

CBP's DoD SkillBridge Internship Program

Background

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) partners with the [Department of Defense \(DoD\), SkillBridge internship program](#) providing transitioning service-members within one year of separating the military the opportunity to transition into permanent CBP positions at no-cost to the Agency. CBP's Veterans Employment Program Manager (VEPM), Jeff Jack, oversees the national placement of DoD SkillBridge interns into non-law enforcement, mission support professions. SkillBridge cannot be used for frontline law enforcement positions.

Self-Identification of Veterans Preference Prior to SkillBridge Placement

It is essential for service-members be aware of, identify and provide CBP's VEPM the exact Special Hiring Authority for Veterans (Veterans Preference) that they qualify for (i.e. 30% or More Disabled Veteran, Schedule A for Individuals with Disabilities (either service-connected or not service-connected), or the Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA).

Why is this important?

Service-Members are eligible for non-competitive placement if they qualify for non-law enforcement positions nationally when available outside of USAJOBS.gov via the SkillBridge internship program during their final four months of participation and as they enter into veteran status. This is a tremendous advantage to over other candidates who apply with hundreds of others on USAJOBS.gov for what are called "competitive" opportunities. It is important for both service-members and CBP hiring managers to be aware of which hiring authority that each SkillBridge participant qualifies for because those service-members who qualify for 30% or More Disabled Veteran and Schedule A hiring authorities are able to be non-competitively (outside of USAJOBS.gov) hired (as long as they also qualify for the positions being considered for) up to the GS-15 grade level while those eligible for the Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA) are eligible for non-competitive appointment up to the GS-11 grade level per Federal regulations.

CBP understands that some service-members will not have completed the Medical Evaluation Board (or Physical Evaluation Board) to have VA official confirm their VA Disability Rating status. Also, DD214s are not always available as well so far in advance from leaving the military. This is why it is essential to understand how to use the attached Statement of Service that can be used in lieu of a DD214 and the Schedule A hiring authority in lieu of DoD/VA having finalized your formal VA Disability Rating decision.

Schedule A is a hiring authority that can be used by individuals with disabilities (civilians and military) in which your disabling conditions we can use the attached Statement of Service (in lieu of your DD214 if you haven't received that by the time my folks wish to hire you) and the attached Schedule A Letter that you can use to be considered for competitive appointment within CBP if you are an individual with disabilities that our agency could use to consider you for non-competitive appointment outside of the typical

USAJOBS.gov process. Schedule A doesn't require disabilities to have incurred while in the military and is for civilians with disabilities as well.

The attached Department of Labor (DOL) Schedule A Letter Checklist describes how to establish your Schedule A eligibility and may be of assistance in presenting to your physician (either military or a private sector one) to educate him on how simple it is for him to approve your Schedule A Letter. It does not matter how long ago your disabilities were initially documented just that he states that you do indeed have disabling conditions, which again don't have to be service-connected. The Schedule A letter (as noted below from the DOL site) does NOT need to give details of your medical history but should simply state that you are able to perform the essential functions of the job. It is not your physician's role to determine whether or not you have sufficient arbitrary disabling conditions per his standards before signing your letter just that you documented disabling conditions. Unfortunately, some physicians complicate this process more than necessary.

Here's a snapshot of the essential part of the aforementioned link that you may want to present to your physician demonstrating the ease with which your physician should have in signing this document for you my friend:

How do I document that I am Schedule A eligible?

To demonstrate Schedule A eligibility you need to provide documentation to identify:

Your disability status - Get a letter stating that you have a disability from your doctor, a licensed medical professional, a licensed rehabilitation professional, or any entity that issues or provides disability benefits. The letter does NOT need to give details of your medical history. It should state that you are able to perform the essential functions of the job. It may address if you need accommodations to perform the job. The simpler the facts are presented, the better.

There are no specific definitions as to what qualifies as disability status under Schedule A, so Federal agencies interpret the requirements broadly. Just have either a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor within your State Vocational Rehabilitation Division (google your state's offices) or a primary care physician in the private sector complete the attached Schedule A Letter and apply for positions on USAJOBS.gov within four months of separating.

Required Documents to Provide the CBP/VEPM (Jeff Jack) from SkillBridge Candidates

Resume

CBP Internship Position Description(s) of Interest and Location(s)

Statement of Service or DD214

VA Disability Rating Letter or Schedule A Letter

Specific Veterans Preference Category that Applies to the SkillBridge Candidate

SSN for the CBP/VEPM to Confirm Reciprocity Eligibility

DoD, SkillBridge Program

[DoD SkillBridge program internships](#) provide opportunities for transitioning service members with and without anticipated service-connected disability conditions to gain valuable civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of service in any non-law enforcement GS series and grade nationally. This program affords CBP hiring managers access and leverage to the world's most highly trained and motivated workforce. Participants receive their military compensation and benefits, while CBP hiring managers provide the training and work experience while hosting interns from this program in a volunteer status with zero cost to the Agency.

