

(BLM's) Student Temporary Employment Program

The following section outlines one annual cycle of the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). The discussion includes recruitment and selection, employment, as well as training and performance management for the STEP cycle. In addition, the discussion includes the roles and responsibilities of the STEP student employee and related Bureau employees (See Appendix C-1, Comprehensive List of Roles and Responsibilities).

Federal regulations and personnel requirements apply to all STEP student employees, regardless of duty station and funding source. Additional requirements and processes vary by State or Center.

Recruitment and Selection Processes

Recruitment Strategy

For STEP recruitment, State or Center SEEP Coordinators work with hiring offices on local recruitment strategies. The WO 730 may assist with STEP recruitment, upon request.

Student Eligibility Requirements

Based on OPM regulations, a student must meet the following requirements to be appointed to a STEP position (See Appendix A-1, 5 CFR 213.3202).

- A student must be enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a degree (diploma, certificate, etc.) seeking student with at least a half-time academic / vocational or technical course load in an accredited high school, technical or vocational school, two or four year college or university, graduate or professional school. The school in which the student is enrolled provides the definition of half-time course load.
- A student must maintain a 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) or better and in good standing with his or her academic institution.
- The BLM may appoint non-citizens provided that the student is lawfully admitted to the U.S. as a permanent resident or otherwise authorized to be employed. The BLM's ability to appoint a non-citizen to a STEP position is subject to change, as Federal agencies may be precluded from hiring non-citizens to an excepted service by a ban in their appropriations act. See Appendix A-7 for OPM's guidance on the Appropriations Act Ban on Employing Non-Citizens.
- The student must be sixteen years of age or older. Age restrictions do apply to some targeted and arduous positions, such as Fire and Survey Technician.

Note: Unlike the SCEP student, the STEP student employee's academic and career goals may differ from his or her work duties and responsibilities.

Application and Selection Processes

A State or Center may announce its STEP employment vacancies through the BLM JOBS On-line system where students compete for the posted vacancies. A State or Center may, also, recruit for students independently and hire student “on-the-spot” because the 5 CFR 213.3202 allows for appointment of a STEP student without full and open competition (Appendix A-1).

Regarding full and open competition, OPM’s Schedule B positions are exempt from standard competitive examining procedures (See Appendix A-10, 5 CFR 213.3201). Students appointed under the Schedule B Student Educational Employment Programs are exempt from the ranking requirements of the Excepted Services (See Appendix A-11, 5 CFR 302.101). However, veterans’ preference does apply in the selection of student employees. Finally, 5 CFR 213.3202 explicitly states that written tests are waived for students hired through the STEP (Appendix A-1).

Requests for Funding Assistance from the WO 730

The WO 730 provides funding assistance for STEP student employees through its Field-Based Partnership Initiatives only. State and Center SEEP Coordinators should follow the policies and procedures of the Field-Based Partnerships for funding consideration.

Employment Issues

State and Center SEEP Coordinators, managers and supervisors, and other relevant Bureau employees should familiarize themselves with the employment regulations and policies before a new student employee’s start date.

On the start date, the Human Resources Specialist will provide the new STEP student employee with information about the Bureau’s policies, and will conduct the employee’s Enter-On-Duty (EOD) process. At that time, the new STEP student employee will receive standard forms and instructions, such as the W-2.

Appointments

Schedule B, 5 CFR 213.3202 governs STEP appointments to the Bureau and other Federal agencies (Appendix A-1, 5 CFR 213.3202). Under 5 CFR 213.3202, a STEP student fulfills the temporary employment needs of an agency for a one-year appointment or less. Agencies may extend the appointment in one year increments as long as the individual meets the definition of a student, fulfills minimum academic requirements of the agency, and meets on-the-job requirements for program continuation.

Note: A student hired under the STEP authority, 5 CFR 213.3202, is not considered a student once he or she completes the requirements for a diploma or certificate, and is no longer eligible for employment under the STEP authority. A student must be terminated under the STEP authority even if time remains on the current appointment.

Finally, participation in the SCEP program does not preclude students from working other government appointments; however, an individual is not entitled to receive basic

pay from more than one position for more than an aggregate of 40 hours of work in one calendar week, from Sunday through Saturday (See Appendix A-15, 5 USC 5333).

Security Requirements

In accordance with Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 12, all SCEP students must have a completed National Agency Check with Inquiries (NACI), including a review of the fingerprint files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), prior to the issuance of a credential (See Appendix A-16, HSPD 12). Each State Human Resource Office will determine risk/sensitivity designations for the program office they service and process the required paperwork. Suitability/security investigations for employees should be initiated at the State Human Resource office before appointment.

Working Agreements

OPM regulations do not require that Federal agencies create working agreements for STEP student employees. However, State and Center SEEP Coordinators are encouraged to work with supervisors on a working agreement for each STEP student.

Job Title and Grade Levels

Classification of STEP student employees is based on the occupational series for which they are hired. Grade level is set according to the criteria in the appropriate GS or WG classification standard. For example, a Maintenance Worker would become WG-4701-4. STEP student employees subject to both the General Schedule and Federal Wage System fall under Tenure Group 0 until they complete a year of uninterrupted services, at which time they fall under Tenure Group 3 (Appendix A-17, 5 CFR 351.502).

Compensation and Benefits

A STEP student employee receives a salary at the current rate authorized for grade by the Classification Act and receives authorized payment for overtime (Visit www.opm.gov for current pay rates).

In addition, a STEP student employee receives the following benefits and considerations (See Appendix A-1, 5 CFR 213.3202).

Promotions and Awards

A STEP student employee may receive a promotion when he or she meets the requirements of the Qualifications Standards. However, the Nature of Action Code (NOAC) for the STEP is a conversion to a new appointment at a higher grade, while maintaining the current not-to-exceed (NTE) date.

Wage-grade STEP student employees are eligible for within-grade increases, while STEP appointees in the General Schedules are not.

Finally, a STEP student employee may receive an award for exceptional work.

Work Schedules

The STEP student employee may work full or part-time during any time of year. The student and supervisor agree upon a mutually-beneficial work schedule in which the work load does not interfere with academic performance.

The STEP student employee accrues sick leave at the rate of a regular employee, and the STEP appointee who works more than 90 consecutive work days accrues annual leave at the same rate of a regular employee.

Standard Benefits

Generally, the STEP student employee receives no retirement coverage, as noted in 5 CFR 831.201 and 5 CFR 842.105 (See Appendix A-20, 5 CFR 831.201 and Appendix A-21, 5 CFR 842.105).

The STEP student employee who has been continuously employed for one year, without a break in service exceeding five days, may enroll in the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program, but he or she must pay the employee and government's share of the premium. 5 CFR 870.202, 890.102, and 890.502 outline the rules of health and life insurance coverage for the STEP appointee (See Appendix A-22, 5 CFR 870.202 and Appendix A-23, 5 CFR 890.102 and Appendix A-24, 5 CFR 890.502).

Financial Assistance

5 CFR 213.2302 states that agencies may use their training authority in 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41 and 5 CFR Part 410 to pay all or part of training expenses directly related to students' official duties (See Appendix A-18, 5 USC 41 and Appendix A-19, 5 CFR 410). Therefore, individual hiring offices may provide financial assistance to STEP students for training-related activities, such as travel.