



Columbia  
Law School

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*Office of Public Interest/  
Public Service Law and Careers*

# Introduction to the Department of Justice Attorney General's Honors Program

**A Public Interest/Public Service Job Search Tool from the  
Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers**

**2023-2024 Edition**

# How to Use This Guide

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This document provides an overview of the Department of Justice Attorney General's Honors Program. This is only an introduction to the program and should be used together with advising from the [Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers](#), informational interviewing, and additional research. Interested students should also consult the Honors Program website.

In particular, if you expect to apply, be sure to review the Honors Program website carefully once it is updated for your application period.

Part One of this document reviews the Honors Program generally. Part Two discusses the hiring process and provides a summary of key dates and deadlines. Part Three identifies hiring criteria for applicants. Part Four identifies the DOJ components that have historically participated in the Honors Program (though which components participate can vary from one year to another).

Part Five provides an overview of participating DOJ components. Part Six suggests steps you can take to improve the likelihood of that you will be selected to interview. Part Seven outlines the interview process. Part Eight provides an overview of additional resources available to you.

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# Introduction to the Honors Program

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The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Attorney General's Honors Program is, with rare exceptions, the DOJ's only hiring program for entry-level attorneys. Entering attorneys are often hired for term-limited positions of two to three years, although those positions are frequently made permanent at the end of the term. Other positions, including those with the Executive Office of Immigration Review and the Drug Enforcement Agency, are strictly term-limited and cannot be made permanent.

The program is highly competitive. Check its [website](#) for up-to-date hiring projections. Not all DOJ offices participate in the Honors Program. Those that do are typically referred to as "hiring components" or "participating components" (see [Choosing Components](#)).

## Application Process and Key Dates/Deadlines

Applications are processed online. The application period typically opens July 31 and closes the Tuesday after Labor Day. Please note: as application periods are subject to change, students are responsible for verifying application due dates.

Visit [justice.gov/legal-careers/entry-level-attorneys](https://justice.gov/legal-careers/entry-level-attorneys) to access the application, as well as information about:

- Eligibility Requirements
- Participating Components
- Selection Criteria
- How to Apply and Key Deadlines
- Interviews
- Salary, Promotion, and Benefits

The application is processed through Avue Central, a website supported by Avue Direct Services, a third-party contractor. Applicants create a username and password when they first visit Avue Central. Once a username is assigned, applicants begin their application. Applicants can also monitor the status of their application on Avue Central. In addition, the DOJ delivers important messages and updates through Avue Central.

The application is typically divided into the following sections:

1. Personal Information
2. Citizenship & Residency
3. Veterans Information
4. Education
5. Post-Law Activities
6. Experience and Awards
7. Employment
8. References (three are required)

9. Employment Preferences
10. Transcript Data
11. Additional Information
12. Essays ("Why do you want to work for the DOJ and what attracts you to the components you selected?" and "If you could tell the selecting official one thing about yourself, what would it be?")

Note that the DOJ does not accept electronic copies of your resume or transcript; all information must be transcribed to your online application.

For technical assistance with the online application, contact the Avue Help Desk at (800) 407-0147.

Candidates who are selected for interviews are generally notified beginning in late September. It is possible, but not common, to receive invitations from more than one Participating Component. You should accept all invitations that interest you. Most participating components require only one interview. These interviews typically take place between mid-October and early November. Successful candidates are usually extended an offer between late November and February.

Waiting to learn if you will receive an offer can be stressful. During this period, applicants may wish to engage with other applicants through informal channels. The site [top-law-schools.com](http://top-law-schools.com) frequently hosts a discussion thread for Honors Program applicants. Advisers from the [Office of Public Interest/ Public Service Law and Careers](#) (the PI/PS Office) are also available to discuss your application status or other aspects of your job search.

## Hiring Criteria

The program is open to graduating J.D. students and joint-degree law students. LL.M. students who began full-time LL.M. studies immediately after obtaining a J.D. are also eligible. Starting a judicial clerkship, a qualifying full-time legal fellowship, a Presidential Management Fellowship, or a full-time graduate law program within nine months of law school graduation extends eligibility as long as you apply to begin work at the DOJ immediately upon the end of the eligibility-preserving activity (applicants must apply approximately one year ahead of anticipated start date). A full description of rules relating to eligibility is available on the DOJ Honors Program [website](#).

