

CYBERSECURITY SERVICE

August 2024

DHS Cybersecurity Service + Cybersecurity Talent Management System

Frequently Asked Questions

- The following questions are common inquiries DHS has received from both current federal employees at DHS and other agencies as well as individuals currently working outside of government.
- Whether or not you have worked as a federal employee before, you may find this content informative, but please note that some of the questions and answers contain references to federal human resources terminology and concepts.
- This includes references [Title 5](#), which contains many of the rules governing federal civilian employment across agencies.
- At any time, individuals considering applying—or in the process of applying—to join the DHS Cybersecurity Service, may contact our [Talent Team](#) with specific questions—or to ask for clarification concerning this content.
- As individuals that have applied to join the DHS Cybersecurity Service progress through the application and assessment process, they will receive more information and have more opportunities to ask questions of our Talent Team.

General

What Is the Cybersecurity Talent Management System (CTMS)?

CTMS is a federal civilian talent management system, which is a collection of specialized policies, processes, and practices for hiring, compensating, and developing employees.

As described in the [regulation](#) authorizing CTMS, it is designed to modernize and enhance DHS's capacity to recruit and retain individuals with mission-critical cybersecurity skills.

What Is the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

The DHS Cybersecurity Service is the group of employees hired, compensated, and developed using CTMS. Collectively, they aim enhance execution of the DHS cybersecurity mission by applying their skills to perform a range of DHS cybersecurity work.

While all DHS Cybersecurity Service employees are part of a special cadre, they are also employees of the specific DHS organizations that hire them using CTMS.

When current federal employees join the DHS Cybersecurity Service from existing appointments under other federal talent management systems, they are appointed to new DHS Cybersecurity Service positions.

DHS Cybersecurity Service Frequently Asked Questions

What DHS organizations are using CTMS to hire DHS Cybersecurity Service employees?

Our [application portal](#) lists organizations actively using CTMS. Please note that not all may be hiring new DHS Cybersecurity Service employees at this time. On the application portal, [Apply](#) lists the featured jobs in the DHS organizations, and you can also contact a [recruiter](#) concerning your interests.

What types of cybersecurity skills do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees have?

DHS organizations hire DHS Cybersecurity Service employees with a variety of cybersecurity skills at all stages of a career. Our jobs are structured around different cybersecurity specializations - called technical capabilities. Our [application portal](#) lists and defines current technical capabilities.

Most DHS Cybersecurity Service employees join with a primary technical capability, reflecting the majority of their cybersecurity technical expertise and experience. Those just beginning a career in cybersecurity will work with DHS to identify and develop a primary technical capability.

Joining the DHS Cybersecurity Service

How do Interested Individuals Join the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

Individuals, including current federal employees, interested in joining the DHS Cybersecurity Service need to submit an application, complete an assessment process, and be selected by a participating DHS organization.

How are DHS Cybersecurity Service applicants assessed?

All applicants to join the DHS Cybersecurity Service go through a multi-part assessment process. Instead of completing self-rating questionnaires, which are common in federal government job application processes, applicants respond to questions/prompts in several different formats, including:

- Tests that are completed online;
- Tests, including simulations of work situations, that must be scheduled and completed through an assessment center; and
- Scenario-based interviews conducted virtually or in-person at a DHS office.

Additional information about what to expect in the assessment process can be found on our [application portal](#).

DHS Cybersecurity Service Frequently Asked Questions

If current federal employees join the DHS Cybersecurity Service, can they change their minds and return to their previous positions?

Immediate return to a previous federal position is neither guaranteed—nor provided for—in the Secretary's authority for CTMS.

Current federal employees with competitive status (i.e., those that have completed the initial one-year probationary periods in the competitive service) that join the DHS Cybersecurity Service would be eligible to apply for—and potentially be reinstated to—open competitive service positions, in alignment with Title 5 rules.

Can an individual join the DHS Cybersecurity Service through a temporary detail from a federal position outside of the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

No. Federal employees appointed to positions outside of the DHS Cybersecurity Service may not be detailed to a position in the DHS Cybersecurity Service.

