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Hello, my name is Tanya Robles, the Student Program Coordinator for NRCS under the Talent Management Division at National Headquarters in Washington, DC.

We will be discussing the new Pathways Programs and its requirements. Current OPM Pathways guidance will be shared in this training. USDA final guidance will be posted on the NRCS People SharePoint site, under the Pathways Information folder. For new and updated guidance, please visit the Pathways Information folder continuously as it will be updated as new information is received. The NRCS People SharePoint site can be found in the Resources slide at the end of this training.

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The navigation for this training includes the menu to the left of the screen and the controls at the bottom of the screen. From the menu you can select a topic to view. You can choose to view thumbnails, audio or search option by clicking on the tabs at the top. A scroll bar appears on the right side of the audio when needed.

The controls at the bottom right of the screen allow you to:
Play or pause the course, and

Move to the previous or next slide

The controls at the bottom left of the screen allow you to:

Turn the audio on or off

The attachment button allows you to view additional resources for this training. You can also view the training in full screen, hiding the navigation menu

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Reasonable Accommodation

For those requiring a reasonable accommodation, a link to a text version of this training will be made available at the end.

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These are the Pathways topics we will be covering in this training. They are:

- Introduction - Pathways Program
- Pathways Core Principles
- Pathways Program Components
- Pathways Program Highlights
- Pathways Program Posting Requirements
- Recruiting for Pathways Programs
- Pathways Best Practices and Requirements
- Pathways Resources

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In an effort to reform the federal hiring process for students and recent graduates, President Obama signed Executive Order 13562 on December 27, 2010. Pathways regulations became effective July 10, 2012, and the former Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) and the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) were replaced by Pathways Programs. USDA will now utilize the newly created Schedule D Hiring Authority. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for the administration and use of Pathways Programs. The MOU must be renewed every two years. NRCS will administer the Program in accordance with title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations and the merit system principles and avoid any prohibited personnel practices. This includes how the agency will accept applications for positions, assess candidates, rate and arrange qualified applicants and ensure adherence to veterans' preference. In addition, OPM has the right to place a cap on the number of conversions that agencies complete.

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Lets go over some of Pathways core principles: 1 Transparency- Agencies must show fairness and equitable treatment for all potential job candidates by publically posting any Pathways opportunities 2 Fairness to veterans- This core principle promotes fair hiring practices for veterans and requires agencies give preference to veterans over nonveterans for all Pathways Programs. 3 Agency investment- This principle supports meaningful training and career development for Pathways interns. Professional development is an important component of the program. 4 Limited Scope- This core principle is driven by the program's limited purpose, which is associated with USDA's workforce planning strategy. All projected intern hires will be reported in USDA's annual Human Capital Management reports. 5 OPM Oversight - To ensure the programs are managed properly, OPM will provide increased oversight of Pathways Programs. OPM will be given the authority to terminate, suspend, or revoke privileges to hire interns under the Pathways Program.

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As we've learned, Pathways is the umbrella name for three internship programs: The Internship Program is for enrolled degree-seeking students. Students in the Internship Program will now be referred to as "Interns." Current STEPs and SCEPs may be eligible for the Internship Program. Agencies have until January 6, 2013 to transition current students to the appropriate Internship Program. The Recent Graduates Program is for recent graduates. The Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF) is for graduate degree candidates. Now, let's review each of the Pathways Program requirements:

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The Internship Program highlights include:

- The Internship Program is similar to the former STEP and SCEP.
- It targets students enrolled in accredited educational institutions at least part-time. A qualifying educational institution is defined as an accredited high school, home school, community college, trade, vocational or technical school, and undergraduate or graduate school. The minimum age requirement is 16.
- There are two types of Interns in the Internship Program. One is for temporary workload needs, not expected to last more than one year. These will be your Interns under not-to-exceed (or NTE) appointments or Intern NTE. Agencies may also hire Interns expected to work for more than one year whose appointments would not expire. Interns may be noncompetitively converted to career or career conditional positions upon meeting program eligibility requirements and/or educational requirements.
- To be eligible for noncompetitive conversion, Interns must complete 640 hours of career-related work experience while enrolled as a full or part-time degree-seeking student. There are provisions that will allow 320 hours to be credited toward the 640 hour requirement if an intern has non-federal career-related internship experience, volunteer service, active duty military service or exceptional job performance.
- An Intern NTE's appointment may be extended in 1 year increments or less. --Interns may work flexible full or part-time work schedules. Supervisors and students should agree on a formally-arranged schedule of school and work that does not interfere with the student's academic schedule or performance and so that completion of the educational program and the Internship Program is accomplished in a reasonable timeframe.

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The next Pathways program component is the Recent Graduates Program:

- Recent Graduates are defined as individuals who have graduated from a qualifying educational institution within 2 years of their official graduation date.
- Veterans are eligible for the Recent Graduates Program within 6 years of their official graduation date.
- This is a one-year training program (that may be extended up to 2 years).
- Under Recent Graduates, appointments may be made up to the GS-09 level. Agencies may appoint Recent Graduates with degrees in science, technology, engineering or math (also referred to as STEM) fields at the GS-11 level if they possess a Ph.D. or equivalent degree from a qualifying institution directly related to the position being filled.