In addition, exiting EOIR and DEA clerks may reapply to the Honors Program in a subsequent year for permanent positions in other components provided they meet eligibility criteria.

Applicants must also meet additional hiring criteria. Most participating components only hire U.S. citizens. Dual citizens are considered on a case-by-case basis; non-U.S. citizens are hired only in extremely rare instances.

## Choosing Components

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The DOJ is comprised of [many components](#), but not all participate in the Honors Program every year. The number of attorneys to be hired is projected in advance, but actual hiring is subject to availability of funds. Also, please note that certain components may participate in the program informally, meaning that their application procedures may be different. However, you may still indicate an interest in these components on the online application.

You are permitted to apply to up to three participating components. One of the essay questions will ask why you are interested in DOJ broadly and the chosen components specifically.

If you are unfamiliar with the work of certain components, consult with the [director of government programs](#) at the PI/PS Office before submitting your application.

### Component Overview

The DOJ provides one of the most rewarding opportunities for an entry-level attorney, offering a dynamic work environment filled with tremendously talented lawyers. Though based in Washington, DC, the DOJ and its components have offices in all states and territories and maintain offices in over one hundred countries worldwide. With the notable exception of EOIR clerks, however, nearly all Honors Program attorneys begin their careers in Washington, DC. Altogether, the DOJ employs more than 10,000 attorneys, making it the world's largest legal employer.

The DOJ is comprised of nearly two dozen components. Eight of these components focus on litigation—Antitrust, Civil, Civil Rights, Criminal (in addition to the U.S. Attorneys' Offices), Environment and Natural Resources, National Security, Tax, and the U.S. Trustee Program. Approximately 88% of DOJ attorneys work in one of these eight components. The remaining 12% work on legal and policy issues (e.g., the EOIR) or law enforcement issues (e.g., the FBI and ATF).

Each year, the DOJ updates the participating component list [on its website](#). Below, however, is a brief overview of some of the components that have hired through the Honors Program in recent years. For a comprehensive review of the components (including an excellent chart matching academic interests to each component), view [this brochure](#).

#### ***Antitrust Division***

Focuses on promoting economic competition through enforcing and providing guidance on antitrust laws and principles. Comprised of ten sections, three of which focus on litigation, one on appellate work, and six on specific interest areas. The division is involved in both civil and criminal actions.

#### ***Civil Division***

Represents the United States, its departments and agencies, Members of Congress, Cabinet Officers, and other federal employees in civil or criminal matters. Most attorneys are employed in the

commercial litigation branch. Other branches include the Federal Programs Branch (which defends legal challenges to U.S. programs and policies), the Torts Branch, the Consumer Protection Branch, and Office of Immigration Litigation. Also maintains a staff of 60 attorneys to work on appellate matters.

### ***Civil Rights Division***

Enforces laws in areas such as unlawful discrimination, police abuse of power, voting rights, and unfair housing policies and practices. Attorneys are divided into sections based on subject matter. The division is involved in both civil and criminal actions.

### ***Criminal Division***

Prosecutes many nationally significant criminal cases and often supervises and leads cases with attorneys from the U.S. Attorneys' Offices. Note that the DOJ website typically lists the sub-components that are hiring and the number of open positions. Review this list carefully to anticipate the questions you will likely be asked in your interview.

### ***Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)***

Responsible for enforcing civil and criminal laws relating to controlled substances. Entry-level attorneys are hired to serve as law clerks to Administrative Law Judges. Clerks serve for fourteen months. Note that exiting DEA clerks may reapply to the Honors Program in a subsequent year for permanent positions in other components, provided they meet eligibility criteria.

### ***Environmental and Natural Resources Division (ENRD)***

Enforces environmental laws. Also prosecutes criminal cases under federal pollution and wildlife laws, litigates cases to protect the rights of Indians under treaties, and defends various federal environmental programs. The division is involved in both civil and criminal actions.