How do positions and assignments in the DHS Cybersecurity Service work?

CTMS is a person-focused (often called rank-in-person) talent management (or personnel) system, which emphasizes individuals and their unique skills related to the DHS cybersecurity mission. This is in contrast to position-focused (often called rank-in-position) federal personnel systems, which focus on pre-defining generic positions and then hiring individuals.

An individual hired by a DHS organization using CTMS is appointed to a qualified position in the DHS Cybersecurity Service, which is documented in terms of that individual's skills and the related range of cybersecurity work that individual can perform.

CTMS does not require a DHS Cybersecurity Service employee to change positions in order for DHS to acknowledge enhancements to the employee's skills or to recognize the employee with greater levels of compensation.

A DHS Cybersecurity Service employee's qualified position evolves over time as the employee's career progresses, including as the employee receives new assignments and gains new skills.

A DHS Cybersecurity Service employee receives an initial assignment as part of appointment to a qualified position, and may have one or more subsequent assignments while serving in the DHS Cybersecurity Service (much like moving through multiple positions over time in many rank-in-position federal personnel systems).

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Subsequent assignments are intended to allow the employee to perform different types of cybersecurity work, enhance critical skills, and support different cybersecurity programs and/or mission areas.

When a DHS Cybersecurity Service employee leaves the DHS Cybersecurity Service, that employee's qualified position no longer exists—though a DHS organization may address the continued need for such skills by hiring a new DHS Cybersecurity Service employee or changing the assignment of another existing DHS Cybersecurity Service employee.

Compensation for DHS Cybersecurity Service Employees

How does DHS compensate DHS Cybersecurity Service employees?

CTMS uses new methods and practices for providing DHS Cybersecurity Service employees with both salaries and additional compensation.

Under CTMS, DHS provides DHS Cybersecurity Service employees with competitive salaries, based on ongoing analysis of the market for cybersecurity talent, including the compensation offered by other cybersecurity employers.

Under CTMS, DHS also provides DHS Cybersecurity Service employees with additional compensation, including cash bonuses (called recognition payments) and several other types of compensation, based on employees' skills and their impact on the DHS cybersecurity mission.

Additional information about compensation for DHS Cybersecurity Service employees is available on our [application portal](#).

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' salaries include locality pay?

CTMS does not use locality-based comparability payments from Title 5.

CTMS salary subranges are based on analysis of average cybersecurity salaries across the Nation, which ensures that DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' salaries are competitive.

In some geographic areas, DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' salaries may include local talent market supplements to ensure their salaries are sufficiently competitive for those geographic areas.

Local talent market supplements function much like locality-based comparability payments, but they are based on ongoing analysis of cybersecurity salaries in the market, including the compensation offered by other cybersecurity employers in specific geographic areas.

DHS Cybersecurity Service Frequently Asked Questions

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees receive salary increases?

Salary progression for DHS Cybersecurity Service employees results from receiving recognition adjustments based on employees' enhancement of their skills and impact on the DHS cybersecurity mission.

At least annually, DHS considers whether to increase a DHS Cybersecurity Service employee's salary with a recognition adjustment.

CTMS does not use time-in-grade or analogous salary progression restrictions used in other federal personnel systems that tie employees' salary increases to certain time periods.

CTMS does not use grades or steps—or grade or step increases.

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees receive automatic annual salary increases?

Across-the-board annual salary increases are not guaranteed or mechanically applied in CTMS, as often occurs in some other federal personnel systems.

On an ongoing basis, DHS reviews CTMS salary subranges in relationship to the market, which may result in adjustments to all or some CTMS salary subranges; such adjustments may occur more or less frequently than annually.

Adjustments to DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' salaries are addressed separately from adjustments to CTMS salary subranges.

Are current federal employees guaranteed higher salaries if they join the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

Joining the DHS Cybersecurity Service may provide current federal employees the opportunity for greater compensation than they might receive under other federal personnel systems, but higher salaries are not guaranteed.

When individuals are selected to join the DHS Cybersecurity Service, they receive detailed information about their initial compensation packages, including their initial salaries.

