considered to be Federal positions. As such, prospective employee must be a U.S. citizen eligible to work, and must pass background check. PI does not need to have VA funding. The WOC can be an unpaid volunteer, or a paid employee of the VA NPC, academic affiliate, or other non-VA entity. A PD is not required for a WOC appointment and no documentation of education is required, however specific duties in Scope of Practice may require verification of credentials and/or licensure. WOC appointments are for 1 year and are renewable annually. WOC appointments can be terminated by the PI, or by the Research Service, at any time without advance notice. See RDC WOC SOP for more details on responsibilities. **Onboarding timeline is 3-6 weeks.**

**Interagency Personnel Agreement (IPA) employment:**

The IPA mechanism allows VA to “borrow” an employee from another institution for a limited period of time. Prospective employee must be a permanent/career status employee of an institution able to enter into an IPA agreement with the VA, such as the VA NPC or academic affiliate, and must pass background check. Employee must have been in current (paid) position for a minimum of 90 days to be eligible. Students are not considered permanent employees and are not eligible for IPA regardless of tenure. Non-citizens may be eligible for IPA provided they meet employment requirements, have a valid visa status allowing employment, and pass background check. PI must have VA funds available. Indirect costs are not allowed on an IPA agreement. A valid, current PD must be available or created for the position. Employee must provide verification of education. Positions are capped at a maximum of 4 years, after which employee must wait a minimum of 1 year before again becoming eligible for IPA. IPA agreements can be cancelled at any time, by either the lending or borrowing institution, with a minimum 30 day notice. **Onboarding timeline is 2-4 months,** provided PD is already available; creating a new PD can add 4-6 months or more to the hiring timeline.

IPA may only be used for current employees of the academic affiliate or VA NPC. If a PI wishes to use an IPA to hire an individual who is not a current employee, the 90 day employment minimum means the PI must have sufficient funds at the external organization to pay the employee’s salary for this 90 day period prior to implementing the IPA. A WOC appointment will be required for any work on VA projects during this initial 90 day period. All eligibility requirements for WOC employees will apply during this timeframe.

**Contract employment:**

Rarely used by Research for personnel. A contract will not allow hire of a specific person, but will instead allow VA funds to be used to pay for a specific service. Contracts are made between VA and the institution providing the service. Employees of the institution providing the service do not need to meet VA hiring requirements but will be given status allowing them to be present on VA property or to access VA resources as needed to complete the service. Contracts must adhere to VA guidelines for all such agreements and may require an open bidding process. Contracts are subject to the indirect cost rates levied by the institution providing the service. Because of this additional expense, contracts are better suited to discrete, repeated services such as medical imaging, genetic sequencing, or high-throughput tissue analysis, and should be used only as a last resort for onboarding personnel. **Onboarding timeline is 6-8 months or more.**