CBP will have access to interview and select SkillBridge internship candidates up to one year prior to them separating from the military affording CBP's OPR to complete full Agency Background Investigation (BI) on prospective participants required of the GS series/grade for these internships. Full CBP/BIs are expected to be completed within six months (sometimes as quickly as one month if candidates are eligible for reciprocity and between 3 to 5 months if a full CBP/BI is required to be initiated), which leaves six months of internship participation available to interns from this program. Each individual SkillBridge participants' situation is different in that their Commanding Officer may only allow them to participate for 120 days or 90 days, however, the general rule is a full 180-day internship experience.

SkillBridge affords CBP hiring managers an exceptional opportunity to evaluate participants' skillset prior to considering them for non-competitive hire outside of the typical USAJOBS.gov competitive process leveraging their [Veterans Preference](#). The DoD SkillBridge internship is available to CBP program offices with and without the requirement of hiring them as a result of their participation in these internships.

IMPORTANT: If CBP host divisions are unable to hire during the SkillBridge participants 6 months internship they can be considered for non-competitive hiring consideration well into their entry into veteran status. This is due them already being in possession of a full CBP/BI, invaluable internship experience as a known entity within our agency, possible recommendation form internship supervisor, with the ability to begin working on day one after they've been non-competitive selection as a result of their SkillBridge participation. Talk about a win-win! For those CBP divisions that are unable to hire SkillBridge candidates, that must be identified and communicated to CBP's VEPM (Jeff Jack) at the onset of this selection process. In those cases, Jeff Jack will discuss and fully inform SkillBridge candidates of this. The beauty of the SkillBridge internship program is that even if these folks aren't selected during the internship program experience in those CBP divisions that are unable to due to a lack of FTE (or other factors), the VEPM can actively engage other divisions during the service-members' participation and afterwards to ensure they are considered for non-competitive selection any where in the country within our agency.

What is DoD/Background Investigation (BI) Reciprocity and How Does That Work with a CBP/BI

CBP's Veterans Employment Program Manager (VEPM), Jeff Jack, uses SkillBridge applicants SSNs to request a preliminary check ensuring that they are eligible our agency to use one's current DoD/BI for our CBP/BI purposes, which are required to be completed prior to internship onset. If a SkillBridge intern's current DoD/BI has been conducted meeting our CBP/BI Tier Level for the exact GS series/grade for which they are being hosted, reciprocity can be granted. If not, then a full CBP/BI must be conducted that can take between 3 to 4 months, which an incredibly fast tracked approach compared to applicants hired outside of the SkillBridge program (i.e. from USAJOBS.gov, etc.). This is only a preliminary check, the CBP division that selects SkillBridge interns must formally submit an official CBP/BI reciprocity request through our Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR), wherein any additional requirements are identified. Typically, if a SkillBridge intern is eligible for reciprocity as determined by the CBP/VEPM's preliminary confirmation through the OPR contact I work through at CBP, you should quickly be provided this by the host office.

What Happens If I Am Not Eligible for Reciprocity?

Being ineligible for reciprocity does not disqualify a SkillBridge applicant from participating it only means that CBP cannot use the service-member's current DoD/BI for our purposes for myriad reasons none of which are due to anything the service-member has done wrong.

Why Is Having a CBP/BI Conducted Beneficial To SkillBridge Interns?

CBP/BIs are being completed in record fashion (3 to 4 months) as opposed to hiring someone outside of the SkillBridge program (i.e. those selected from USAJOBS.gov Job Opportunity Announcements), which can take up to 8 or even 12 months to complete, which therein imparts the tremendous advantage SkillBridge Interns have over other candidates. Whether or not you are hired by the CBP host division, having a fully completed CBP/BI is of consequential importance over other candidates since it provides for a seamless hire when either the (a) host division wishes to move forward on your non-competitive conversion and if not (b) CBP's VEPM can market your desired career preference/locations to all other agency divisions for non-competitive hire outside of the competitive process (i.e. USAJOBS.gov).

Next Steps After Regarding SkillBridge Placement

After CBP's VEPM and SkillBridge participants jointly identify the internship position and location they'd like to be considered for, their resume is forwarded for selection consideration. CBP hiring managers can take up to 3 weeks reviewing resumes before initial interviews are scheduled with SkillBridge candidates. Interviews with candidates are completed and selection decisions are requested by the CBP/VEPM within 3 weeks (or less) from these initiate interviews.

Approximately 3 weeks after official selection, SkillBridge candidates receive an email from our Minneapolis Hiring Center with a Tentative Selection Letter contained therein

inviting interns into our Onboarding Portal that initiates the reciprocity request for our CBP/Background Investigation (BI). The GREAT news is that I've already confirmed through OPR that you are eligible for reciprocity. This means that we can use your current DoD/BI for our CBP/BI purposes with the caveat that the host office in CBP must request the exact Tier Level of CBP/BI required of the position (i.e. Public Trust level 4/5, etc.). Simply put, it should be easily completed by our OPR and wrapped up shortly thereafter. Once completed, you and the CBP host office for this SkillBridge internship will be advised of the Entry-on-Duty (EOD) date for reporting and that's it.

Once your CBP/BI has been completed you will still have to wait to begin your SkillBridge internship with no other obstacles presented prior to lift off. Awesome, any questions you have please email me to discuss. Thanks so much for availing us of your talents. I KNOW it will be a rewarding experience for you and us my friend. 😊