### ***Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR)***

Responsible for developing policies and directing activities related to the conduct of appellate review and administrative hearings on various matters of immigration law. A limited number of entry-level attorneys are offered a position with the Office of the Director, Office of the Chief Administrative Hearing Officer, or Board of Immigration Appeals. However, most entry-level attorneys are offered time-limited two-year clerkships in the Office of the Chief Immigration Judge. As a result, EOIR is typically one of the largest employers participating in the Honors Program. Note that exiting EOIR clerks may reapply to the Honors Program in a subsequent year for permanent positions in other components, provided they meet eligibility criteria.

### ***Federal Bureau of Prisons***

Protects public safety by ensuring that federal offenders serve their sentences of imprisonment in facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure and provides reentry

programming to ensure their successful return to the community. The Federal Bureau of Prisons offers a two-year fellowship.

### ***Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)***

Exposes fellows to a wide variety of legal areas that the FBI supports, including but not limited to: Cyber Law, National Security Law, Employment Law, Civil Litigation, Fiscal & Property Law, Science, Technology, and Investigative Law. The Federal Bureau of Investigation offers permanent positions.

### ***Indian Country Fellowship***

This three-year fellowship, open to all eligible Honors Program applicants, is designed to create a new pipeline of legal talent with expertise and deep experience in federal Indian law, tribal law, and Indian Country issues that can be deployed in creative ways to build tribal capacity, combat violent crime, and bolster public safety in Indian Country jurisdictions. Each fellow will be afforded the opportunity to serve a detail with an appropriate tribal legal or governmental entity. Applicants who accept an offer from a district located in a jurisdiction that requires state bar admission must be admitted to that bar within 12 months of entry on duty. Incoming fellows who are not admitted to a bar or do not have bar results pending are expected to take the first available bar examination for which they are eligible (i.e., a May law school graduate would take the July bar exam).

### ***INTERPOL***

Provides legal advice on international criminal investigative issues and cases, fugitives, mutual legal assistance, liaison with domestic and foreign law enforcement authorities, and data sharing initiatives. Other in-house counsel duties involve the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act and additional administrative matters. The fellowship has a three-year commitment.

### ***National Security Division***

Attorneys in the National Security Division oversee a broad range of activities, including prosecuting suspected terrorists and spies, litigating foreign intelligence surveillance matters, providing legal and policy advice on national security matters, and conducting oversight of the activities of various Intelligence Community agencies. The National Security Division offers permanent positions.

### ***Tax Division***

Attorneys directly handle most civil litigation arising under the federal tax code. Most attorneys are assigned to the Civil Trials Section and the Court of Federal Claims Section. Attorneys in the Criminal Enforcement Section review recommendations arising from U.S. Attorneys' Offices to determine if a case merits prosecution while the small number of attorneys in the Appellate Section focus exclusively on reviewing adverse court decisions in civil tax cases. This year, the division will be hiring for both the Civil and Criminal Branches. Interested students may designate their interest in a particular branch. The Tax Division offers permanent positions. Applicants may designate Civil Section or Criminal Section preferences on their application.



## ***U.S. Attorneys' Offices***

Each U.S. Attorney is the chief federal law enforcement officer within his or her particular jurisdiction. U.S. Attorneys conduct most of the trial work in which the United States is a party. Although the distribution of caseload varies between districts, each U.S. Attorney's Office deals with every category of cases and handles a mixture of simple and complex litigation. Each U.S. Attorney exercises wide discretion in the use of his/her resources to further the priorities of the local jurisdictions and the needs of their communities.

## ***U.S. Trustee Program***

The U.S. Trustee Program is a component of the Department of Justice that seeks to promote the efficiency and protect the integrity of the Federal bankruptcy system. To further the public interest in the just, speedy and economical resolution of cases filed under the Bankruptcy Code, the Program monitors the conduct of bankruptcy parties and private estate trustees, oversees related administrative functions, and acts to ensure compliance with applicable laws and procedures. It also identifies and helps investigate bankruptcy fraud and abuse in coordination with U.S. Attorneys, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other law enforcement agencies.

## Securing an Interview

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The DOJ prides itself on considering the “whole candidate” when making hiring decisions. There are significant differences among components, however. For instance, your academic performance—as measured by grades and clerkships—is very important to several components, but not to all. The following chart illustrates the general rules regarding the factors taken into consideration. For detailed information about components, schedule a time to talk with the [director of government programs](#) at the Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers.