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The next Pathways Program component is The Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF):

- The PMF is managed by OPM. OPM pre-qualifies candidates starting at the GS-9 level, although agencies may initially appoint PMFs at the GS-9 through GS-12, depending on the fellows qualifications. Generally, NRCS hired PMFs are located at the National Headquarters Office in Washington, DC.
- The PMF program is a two-year program geared towards recent graduates with advanced degrees.
- There are a number of developmental activities that are required under the PMF Program such as: Individual Development Plans (IDP); mentoring; they must undertake at least 80 hours of formal interactive training each year, Participate in at least one, 4- to 6- month rotational or developmental assignment; and Pursue a short-term (1- to 6-month) rotational assignment.

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We will review some of the highlights that pertain to all Pathways Program components:

- All Pathways participants working for NRCS must be US Citizens.
- Each Pathways participant must sign a Pathways Participation Agreement. The Participation Agreement will include a description of the participant's duties, describe the work schedule, specify the length of the appointment and the termination date, explain the evaluation procedures, program requirements, and minimum eligibility requirements for non-competitive conversion, if applicable.
- Each Pathways component offers eligibility for noncompetitive conversion to permanent positions. However, eligibility for conversion does not guarantee that the agency will opt for conversion.
- Training is very important in creating a positive internship experience for Interns. Meaningful formal and informal career-related training and career development is a Pathways requirement.

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Pathways participants are eligible for some benefits:

- Health and life insurance coverage for Federal employees depends on the type of appointment an employee has and the expectation of substantial employment during the year. Students hired under the Internship Program on a temporary appointment are generally not entitled to these benefits. Students hired under an Internship, Recent Graduate or PMF appointment for a period expected to last longer than 1 year are eligible for health and life insurance coverage. Students hired under the Internship Program are generally ineligible for retirement coverage. Recent Graduates and PMFs are eligible for retirement benefits if their appointments are for more than 1 year. Employees hired under the Pathways Programs on appointments for 90 days or more are eligible to earn annual and sick leave.
- Another critical piece of the program is evaluation, performance management and periodic feedback. Pathways program participation requires managers to provide periodic feedback and performance management strategies for each intern in an effort to foster career development.
- Agencies may terminate participants for misconduct, suitability, poor performance, or at the end of the program period.

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One of the major changes for student programs are the Pathways Program posting requirements. All Pathways positions must be posted on USAJOBS. Agencies must meet OPM public notification requirements by providing Pathways Program opportunities and application procedures to the general public. Pathways postings must include the position title, series and grade, geographic location and how to apply or express interest. All applicants may apply to Pathways positions in USAJOBS.

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In addition to positions, career fairs and recruitment events must also be publically posted. Agency Student Program Coordinators and Recruiters may continue to participate in career fairs and recruitment events as long as a career fair ad is posted publically on USAJOBS and the agency's website. The career fair ad must show a calendar of events that specifies the date, location, and positions. All recruitment fair materials must be shared with everyone at the fair. This means that any known Pathways opportunities or information must be openly shared with all fair attendees. Recruiters may continue to gather student contact information to follow up with future Pathways opportunities. Emphasize:– To maintain the programs' transparency goals, all students and graduates must now apply online. Agencies may no longer collect resumes or perform interviews at career fairs. If you will be attending a career fair or event where the intent is to solicit applications for an open Pathways vacancy announcement your event must be posted on USAJOBS. Please notify your local Human Resources Office of your attendance timely.

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Now, more than ever, recruitment will be a crucial part of attracting talent to NRCS! It will be important to build stronger relationships at community organizations, high schools, colleges, and agriculture or natural resource organizations and educate potential applicants and educators about NRCS, our professional careers and qualifications required. We want to attract a continuous pipeline of diverse and highly qualified talent to make NRCS the Employer of Choice. Targeting your recruitment using these strategies can maximize our recruitment efforts for Pathways Programs.

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In targeting recruitment, think about the ways that we have available to reach students and the natural resources community:

- Email
- Blogs
- The NRCS Website
- NRCS Listening Sessions or Focus Groups
- Open House events at an NRCS Office
- Social Networking

These methods can be explored as possibilities to open up dialogue with potential Pathways applicants.

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Below is a list of Pathways Best Practices and requirements.

- The Pathways Program at USDA strives to be the model program across government agencies. For this reason, each intern should complete a capstone project in an effort to promote a meaningful experience, training and career development at NRCS.
- A critical part of the roles and responsibilities of the Pathways Program is mentoring for interns to provide clear pathways for success at NRCS.
- Survey participation from supervisors and interns is a key component of the program.
- Another critical piece of the program is performance management and periodic feedback. It is imperative that we give interns feedback as well as receive feedback from interns in an effort to build on successes and evaluate critical elements pertaining to the program.
- Lastly, USDA is strongly encouraging interns to participate in blogs on USDA Connect. This effort will promote sharing of ideas, unity, and development for interns. USDA Connect allows interns to become a part of a USDA community that will provide news, testimonies, Q and A's, and much more.

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You should now have a basic understanding of Pathways Programs and principles. We have discussed:

- Pathways Core Principles
- Pathways Program Components
- Pathways Program Highlights
- Pathways Program Posting Requirements
- Recruiting for Pathways Programs
- Pathways Best Practices and Requirements

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As mentioned at the beginning of this training, updated information may be found on the NRCS People SharePoint. When issued, final USDA Guidance will be shared with all NRCS employees. Additional Pathways Program information can be found at the following sites:

- OPM Hiring Reform Site
- NRCS People SharePoint Site
- NRCS Student Information Page
- USDA Connect

You may also contact the Student Program Coordinator at the Talent Management Division located at National Headquarters in Washington, DC. Contact information may be found in NRCS's global directory.

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The text version of this training may be found in the following link: [Pathways Audio Transcript](#)

We hope you have found this training helpful in learning more about Pathways Programs.