What happens to employees' salaries if they join DHS Cybersecurity Service, leave for another job, and then re-join the DHS Cybersecurity Service later?

DHS sets the salaries of employees re-joining the DHS Cybersecurity Service based on their current skills.

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As such, former DHS Cybersecurity Service employees may have to participate in an assessment process again to confirm their skills, including any enhancements since their previous service in the DHS Cybersecurity Service.

Are DHS Cybersecurity Service employees eligible to earn compensatory time, credit hours, or overtime?

CTMS does not use compensatory time, credit hours, or overtime.

To address special working conditions or exceptional circumstances, DHS may determine it necessary to provide DHS Cybersecurity Service employees with a cash payment.

Are DHS Cybersecurity Service employees eligible for student loan repayment and tuition assistance?

Yes.

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees have access to the same general federal employment benefits as other DHS civilian employees (e.g., Thrift Savings Plan [TSP] and Federal Employees Health Benefits [FEHB])?

Yes.

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' salaries count toward their high-3 under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) or the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)?

Yes.

Recognition for DHS Cybersecurity Service Employees

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees receive performance-related salary increases, such as Quality Step Increases (QSIs)?

CTMS does not use QSIs, which are a specific compensation tool from Title 5; instead, CTMS uses recognition adjustments based on employees' enhancement of their skills and impact on the DHS cybersecurity mission

Recognition adjustments are the primary means under CTMS by which DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' salaries increase.

DHS Cybersecurity Service Frequently Asked Questions

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees receive performance-related bonuses?

CTMS recognizes DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' mission impact, as determined under the CTMS performance management program, with cash bonuses (called recognition payments), time-off awards (called recognition time off), and honorary awards (called honorary recognition).

How does DHS evaluate the performance of DHS Cybersecurity Service employees and regularly consider whether to recognize employees with recognition payments or recognition adjustments?

CTMS includes a new performance management program organized around three annual, concurrent reviews:

- Appraisal reviews;
- Mission impact reviews; and
- Development reviews.

Appraisal reviews focus on individual accountability and result in a rating of record for DHS Cybersecurity Service employees as required by Title 5; CTMS only includes two rating levels for appraisal reviews (often called pass/fail by federal agencies).

Mission impact reviews examine employees' influence on the cybersecurity mission through the application and enhancement of their skills; DHS use these reviews to support decisions related to recognition adjustments and recognition payments.

Development reviews focus on DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' career progression and continual learning through consideration of employees' completion of—or need for—professional development and training.

Are DHS Cybersecurity Service employees eligible for the 3Rs (Recruitment, Retention and Relocation) Incentives?

CTMS does not use the 3Rs (recruitment, retention, and relocation) compensation tools from Title 5; instead, CTMS uses recognition payments to address a variety of circumstances related to recruiting and retaining DHS Cybersecurity Service employees.

DHS Cybersecurity Service Frequently Asked Questions

If current federal employees receive retention incentives under Title 5, do these continue if they join the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

No. Instead, CTMS salary subranges are market-sensitive, and DHS Cybersecurity Service employees have their salaries set based on their skills, minimizing the need to use incentives to address salary gaps.

As necessary, CTMS uses recognition payments to address a variety of circumstances related to retaining DHS Cybersecurity Service employees.

Are DHS Cybersecurity Service employees eligible for time-off awards?

Under CTMS, DHS may provide DHS Cybersecurity Service employees with recognition time off, which is analogous to receiving time-off awards in other federal personnel systems.

Are senior DHS Cybersecurity Service employees eligible for Presidential Rank Awards?

No. The Secretary's authority for CTMS makes DHS Cybersecurity Service employees ineligible for Presidential Rank Awards.

Instead, CTMS uses analogous recognition payments for the Secretary to acknowledge and reward the cybersecurity-focused career achievements of select DHS Cybersecurity Service employees.

Work Schedules and Leave for DHS Cybersecurity Service Employees

Are DHS Cybersecurity Service employees eligible for alternative work schedules?

CTMS allows for a variety of different schedules, including options analogous to flexible and compressed schedules under Title 5.

DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' schedules are subject to the requirements of their organization, their assigned work, and the approval of their supervisors.

DHS Cybersecurity Service employees on a full-time schedule are required to work 80 hours per bi-weekly pay period.

CTMS allows for part-time work as well.

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Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees receive annual leave and sick leave?

Yes.

Do current federal employees' annual leave and sick leave balances transfer if they join the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

Yes.

Do current DHS employees' annual leave accrual rates and accumulation limits change if they join the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

No. Current DHS employees' annual leave accrual rates and accumulation limits will not be reduced if they join the DHS Cybersecurity Service.

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees receive other types of paid leave, such as family and medical leave (including paid parental leave), from Title 5?

Yes.

Do DHS Cybersecurity Service employees receive paid federal holidays observed under most other federal personnel systems?

Yes.

Employment Status of DHS Cybersecurity Service Employees

Are DHS Cybersecurity Service employees in the competitive service?

No. Employees in the DHS Cybersecurity Service are in the excepted service under the authority of 5 U.S.C. § 658.

Will DHS Cybersecurity Service employees have to serve a probationary period?

The Secretary's authority for CTMS requires all employees in the DHS Cybersecurity Service to serve a three-year probationary period beginning on the date of appointment.

According to Title 5 rules, most employees in the DHS Cybersecurity Service receive full procedural and appeal rights after completing two years of current continuous service in a qualified position; preference eligibles receive such rights after completing one year of current continuous service in a qualified position.

DHS Cybersecurity Service Frequently Asked Questions

Are employees in the DHS Cybersecurity Service who complete the required probationary period serving in career appointments?

CTMS features a variety of appointment types, including long-term, continuing appointments (analogous to career appointments in the competitive service), as well as shorter-term, renewable appointments (analogous to Title 5 time-limited appointments).

The probationary period requirement applies to both continuing and renewable appointments.

As part of the application process for joining the DHS Cybersecurity Service, individuals are asked about their interest in different types of appointments, and when DHS recruits for specific opportunities, we communicate with applicants about the associated appointment type(s).

Is CTMS a merit system with civil service protections for DHS Cybersecurity Service employees?

CTMS is designed to uphold the principles of merit and fairness, prohibit certain personnel practices, and provide equal employment opportunity.

Do current federal employees remain in the same occupational series (e.g., 2210, 0343, 0132, etc.) if they join the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

CTMS does not use the General Schedule (GS) classification system or its corresponding occupational series or job families.

For recordkeeping purposes only, DHS Cybersecurity Service employees are be associated with a four-digit occupational code that identifies them as DHS Cybersecurity Service employees appointed using CTMS; this code does not represent an occupational series or job family.

This code may also appear in announcement for DHS Cybersecurity Service opportunities.

Employees in the DHS Cybersecurity Service receive titles related to their level of expertise and specific skills; they also receive organizational titles related to their assignments. These organizational titles often also appear in announcements for DHS Cybersecurity Service opportunities.

DHS Cybersecurity Service Frequently Asked Questions

Does CTMS use the National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education (NICE) Workforce Framework?

The [NICE Workforce Framework](#) informed the set of skills DHS uses to organize hiring, compensating, and developing DHS Cybersecurity Service employees.

As required by the Homeland Security Assessment Act, Cybersecurity Workforce Assessment Act, and Federal Cybersecurity Workforce Assessment Act, DHS Cybersecurity Service employees' qualified positions are coded using the NICE Workforce Framework three-digit work role codes.

More Information

What If you need more information before deciding to apply to join the DHS Cybersecurity Service?

Potential applicants should explore the DHS Cybersecurity Service [application portal](#) to learn about how DHS hires using CTMS, the types of work our DHS Cybersecurity Service employees perform, current job opportunities, and available benefits.

Individuals considering whether to submit an application can also contact our [Talent Team](#) with specific questions.

Limitations on the Use of this Information

- *The information provided herein does not create any rights or benefits, substantive or procedural, against DHS, its entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person; it does not obligate DHS to commit to any course of action.*
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