	Extremely Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
<b>Grades</b>	X			
<b>Proven Commitment to Public Service</b>	X			
<b>Demonstrated Leadership</b>	X			
<b>Summer Internship with Component</b>		X		
<b>Relevant Clinic/ Externship Experience</b>		X		
<b>Relevant Coursework</b>		X		
<b>Clerkship</b>			X	
<b>Law Review/ Journal</b>			X	
<b>References</b>			X	

Broad guidelines that apply to all components include:

**Research the DOJ generally and the specific participating components in particular.**

The more you know, the more you can tailor your application and credentials. Your applications must demonstrate specific knowledge of the components and their work.

**Identify which component is best for you:**

- Do you want to be a trial attorney (i.e., Criminal Division) or do appellate work?
- Do you want to travel regularly or stay close to home?
- Consult the [DOJ Legal Careers Brochure](#) to identify components that specialize in your preferred subject area.

**Demonstrate your long-term interest in, and commitment to, government and public service.**

As a general matter, the DOJ does not want applicants interested in working for a few years and then leaving the federal government for the private sector.

**Avoid stating or exposing strong political viewpoints.**

Though the DOJ is legally required to be apolitical in its hiring, personal biases may impact the hiring process.

**Draft compelling essays.**

The applications are lengthy and monotonous. The essays are your opportunity to stand out. You have a tight word limit—make every one count.

**Have someone else proofread your application.**

*The DOJ has notoriously exacting standards.* Print out your final application and have a friend proofread it before you submit it. This should be in addition to your own proofreading. The online application, once submitted, cannot be amended.

**Apply early (the deadline is strict, and no late applications will be accepted). Reach out to Honors Program participants or other component employees.**

These contacts can provide valuable information about the process and help you to prepare for your interview. The Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers can assist you in identifying individuals to contact. As stated above, the deadline is indeed strict and, in the past, students have not been afforded any extensions, even when a technical error caused them to miss the deadline.

**Be prepared to answer several questions during your interview, including the most important: “Why do you want to work for this component?”**

## The Interview

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Candidates selected for an interview are generally notified by email in late September. You can also check your status directly on Avue Central. The email will provide information on how to schedule your interview (schedule early, as spots are available on a first-come, first-served basis), book travel through the DOJ's Conference Center, what your travel budget will be (the DOJ will try to minimize costs by ensuring an overnight stay is not required), and how to seek reimbursement (the DOJ will compensate you for almost all expenses incurred, though processing can take several months). If you applied to multiple components, your interview confirmation is typically followed by a second email identifying the specific component(s) that selected you.

Most components limit the interview process to a single interview. Most interviews take place in Washington, DC, although there are exceptions (for example, some U.S. Attorney's Offices hire through their district offices). If you are selected to interview for multiple components, the DOJ will schedule all interviews on the same day to minimize travel costs. The interview itself varies across components. For example, an EOIR interview involves meeting one-on-one with an immigration judge who will ask you about your interest in immigration law and clerking. In contrast, a Criminal Division interview will consist of a three-person panel composed of senior members of several sub-components, who will ask you questions intended to gauge your ability to work in teams and your specific interest in and dedication to public service. Generally, interviews last 30 minutes to one hour. You will be informed in advance of the materials you should bring to the interview. In all cases, bring a copy of your resume, writing sample, and reference sheet. The [PI/PS Office](#) can conduct a mock interview to help you prepare.

Interviews generally take place over a three-week period between mid-October and early November. Most components make first-round offers between ten days and two weeks after the end of the formal three-week interview period, although this varies across components. You will be notified of your selection via email and online on Avue Central. Expect most hiring to be complete before Thanksgiving, with additional offers distributed into February.

## Additional Resources

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The [director of government programs](#) at the PI/PS Office is available for in-person counseling sessions to help you identify components and form your written application materials and to conduct a mock interview.

In addition, review the following resources:

[DOJ Attorney General's Honors Program](#)

[Arizona Government Honors and Internship Handbook](#)

[The PI/PS Office Public Interest Job Search Toolkit](#)